

Early days in prison

What will happen when I first get to prison?

When you first arrive, you will be taken to the reception area of the prison, where;

- You will be interviewed for personal details by prison staff
- Staff may take your fingerprints and your photograph.
- You will be given a prison number.
- You will see someone from healthcare. Tell them if you have a health problem. Tell them if you are taking any medicine, or if you have a problem with drugs or alcohol. Also tell them if you feel very upset or worried about things.
- You will be searched. Searches should always be respectful.

- In men's prisons you will be given a full search.

When you are removing any item of clothing the staff should not touch you whilst you do this. At no point should you be fully naked during a search.

- In women's prisons you will be given a rub down search.

A rub down search should not be intrusive and you should not normally be asked to raise or remove outer clothing.

- You may also be asked to sit in a chair which scans you for metal objects like mobile phones.

There is more information about searching in our 'Searching in prison' information sheet, including searching arrangements for transgender people, people with disabilities and for religious or cultural reasons.

- A member of prison staff will make a list of everything you brought with you. You will be told which of your property can be taken with you – this is called '*in possession*' property. Each prison has rules about what you can keep in your possession. In possession property normally needs to fit in two property boxes.

Some items are not allowed to be in your possession. These include:

- Mobile phones and other banned items
- Cash and Valuable items
- Certain items of clothing such as hooded clothing, clothing with offensive slogans or clothing that does not meet basic standards of modesty and decency.

This will be kept in a safe place for you. This is known as your stored property.

- You will be given bedding and clothes, if needed
- You should receive a 'first night pack' (sometimes called a reception pack) containing items like tea, milk and sugar. This is to help until you can buy things from the prison shop/canteen. It will usually be taken from future earnings.
- You should be allowed to phone your family or legal adviser, either in reception or first night location. You should also be told how to arrange for them to visit you – you are entitled to a social visit within 72 hours of conviction.

What happens after reception?

On the day you arrive:

- You can have a bath or shower if you want one.
- You should receive hot food and a drink even if you have arrived too late for the evening meal
- You will be taken to the room you will sleep in.

You may have to share a room with other people. Often this will be with one other person, but some prisons have rooms which might be shared with more.

Speak to staff if you are concerned about this or feel unsafe.

You should not be asked to share with someone who smokes if you don't.

If you are unconvicted, you should not have to share with convicted prisoners.

Some prisons have a special area where prisoners sleep for the first night so they can get used to being in prison. This may be called the 'first night centre'.

During the first few days:

- You will meet other staff. You may meet someone called a Key Worker. You may be asked for more details about needs you have – for example if you need help with housing or employment.
- Staff will tell you more about prison life and how things work. This is called an induction.
- You may be asked to complete numeracy and literacy tests. This is so they can decide what education courses and work will be most suitable for you.

What should I do if I feel very upset or worried when I get to prison?

It is important to talk to someone if you feel like this.

You can tell

- Prison staff. You may have someone called a Key Worker. Or you can talk to the officer in charge of your area of the prison (this is called the wing or landing)
- Safer Custody staff, who check to make sure people feel safe in the prison
- The doctor or nurse who gives you the health check
- Someone from the chaplaincy team
- A prisoner called a listener or buddy
- The Samaritans. You can call the Samaritans for free, on 0845 450 7797 from prisons in England and Wales, or 08457 90 90 90 from prisons in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

You can also write to the Samaritans and you will receive a written reply:

Freepost RRYU-CBCR-TRSX
Samaritans
PO Box 9090
STIRLING FK8 2SA

Contact our Advice and Information Service

We are a small service and we are independent of the prison service.

We can give you information on prison rules, life in prison and how to get help in prison.

Our freephone information line is **0808 802 0060**. This number is for **prisoners** only. This number is **free** and you do not need to put it on your PIN.

This number is open:

- Monday and Thursday afternoon from 3.30pm to 5.30pm.
- Wednesday morning from 10.30am to 12.30pm.

At other times, you can call on **0207 251 5070**. This number is open from Monday to Friday 10.00am - 5.30pm. This number is **not free** but you do not need to put it on your PIN.

You can also write to us at:

Prison Reform Trust
FREEPOST ND 6125
London
EC1B 1PN