Communicating Behind Bars: A Guide for Prison Inmates, Family and Friends
Foreword

“This course will expose all of you to the benefits of effective communication skills, and hopefully influence some of you to develop a positive direction in your lives. It is ineffective for you to simply wait for your parole date to come around. Grasp the opportunity now and remember that God helps those that help themselves. I promise you that this course has helped me. Having no sense of direction and boredom is our intellectual enemy. “

--- Roberto Eltonello, author of A Fisherman’s Net

“This guide was designed so that inmates could learn how to become effective communicators. Imagine... What if you could defuse tension and create accord in even the most volatile situations - just by changing the way you spoke? Wow! I wish there was a guide available when I was incarcerated during my 5 ½ years of incarceration in the BOP.”

--- Jorea McNamee-Blount, author of Getting Ahead: An Ex-Con’s Guide to Getting Ahead in Today’s Society
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Introduction to Communication

Communication is a social skill that has been around since the existence of humankind. History shows that communication has many forms that have evolved from symbols and pictures to speaking and writing in different languages. It is reasonable to say because of communication, humans successfully worked together to create the world as it exist today. Closely tied to communication is the environment or surroundings which shape the communication process. As a person interacts with others, he or she adjusts their attitudes and behaviors to adapt to their environment. It is important to note, most environments are organized as a hierarchy system designed with rules and regulations. For instance, in a workplace environment, communication is exchanged in a professional and respectful manner. The environment is the workplace, management staff, customers, and co-workers. In schools, communication is informative and encouraged between students and teachers for the benefit of educating and learning. The environment is the school, administrative staff, teachers and other students. As for those who are incarcerated, the environment is the prison facility, staff, and inmates. The communication process in prison is often more complicating than most settings. This is mostly due to restrictions on inmate interactions. Furthermore, hierarchy systems exist in almost all societies and are necessary to establish order and provide an organized communication process. With this guide, a person can learn techniques to better communicate in the prison environment. Ultimately, the goal is for an inmate to learn coping techniques to avoid conflict with others and placement in the SHU’s (Special Housing Units).

Communication involves both verbal and non-verbal exchanges with others. The basic communication process consists of the person sending the message, intended message, method (written, phone, face to face), understood message, person receiving the message, and feedback. When an individual wants to communicate ideas, he or she must consider who they are talking to in order to effectively communicate. The audience could be a group of people or an individual. For example, an inmate will speak with a parole board in a different tone and format compared to a casual conversation with a relative. Inmates also communicate differently with one another compared to how they communicate with correctional officers and other prison staff. Once one understands his or her audience, they can then decide how to explain the idea so the person receiving the message understands. Next in the communication process is the method of communication. This is how the communicator is going to convey the conversation or message. There are many different methods of communication. Phone, email, letter, and face to face are the most common methods of communication. Once the receiver interprets the message, he or she responses by providing feedback. It is during feedback that miscommunication is identified. The person responding to the conversation will ask for clarification.
Below is a basic flow diagram to help visualize the communication process. It begins with the flow of communication from the person starting the conversation to the person receiving the message and responding. In this diagram the person starting the conversation is the correctional officer. The method of communication is face to face and the person receiving the message is an inmate. This diagram is set up to illustrate how the process of communicating works. It is important to note that communication is not complete unless feedback is provided. Remember, feedback can be both verbal and/or nonverbal and the purpose of feedback is to inform the person talking that the conversation or message is understood.

**Diagram of basic communication process:**
Communication Barriers and Interruptions

Barriers in communication often occur from the beginning of a conversation when the sender (correctional officer, inmate, or family member) conveys the intended message. Generally, individuals do not think about how to effectively communicate thoughts or ideas. They just say what they need to and assume that is the end of the conversation. However, effective communication is more involved. There are many reasons why a person can make mistakes in communicating their thoughts or ideas. Knowing and understanding who you are talking to is a very important factor in how your message is received. The channel or method used to send a message is important also. There are potential for interruptions and/or barriers when using different methods of communication such as, phone calls, writing letters, and face to face interactions. All these methods of communication can influence the tone of the message and how the message is interpreted by the person listening. Here are some tips on how to avoid barriers in communication.

- Understand/know who you are speaking with – consider if the person you are talking to has any knowledge of the subject.
- Choose the best method of communication to send ideas – Consider if the person you are talking to can hear well over the phone or if noise is a problem with talking face to face. If sending a letter, use familiar words the person reading the letter will understand.
- Listen – if the person you are talking to interprets the message wrong, try to understand why they did not comprehend your message correctly.
- Try to relate to the person and explain the message so they will understand your conversation. Feedback is a very important process of communication so keep that in mind when dealing with miscommunication.

Effective communication occurs when one clearly communicates a message to another person and that message is clearly understood. The interaction between prison guards and inmates is a daily occurrence. Therefore, it is crucial for inmates to know how to send the right message to avoid miscommunication and/or conflict. The relationship between inmates and prison guards is a significant social interaction that has an impact on the everyday life of inmates. In order for an inmate to establish effective communication with a prison guard, inmates should first consider and try to understand the correctional officer’s responsibilities and how he or she perceives the inmate.
Understanding Correctional Officers

Prison guards have a general idea of what signs to look for in a potential confrontational and/or violent situation with inmates. Their main purpose in the prison system is to manage inmates. This includes escorting inmates throughout the prison and counseling inmates on policies and procedures. Some other important aspects of a correctional officer’s job are to inspect inmate’s living area or cell for illegal items. They have the responsibility of patrolling all areas of the prison. Because of the nature of the job, correctional officers are going to handle each situation with caution. If a guard believes an inmate is a threat or is showing signs of aggressive behavior, they will respond according to prison procedure. A prison inmate should be aware of the trigger signs or body language a guard considers as aggressive or dangerous behavior. These are some of the visible signs of extreme behavior a prison guard may look for when dealing with inmates.

- Escalating voice - voice changes from normal to loud
- Angry facial expressions- Red face, tense facial muscles
- Behavior changes from normal behavior
- Intense eye contact - starring with an angry look
- Rolling eyes
- Turning away from the conversation
- Shrugging shoulders
- Hand gestures-throwing up gang sides or making derogatory gestures with hands
- Slouchy stance –Standing with hands in pockets, slouching against the wall

At any moment a guard feels uncomfortable and he or she has observed these signs the inmate is considered as a threat. If an inmate is in a situation with a guard who believes the inmate is a threat, the inmate should stop and think about the visible message they are sending and correct their behavior before the situation escalates. If the situation has arrived at this point, mostly the inmate is already in trouble. However, the inmate can stop the situation from becoming more of a problem by focusing on relaxing and remain CALM. It is necessary to stop and think about the situation an avoid reacting any further. If it is too difficult to control anger, take deep breaths and focus on not allowing the situation to take control. Instead, the inmate should take control of their thoughts. Focus on relaxing and maintain control. A person’s thoughts are their own and no one can take that away or out of his or her control. So, controlling your own thoughts and knowing you can change the way you perceive a situation is a rewarding feeling. Make this a goal and practice self control of your emotions to avoid miscommunication and conflict with prison guards.
Sending the Right Message

When an inmate disagrees or gets angry with a guard, the inmate should not react first. Instead, he or she should think about what it is they do not agree with or what is making them angry. Here are a few questions to consider when one is trying to control anger or unreasonable thoughts.

- What is it about this situation that angers me?
- Do I have any feelings about the situation other than anger?
- Am I making assumptions or do I have all the facts?
- Was I angry before this situation? And is this me lashing out with anger because of a different situation or another person?
- Will getting angry and reacting make any difference in how I feel now?
- Do I feel depressed, anxious, frustrated, paranoid, or destructive?
- What are the consequences of me retaliating?

Once the inmate understands why he or she is angry or frustrated, they should focus on a constructive way to communicate their thoughts and cope with situations. It is important to note if the inmate has a violent and/or aggressive history with staff, guards will most likely become suspicious and defensive with the inmate. If this is so, the inmate must remain calm and control his or her thoughts. Try to focus on avoiding aggression. If an inmate cannot remain calm by thinking through each of the questions, it may be critical for the inmate to seek guidance from a prison counselor to address his or her anger management needs. Also, if the inmate is feeling depressed, anxious, paranoid, or destructive, he or she should see a prison counselor.

If a situation intensifies, everyone involved feels the pressure. When an inmate is frustrated, chances are the correctional officer is also frustrated. Because prison is a very stressful and negative environment, effective communication is critical. Below are some tips to help an inmate send a clear message when communicating with prison guards.

- Speak clearly and in a regular tone
- Know what you need to say; be brief and to the point in your message
- Be respectful
- Acknowledge that you understand the conversation and respect the guard’s position
- Do not threaten
- Listen carefully
- Clarify if necessary
- Control your emotions
- Be aware of your body language (hands visible and movement at a minimum)

If communication is misunderstood, it can lead to disciplinary action. Thus, inmates should be aware of the message they are sending. Body language is considered a non-verbal form of communication and is a very powerful communication tool. It is essential for inmates to learn
and understand their body language and how others might perceive them. When a prison inmate is in a confrontational situation with a guard or another inmate, these are some body language motions to avoid and prevent unintentional threats.

- Do not make any sudden movements that would make the other person feel threatened. (stand calmly)
- Keep hands visible for the other person to see.
- Stay at least 2 feet from the person (do not violate personal space)
- Do not stare directly into their eyes.
- Do not point fingers.
- Do not make any facial movements that suggest a threat such as clenching jaw muscles.
- Do not shake your head or roll your eyes.
- Do not clinch your fist.
- Remain calm and take deep breaths.
- Try counting to ten and back again to focus on relaxing and let go of negative thoughts.

**Case Study: Writing Assignment:**

Tony has been in prison for 3 years. He knows all the guards except one. A newly hired guard they call Jackson. For the past few days, Tony has been frustrated. His wife has not accepted any of his calls and she’s missed the last three visits. To add to his anger, Tony lost his outside privileges due to a fight that started in the mess hall. He was guilty by just being there even though he had nothing to do with the outbreak. Jackson is on shift and notices Tony’s unusual behavior. Tony is standing against a wall staring at everyone as if he is staring through them. His eyes catch Jacksons and at that moment, Jackson begins to suspect Tony is up to something. Jackson approaches Tony. As he approaches him, Tony rolls his shoulders back as if he pushing his chest up to the officer. Jackson is immediately on alert. He ask Tony in a firm voice why he was just standing there looking as if he was up to something. Tony did not answer quickly enough and Jackson asked him again but with a firmer and more demanding voice. Tony let his frustration take over him and he became angry with Jackson. His face began to turn red; he clinched his jaws together, and tightens his hands into a fist. Jackson felt there was potential for dangerous situation so he alerted other guards. Tony threw his hands up and began to tell Jackson that everything was ok but Jackson did not see it that way. Jackson told Tony to turn and face the wall with his hands up. Tony was confused and angry. He let his frustration take control and he began to curse the officer. Tony was disciplined for threatening the correctional officer.
What went wrong in this situation?

What should Tony have done differently, if anything?

When Jackson approaches Tony, he rolls his shoulders back. This maybe something Tony is use to doing or he is just standing up straight anticipating the officer’s approach. Either way, what communication error did Tony violate?

Could Tony avoid conflict in this situation? Why or why not?

In the case study, Tony was previously in trouble and even though it was not his fault that is the first impression Jackson has of him. Tony’s body language suggests his is trying to intimidate the new officer. He let his frustrations, about his wife, overcome him and he turns that frustration to anger with the guard. His body language displays a potential threat because his face turns red; he clinches his jaws together, and tightens his hands forming a fist. Then he throws his hands up to explain but his body language suggests an immediate threat. Then Tony reacts by cursing the officer. The situation went from a form of miscommunication to conflict. Tony could have avoided the conflict if he would have been aware of his body language. He could also learn to control his anger by taking deep breaths and not allowing the situation to control him. Controlling ones anger is a challenge but is possible. Taking deep breathes and thinking before reacting is a start. Also, Tony was already upset with his wife. He did not deal with his anger and turned it towards the new officer. These are examples of poor communication. Note that a prisoner should also be prepared when new officers come in. They should expect changes and some misunderstandings because the officers are new and learning the job.

Effective Listening

Listening is another important tool in effective communication. For example, a prison guard provides inmates with instructions; it is important for the inmate to understand what is said. If an inmate does not understand the instructions, he or she should ask for clarification. Sometimes it helps to repeat what has been said in order to know if the intended message was understood. It is important to note that an inmate should not do so in a manner that could be misinterpreted as insubordinate or sarcastic. Inmates
should ensure they are respectful and considerate when conveying the need for clarification. Here are a few tips for an inmate to practice effective listening.

- Pay attention to the person talking.
- Remember the conversation.
- Do not interrupt!
- Do not change the subject.
- Repeat what you heard if necessary to ensure you understand the message.
- Look at the person during the conversation to show that you are paying attention.
- Acknowledge that you are listening with a simple head nod or say “I understand”. Say something to let the other person know you are listening and understand. (Feedback)
- Listen carefully and do not criticize.

**Communication Between Inmates**

Communication between inmates is also a significant social interaction in the prison environment. These are the people an inmate will see every day for the rest of his or her time there. If an inmate decides not to have friends or talk with others, there is one person he or she should consider getting to know. Cell mates are forced together in the most private and personal situations. Therefore, it is important for an inmate to get to know his or her cell mate. This is the person they will spend most of their time with. Prison inmates share a very small open space that includes an open bathroom. So, it only makes sense to learn to communicate with and tolerate the cell mate. This means giving them space and respecting their property. That same respect should be returned. If not, the inmate should not lose control of their emotions. Instead, they should try to work out problems with the cell mate to try and understand his or her point of view. The inmate should seek out potential communication barriers and work around them. Here are some obstacles an inmate should consider and avoid when trying to identify communication problems with a cell mate.

- Perception - Does the cell mate think you are trying to overpower, intimidate, or criticize him or her? (this is how they see you)
- Personal Time – Do you allow each other personal time alone in the cell? Personal time to read or just sit in the cell and think alone with no distractions.
- Do not make assumptions - Get the facts and avoid making judgements.
- Personal space violations - Do you stand too close or in their personal space which is about 2 feet?
- Language differences – Do you speak the same language? If not, do you or the cell mate have problems understanding one other because of language differences? (cultural)
- Prejudice - Do you have prejudice feelings towards the person or do you perceive the person to have prejudice feelings toward you? This could be because of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc...)
• Noise - Is the conversation among others or is there too much noise in background? Do you or the cellmate play music too loud?

If all means to resolve the problem have been exhausted, the inmate should ask to be moved with a new cell mate. That is if it is possible to move. Otherwise, the inmate should focus on working with the cell mate to tolerate one another and respect each other’s needs and/or opinions.

Because prison is such a dangerous environment, interaction between inmates can be intense and sometimes violent. With all the diverse backgrounds joined together with intolerance, hate, ignorance, manipulation, and anger, it is difficult for an inmate to focus on steps to effective communication. Also, the prison environment tends to foster a need among inmates for dominance and/or respect. This occurs more frequently in prison compared to the outside world. Therefore, the need for conflict management is a necessity in the prison system but is the strategies to approach and resolve conflict the same? In American society there are many differences among individuals such as, personality, opinion, culture, status, beliefs, and so much more that it is impossible to name them all. Of these differences, many are the root cause of conflict between individuals and groups. These same differences exist in the prison culture but there is a larger concentration in one area. A prison is designed to operate as a hierarchy system similar to a chain of command that is focused on discipline and correction. If possible, conflict should be handled at the lowest level first by taking steps to avoid negative circumstances. In an ideal situation conflict can be avoided but it is not that easy in a prison environment. Here are steps to consider and try avoiding conflict with others in prison.

• Avoid situations that are certain to intensify.
• Avoid people that are known to initiate and/or participate in aggressive or violent situations, such as gangs.
• Avoid screaming or yelling when disagreeing with others.
• Avoid being alone or in a position you cannot break away from.
• Get involved with programs provided through the prison that is designed to help inmate’s rehabilitate.
• Get a job in the prison.
• Set goals and focus on achieving those goals. (Parole date, family visits, reading, education, work out, sports, etc.)
• Respect others even if you do not like them.
• Learn to tolerate and not judge.
• Keep in touch with family and friends.
• Do not threaten anyone.
• Try to understand other’s points of view.
• Do not get defensive.
• Learn your body language communication and avoid making negative gestures.
• Remain calm and alert.
• Keep your distance and do not invade personal space which is around 2 feet from others.
Communicate In Writing

There are many reasons why inmates lose control of emotions. More often than not, the shame and embarrassment of being incarcerated most likely consumes the thoughts of inmates over time. For some, the concern for their families and the future adds to the emotional strain of being incarcerated. Therefore, communication with family and friends is very important for an inmate’s ability to cope with the anxiety of prison life. Survival throughout each day can be a mental struggle for inmates. Those inmates that seek to restore and/or maintain a healthy relationship with family and friends are faced with challenges of communicating behind prison bars. The convenience of talking with family members and friends is no longer a simple choice but instead a privilege that the prison system controls. Therefore, writing letters and making phone calls to family and friends is a valuable communication process for inmates. Here are some basic steps to write a letter.

Step one: Create and outline to organize thoughts (introduction, main body, and conclusion).

Step two: It is good practice to start the letter with your name and address followed by the receivers name and address.

Step three: Start with addressing the person the letter is intended for using one of the terms, Dear, Sir, Ma’am, Mr., or Ms. If the letter is for family or friends, just use their name.

Step four: Begin the introduction by stating the purpose of your letter.

Step five: Start a new paragraph when transitioning to a new subject or topic. You may need to provide details of the purpose of your letter and this is your main body of the letter.

Step six: Conclude your letter by restating your purpose and highlight any important facts or information you want the reader to know. You should also thank the person for their time. If writing a family member or friend, this is where you want to emphasize how important they are to you.

Step seven: End the letter with a salutation such as; Sincerely, Regards, Thank you and then include your name.

This is basic guidelines for writing a letter. An example letter in format is provided at the end of this guide on page 16 and is intended for inmates to use as a reference for organizing their thoughts and practice writing letters. Inmates should also consider keeping a journal of each day. In the journal, he or she can practice writing and keeping a record of thoughts. Sometimes it helps to look back on days and compare thoughts and feelings to current situations. This journal can also be used to draw pictures, write poems, songs, and anything that is meaningful to the inmate. Having a written log to refer to not only helps with writing skills but
also keeping track of mental struggles and strengths. A journal can also be used to document moments of anger and frustration and how one manages each situation. Ultimately, a journal can be used to help an inmate learn to cope and avoid conflict in prison.

Start by documenting a daily record of your feelings, anger and frustration. Set your goals to better cope with your anger and avoid long periods of frustration and anxiety. In your journal, you should have an outline of goals you want to achieve. When working toward controlling your anger, here is an example of goals you should focus on and practice when faced with difficult situations that lead to conflict. Write the goals in your journal and answer the following questions with each goal.

1. Goal – I will not say anything more on the issue at this point
2. Goal – I will step back and remove myself from the situation
3. Goal – I will take deep breathes and relax
4. Goal – I will think about the situation and cope with the problem

✓ Ask yourself what is really going on in this situation?
✓ How is it a problem for you?
✓ What is the root cause of the problem?
✓ Find the facts and eliminate assumptions and perceptions.
✓ Ask questions if you do not understand.
✓ What choices do you have in this situation?
✓ What are the consequences of reacting?
✓ What choice is best for you?
✓ What are the advantages and disadvantages of the problem?

**Case Study: Writing Assignment**

It has been three months and you have not spoken with your son. Last time he came to the prison, the two of you had an argument. You want to see him again but you do not call. Note: The key here is to practice working toward resolving conflict. Use the goal setting example for controlling anger as your guide. Think of the different steps you need to take in order to reach this goal. Ask yourself questions that you think you will have to answer when working toward this goal.

The idea here is to resolve conflict with your son. What is your first goal in resolving the conflict? What question do you need to focus on in order to achieve this goal?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

What is your second goal? What questions do you need to focus on?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Are you ready to confront your son and work on your relationship? If so, are you ready to listen to his side of the situation? Are you ready to understand?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Communication Tips for Family and Friends

As for family members and friends of inmates in prison, how you communicate with your loved one in prison is also important. There is no doubt that family members are stressed too. Communication between you and your loved one should be positive. It is hard to be positive all time but that is not what the message is here. Before you speak with your loved one, focus on creating positive interaction. Consider your mood at the moment and avoid talking about negativity and depressing conversations. The reason why you should try to remain positive is because your loved one is in a very negative environment. On a daily basis, he or she is faced with the most negative interactions with other people who are feeling depressed, frustrated, and angry with everyone else. The last thing your loved one wants to hear is more negative and depressing conversations. If you have something important to tell them, then do so but you should focus more on how you convey your message. Look at the positive side of the circumstance and keep it active in the conversation. For instance, if a relative or friend is sick tell them but include the positive outcomes or at least provide hope by remaining positive about the situation. If your family is religious, turn to faith and embrace hope. See the following case study to observe poor communication between an inmate and family member during a visit.

Case Study:

John has been in prison for 6 months. For the past month he has been really depressed and feeling bad about his situation; he is ashamed of what he did. He recently received news that his sister Anne is coming to visit in a week. This will be her first visit with him and he is looking forward to seeing her. This is the highlight of his week knowing that she is coming...that’s all he can think about. Thus, the news of her visit was a surprise so he is really expecting this to be a good time to talk with her and find out how things are back home.

Anne arrives and goes through the usual security checks conducted by correctional officers at the facility. The door opens and John sees his sister. He is so excited and she has this grim look on her face. She greets John and begins telling him that it’s good to see him but she has bad news. “Dad is in the hospital and he is not doing well. Everyone is expecting the worse and they sent me to tell you.” The news is devastating and there is nothing John can do.
His sister leaves and John is left trying to figure out the outcome. He feels there is no hope and he believes he will never see his father alive again.

In this case study, Anne did not consider John’s situation. Informing a family member or friend in prison that a loved one is sick is not easy to do but there are ways to go about it that will not make the situation worse. Family and friends should always think about what they will say during their visit. Considering the stress and depression an inmate endures daily is a first step in learning how to communicate with your loved one in prison. There are a few ways to approach this situation in the case study. First of all, hope is comfort. When something happens back home and the news is bad, prepare your conversation before you enter the prison visiting area. Think of all the positives that you can and include that with your conversation. In the case with John and Anne, she could have told John that the family was hopeful and holding on to faith that there will be a good outcome. Do not leave the visit without a positive word. Anne could have left John with hope. Instead, she left him with the devastating news to worry about alone. Notice in the beginning when Anne walks in, she has a grim look on her face. That’s her body language displaying a negative or sad situation. Family should also be aware of their body language because it does make a lasting impression on their loved one. Your visit is the one thing they have to look forward to so think about what you will say and your body language before you arrive at the prison.

Communication is a critical component to interpersonal relationships. The ability to communicate a message effectively is based on how the content is delivered, what method of communication was involved, how the person receiving the message understands the content, and the feedback in response to the message. Prison is a stressful and negative environment. Inmates, correctional officers, and family are all a part of communicating under prison rules, conditions, and regulations. Taking the extra steps to improve how one communicates can lead to less stress and confusion. Remember, effective communication involves active listening and understanding. To avoid conflict, one must consider what makes them frustrated or angry. Take the necessary steps to avoid conflict by thinking through the situation. Consider anger management if the frustration is too intense. Think before you speak and respect others by not interrupting the conversation. Continue to maintain communication with family and friends. Keep a journal and write letters. Avoid gangs and get involved in all the programs available in prison. This will help with improving communication because the programs provide positive interactions with others. Ultimately, the goal is to create positive communication, maintain healthy relationships and for inmates to avoid going to the SHU.
Suggested Journal Articles

The following are actual research studies provided in the Prison Journal. The journal articles are available at your local library or through interlibrary loan. For those of you that are incarcerated, please check with your prison librarian. The first research study is by Darren P. Lawson, Chris Segrin and Teresa D. Ward (1996). In this study, they investigate the process of prison inmate’s integration in the prison system and how the process is influenced by social skills. The results of the study supported a connection between prison inmates feeling lack of power, internal and external communication as an indicator of an inmate’s level of integration into the prison culture. Lawson, Segrin, and Ward identify some limitations and questionable measurement data in the study. Because of these factors, the authors suggest a need for further research to identify how communication and adaption to prison culture influence the prison system’s purpose of rehabilitation.


The second research study, Andrew A. Sappinton (1996), observes inmates in the anger management program. He examines the relationship between their ability and or inability to adjust in prison system, personal beliefs and coping style. Sappinton also suggest a need for further research on prison adjustment and relationships. Overall, the two research studies provide valuable information about how unique the prison environment is and propose a need for more research in the area of inmate adjustment into the prison culture, interpersonal relationship and communication. If you are interested in reading the articles contact the library for more information on how to obtain the journal and/or the article.

Your Name
Street address
City, State and zip code

Person letter is for (name)
Their Street address
Their City, State and zip code

Month day, year

Dear (person's name),

This first paragraph is the introduction. This is where you explain the purpose of your letter. You should also check your spelling and grammar when writing letters. If using a computer, most software programs have spell and grammar check. You should select those options if available and proofread your letter before sending.

This next paragraph is where you transition to a new topic or explain your purpose in more detail. It is good practice to use four to five sentences per paragraph but it is not a set rule. If you have said everything you need to in five sentences, you can transition to the conclusion.

This is where you state your conclusion. You should restate important information from your introduction and main body and thank the person for their time.

Salutation (Sincerely, Regards, Thank you),

Your name
Personal Survey for Prison Inmates

1. What is the basic communication process?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What part of the basic communication process can barriers and interruptions occur?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. How can I avoid the barriers in communication?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. What are the visible signs a correctional officer will look for when dealing with aggressive or violent inmates?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. Why is it important to understand how the correctional officer identifies inmate behavior?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Why is it important to understand a correctional officer’s job?
7. Why should I get to know my cell mate?

8. What are some questions to consider when communication problems occur with cell mates?

9. What steps do I need to take to write a basic letter?

10. Am I angry right now? If so, what questions should I ask myself about the situation to control anger or irrational thoughts?

11. What are some body language motions to consider when avoiding miscommunication?

12. What are some effective listening techniques?
13. What goals should I focus on in my journal?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. What questions should I ask myself to problem solve and cope with my frustrations?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Personal Survey for Family and Friends

1. Why do you need to prepare what you will say before you visit a loved one in prison?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Why should you be positive during visits?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you understand that your communication with your loved one has a strong impact on their emotions and mood long after the conversation is over?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Are you positive during visits?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. Do you leave the visit knowing that your conversation with your loved one was a positive interaction?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you remind your loved one how much they mean to you?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
About the Author

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Tracy was born 1972 in North Carolina, USA. She joined the military in 1995. After serving three years assigned to Civil Engineering Squadron in Texas she transferred to Korea for a year and then moved to Germany. She was awarded the William H. Pitsenbarger Leadership Award and the distinguished graduate award while attending the Pitsenbarger Airman Leadership School at Spangdahlem Germany. She later changed careers and served her last tour in the service as a management analyst. During her 12 years of military service, she received two Associates degrees in Applied Science, Bachelors in Business Management and Master of Human Relations.

Tracy enjoys the outdoors and likes to hike, kayak, and ride bikes. She aspires to be an Environmental Engineer and is pursuing her second bachelor’s degree at the University of Oklahoma.
Evaluation

1. Is the guide easy to read and understand? Yes____ or No____

2. Will you use any of the techniques and/or tips to improve your communication? If so, which ones?

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________________________________________________________________________

3. What specifically did you find useful in the guide?

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4. What did you like or not like about the guide?

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5. Will you tell others about the guide? If so, who? (family, friends, and/or other inmates)

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6. What would you change about the guide, if anything?

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7. Did the guide help you understand effective communication? If so, what was it?

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________________________________________________________________________
8. Was this guide useful in helping you understand how to communicate with friends and family?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. Does the Author demonstrate knowledge of communication in prison? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________
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We appreciate your feedback!

Fax to: 866-295-7200 or
Email to: questions@sjmfamilyfoundation.org
Robert Eltonello has an A.A. degree in Paralegal Education and B.A. in Socio-legal Environment. He is currently working on a second degree in Criminal Justice and hopes to start his graduate studies in the fall. Also, Roberto is a credentialed mediator and legal investigator that specializes in family law. He claims that "stirring up social issues" characteristically drives him to write. Presently, he is incarcerated at the Dick Conners Prison in Hominy, Oklahoma where he is finishing up his second novel, Normal People. It will be released this fall.
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