

Road to Reentry Video Series

Reconnecting With Family and Community

Instructor's Guide

Overview

Approximately 1,700 felons are released from incarceration each day. Of those, more than half will end up back in prison. Those who do manage to rebuild their lives on the outside say it is a daily struggle—and one that requires the continual support of friends, family, and community.

This video focuses on the need for formerly incarcerated individuals to reconnect with the people who can help them upon release, starting with family and extending out into the larger community. It provides strategies for the formerly incarcerated to reestablish trust and open lines of communication. The video also identifies resources and potential support networks available to them upon release. As a result of watching and discussing the video, participants should have a clear idea of the role that family and community can play in their successful reintegration.

Instructors and facilitators should keep in mind that these topics—particularly those dealing with family—can be sensitive and emotionally stressful. Participants may be reluctant to discuss issues of such a personal nature. It is important, however, for the formerly incarcerated to be able to take advantage of all of the support systems available to them.

Presentation Suggestions

Ask participants to think about life outside of prison versus life behind bars, particularly with regards to friends and family. Who do they rely on in each scenario? Who do they trust? How are relationships created and maintained? Try to get a sense of the kinds of barriers the formerly incarcerated may face when reconnecting with family and community. How do they communicate, make amends, and rebuild trust? How hard is it to ask for help? And who should they ask?

When you feel participants have a sense of the need for (and potentially difficulty of) connecting to their support networks, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to watching the video. If you wish, allow the participants to state their answers and discuss them as a group.

Show the video. Encourage participants to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video. If you wish, allow time for participants to

do update their answers after each section.

At the conclusion of the video, ask participants to discuss any changes they made to the answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of information in the video. Follow up the discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from participants, or assign the questions as homework essays.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group.

Assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

Anticipation Quiz

Directions: Answer the following questions as completely as possible. You may revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. What are some of the unique challenges faced by the formerly incarcerated upon their release?
2. What kinds of support can families provide upon release?
3. Whom else can the formerly incarcerated turn to, besides family, to assist with reentry?
4. What kinds of resources or assistance can the formerly incarcerated find at a public library?
5. What can recently-released individuals do to get along with their parole or probation officer(s)?

Answer Key

1. (Answers may vary.) Challenges may include: getting a job, maintaining relationships, meeting with a parole officer, coping with drug additions or mental health issues.
2. (Answers may vary.) Families can provide housing, transportation, job leads, financial support, and emotional support.
3. (Answers may vary.) Besides family, the formerly incarcerated may find support from friends, former employers, teachers, religious leaders, community service members, and social workers.
4. The public library may have helpful resources, such as Job search assistance, computer classes, ESL classes, and GED classes.

5. (Answers may vary.) Treat him or her with respect; show up on time with check-ins; be honest, polite, cooperative, and patient.

Activities

Activity #1

Title: Release Goals

Format: Individual to Large Group

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Procedure:

1. Participants need to have both short- and long-term goals upon release, and to maintain a habit of setting and meeting those goals. Some goals are immediate (finding a place to live); some are lifelong (staying clean and sober). Some goals may come in stages. For example, starting a career may require taking a job that you aren't as interested in so that you can afford additional schooling. It is important for participants to write these goals down and to keep them handy as a reminder of what they hope to accomplish.

For this exercise, have each person come up with three short-term and three long-term goals and list them, along with the steps they will need to take to reach those goals. The short-term goals can lead to the long-term goals.

2. Come back together as a whole class and discuss these lists. What goals do everyone have in common? Are there steps to meeting those goals participants hadn't thought of? Encourage participants to amend their goals and to add to their steps. You can also have participants share the difficulties/barriers that they expect to face or have faced in trying to meet these goals. Emphasize the importance of persistence and of relying on outside support for resources and encouragement.

Activity #2

Title: Give and Take

Format: Individual

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Paper and pen

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to divide their paper in half. Tell them to label one side of the paper “Responsibilities” and the other side, “Requests.”
2. Have participants think of a member of their support network. Ideally this would be a family member (a spouse or a parent, for example), but it could also be a friend, someone in the community, or even a parole or probation officer. In the “Responsibilities” column have participants make a list of everything they should do for that individual—the responsibilities they have towards that person. For example, if it is a spouse they could write “Help with the bills” or “Be open and honest”. In the “Requests” column have participants make a list of everything they would like to request from that individual. For example, they could write, “short-term financial support” or “forgiveness”. There will likely be some overlap between the two columns.
3. Encourage participants to share this list with the person they identified on the page, discussing both the support that they would like to see that person provide as well as the effort that they, the participant, will make to earn it.

Discussion Questions

1. The video suggests that life outside of prison can be more difficult than life on the inside. Do you agree? What challenges/responsibilities do you expect to face upon release that you didn’t face while behind bars? What can an individual do before release to better prepare for these challenges?
2. Life in prison is tough, of course, but it is also challenging for spouses, children, and family members left behind. What impact has your incarceration had on your family? What steps do you need to take to make amends and create a strong, honest, and supportive relationship with those family members?

Quick Quiz

Note: You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for participants to respond; or copy and hand this out as a written exercise. If you read the quiz, write or project responses for the group to see.

Directions: Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the video.

1. Living with family upon release is always the best option for the formerly incarcerated.
2. Public libraries do not provide resources to the formerly incarcerated.
3. You won't get help if you don't ask.
4. Open communication is key to reconnecting with loved ones upon release.
5. Associating with someone who is convicted of a crime does not violate your own parole.
6. Most people outside of prison will want to see you succeed, provided you are making the effort.
7. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have problems in school.
8. Your parole officer's first priority is to keeping the community safe.
9. Many community resources are available to the formerly incarcerated for little or no cost, provided the individual is meeting the conditions of his or her release.
10. You should always return to the community you are most familiar with.

Answer Key

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| 1. False | 6. True |
| 2. False | 7. True |
| 3. True | 8. True |
| 4. True | 9. True |
| 5. False | 10. False |

Homework Option

The video says that there are available resources so long as one is willing to ask for help; whether it's Goodwill, a halfway house, a soup kitchen, or the local library. Provide participants with a list of organizations that can help them with some aspect of their reentry and have them call or visit one of those organizations to get a better sense of the kinds of services it provides. Be sure participants ask about costs, requirements, and availability. Have participants report back on their findings and discuss the value of these organizations.