

PAROLE Preparation TOOLKIT

An action guide for understanding
and preparing for your parole hearing



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & NOTE OF THANKS

The Parole Preparation Toolkit: an action guide for understanding and preparing for your parole hearing is the culmination of hundreds of volunteer hours from attorneys and staff at Microsoft, Starbucks, and Baker McKenzie. We are grateful for the time and efforts taken by the attorneys and staff involved in crafting this first-of-its-kind document. The Parole Toolkit is meant to be a guide to help incarcerated youth and adults prepare themselves for parole. This Toolkit was the genesis of thousands of hours of tireless work by The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth on behalf of incarcerated youth.

Our collective thanks also extends to those individuals that supported the work of this Toolkit through the contribution of their materials and work product. Notably, our thanks goes out to:

- **Michael A. Singer**, author of New York Times bestsellers [The Untethered Soul](#) and [The Surrender Experiment](#). Mr. Singer is the founder of Temple of the Universe, a now long-established yoga and meditation center. He is also the creator of a leading-edge software package that transformed the medical practice management industry, as well as founding CEO of a public company whose achievements are archived in the Smithsonian Institute.
- **Carl Fulwiler**, MD, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Medicine, Medical Director and Associate Research Director at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Fulwiler is an Addictions Psychiatrist with a doctorate in Neuroscience and specialized training in clinical applications of mindfulness.

Finally, in addition to the drafters, editors, and contributors to this Parole Preparation Toolkit, the foundation of this Toolkit is the insights, perspectives, and experiences of parole board members, pro bono attorneys, and formerly incarcerated individuals, who made themselves available for interview and discussion in an effort to help individuals who are preparing for parole hearings. We are incredibly grateful to this group of individuals, though unnamed, for sharing extensive perspective and guidance.

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FOREWORD

You are not alone: there are over 2,500 children in the United States who have been sentenced to life without parole, and there are thousands more serving long sentences that probably mean life in prison. But, there is a growing movement at the state level to eliminate life sentences for children. Currently, 20 states ban life without parole for children, and we hope that more states will do so in the coming years.

Because of positive changes in state laws and a number of U.S. Supreme Court cases that limit sentencing a child to life without parole, many individuals who were given such a sentence now have a chance for parole. This is a great opportunity for a second chance, and it requires that incarcerated individuals and their attorneys understand how to prepare for a parole hearing and possible release. Preparation is extremely important to the outcome of the parole hearing.

The Parole Preparation Toolkit is intended to do just that – provide information and resources so that you are well prepared for a second chance at freedom. This Toolkit was created through the work of volunteer attorneys from Microsoft, Starbucks and Baker McKenzie based upon interviews with formerly incarcerated youth and parole board members across various states, as well as data and information from numerous published sources. Incarcerated individuals and supporting families, friends and community members can use the Parole Toolkit to learn the basics of parole and to become familiar with the process. The Toolkit also explains how to prepare for a parole hearing, and provides sample parole questions, resources for correspondence courses, mindfulness exercises, and other preparation materials.

In the following pages, you will learn that being eligible for parole is really an opportunity to demonstrate how you have positively changed and grown in prison. Although following the recommendations in this Parole Toolkit cannot guarantee any particular outcome, it can help you put your best case forward and prepare for life outside prison.

The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
October 2018

the CAMPAIGN *for the* FAIR
SENTENCING *of* YOUTH 

The Parole Preparation Toolkit is an action guide to help individuals prepare for a successful parole hearing. Preparation for parole consideration should start early and individuals should know that the preparation can take substantial time. The Parole Toolkit is designed so that you can start early, obtain help where you need it, or catch up quickly to get yourself as prepared as possible. This Toolkit can be used by both individuals who may be up for parole or potentially coming up for parole, as well as by family members and friends looking to support that individual.

I. What is Parole?

This section is meant to provide a general understanding of Parole and the process for Parole consideration.¹

Parole is the release of an incarcerated individual² from prison before the end of her or his sentence. A **parolee** is someone who is released from prison because she or he was granted parole. A parolee must follow certain rules for a set period of time in order to stay out of prison. Violating any of the rules could result in parole being revoked – meaning the parolee would have to return to prison and serve all or most of the rest of his sentence. The rules a parolee must follow differ by location and parole board, but common parole rules include:

- following all laws;
- remaining in the state;
- paying child support;
- avoiding certain people;
- reporting regularly to a parole agent; and
- attending counseling sessions or treatment programs.

State parole boards usually decide whether an incarcerated individual gets paroled. Individuals who serve on parole boards are generally chosen by state government officials and are sometimes required to have a certain education or professional experience. For example, in South Dakota, the parole board is chosen by the governor, the state attorney general, and the South Dakota Supreme Court. In addition, in South Dakota, the parole board must have a total of nine board members, and three of them must be lawyers.

Board members are usually expected to serve for a specific term, meaning they will be a board member for a set amount of time – usually between four to six years. Most states allow board members to request an additional term to continue serving on the parole board. Therefore, an incarcerated individual who is up for parole a second or third time might see some of the same parole board members as the first time. Some, but not all, states limit the number of terms or years that an individual may serve as a parole board member.³

To be eligible for parole, incarcerated individuals usually must meet certain parole qualification requirements. These requirements are different depending on the state and the

¹ The parole process and eligibility differs for each state. Included in the attached materials is the general information that is largely applicable to most states. Resources for the state that you are located in should be sought out as well.

² Throughout the Parole Toolkit, "incarcerated individual" means inmate or parole candidate.

³ Robina Institute, "The Continuing Leverage of Releasing Authorities: Findings from a National Survey" (2017) ("National Survey").

incarcerated individual's history and crime. Examples of some conditions for parole eligibility may include:

- serving the minimum sentence required for parole eligibility;
- not having any major disciplinary actions within the previous 12 months;
- completing a certain number of hours of pre-release training or counseling, such as a substance abuse rehabilitation program;
- obtaining a high school diploma or a GED, or providing documentation that a diploma or GED is not possible; and
- having a mental health evaluation by a qualified expert.

The parole process varies by state, but it typically consists of a number of steps for both the incarcerated individual and the board. In many states, materials and information concerning the incarcerated individual are required in advance of any parole hearing or meeting. Usually, the first step involves preparing a parole file that has documents about the incarcerated individual and his case for the parole board to review. Depending on the state, another step involves incarcerated individuals working with a **parole agent**⁴ to develop a plan to reenter society and prepare for the parole board hearing or interview.

Parole hearings are proceedings where parole board members listen to incarcerated individuals and ask questions to determine whether parole should be given. Some states allow victims, witnesses, and other concerned parties to appear at hearings to express support for, or disapproval of, the incarcerated individual being paroled. Some states do not have parole hearings, or if they do, incarcerated individuals are not allowed to attend. Instead, the incarcerated individual might be interviewed by a parole board member or a **hearing officer**.⁵ More information on the parole process, and the factors that board members consider to determine whether an incarcerated individual should be granted parole, are discussed in **Chapter 3**.

Parole hearings are different from court proceedings, where juries and a judge listen to both sides of the case and weigh the evidence to determine whether a defendant is guilty of a particular crime. Moreover, the U.S. Constitution provides certain protections and rights to criminal defendants to help prevent random or unreasonable decisions. Some of these protections and rights include a fair opportunity to present evidence, the right to a jury trial, the right to be represented by an attorney, and entitlement to a fair and impartial judge and jury.

In contrast, parole hearings are an opportunity for incarcerated individuals to show positive change; they are not a retrial of the case or a resentencing. In addition, in most states, parole is a privilege and not a constitutional right, and the protections of the U.S. Constitution do not apply.⁶ Therefore, although parole boards must follow the parole procedures created by

4 Sometimes parole agents are called "parole officers." In general, parole agents help inmates prepare for life outside prison and then supervise them once the inmates are paroled. However, not all states have parole agents who help inmates prepare reentry plans. In those states, inmates will have to prepare one on their own or work with a counselor or prison staff to develop one.

5 In some states, hearing officers interview inmates and write summaries of the cases they are assigned to. In addition, some states allow hearing officers to make recommendations to the parole board regarding an inmate's parole. Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 31.

6 "State prisoners do not have a constitutionally protected interest in receiving parole unless a parole statute contains mandatory

the state, they generally have discretion, or flexibility, in deciding whether to grant parole. In addition, the other safeguards provided in criminal proceedings, like the right to have a lawyer or cross-examine witnesses, do not usually apply. However, if parole is denied, some states allow incarcerated individuals to request that the parole board reconsider its decision.⁷

Whether you will be considered for parole depends on which state you live in. In many states, individuals who were sentenced to life without parole as a juvenile are being resentenced. Many of the new sentences allow incarcerated individuals to be considered for parole after a certain number of years. Several individuals have already been released because of time already served. Some states are moving more slowly and have not yet updated their laws or parole policies to be consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court rulings. If you live in one of these states, do not give up hope. The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth and other advocacy groups are working to make positive changes in these states.

II. What to Expect at the Parole Board Hearing

California is one of many states that permit incarcerated individuals to be present and speak during parole board hearings.⁸ However, some states do not hold parole board hearings. Instead, parole board members and/or hearing or parole agents will interview incarcerated individuals, and then the information from the interview will be used to decide on parole. For example, in Texas, incarcerated individuals are typically interviewed by a parole agent, who then prepares a case summary, which is given to the parole board. The Texas parole board does not usually interview incarcerated individuals. In Pennsylvania, incarcerated individuals are usually interviewed by one or two board members and sometimes also a hearing examiner. In these interviews, individuals sometimes participate using a video conference.⁹ Interviews using video conference are recorded, and the video recording is circulated to other Pennsylvania board members for their review.

You should find out from your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney¹⁰ whether you will participate in a formal parole board hearing or be interviewed privately. Knowing whether you will have a formal hearing or just an interview will help set your expectations. Either way, you should be well prepared and take the interviews just as seriously as a parole board hearing. See **Chapter 3** for information on how to prepare for the parole hearing or interview.

The remainder of this Parole Toolkit will refer to the parole board hearing only and not interviews, as in many ways the preparation needed is similar and hearings are slightly more common. For specific questions as to a parole interview, inquire with your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney.

language that requires the parole board to grant parole in certain situations." 33 Geo. L.J. Ann. Rev. Crim. Proc. 741 (May 2004); see also Joshua C. Jungman, Thirty-First Annual Review of Criminal Procedure. IV. Sentencing, 90 Geo. L.J. 1870 (May 2002).

7 Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 33.

8 "What to Expect at a Parole Suitability Hearing," available at http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/BOPH/parole_suitability_hearings_overview.html (last viewed Oct. 6, 2017); see also Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 29.

9 A video conference is where an individual can participate in a meeting by use of a TV or computer screen. Video conferences allow individuals who are in different locations to communicate with those present at the meeting.

10 You might be able to hire an attorney to help you prepare for parole. Most states do not provide an attorney for the parole process.

A. Parole Board Process

As noted above, each state's parole process is different. However, many states provide information on the parole process to incarcerated individuals, so ask your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney if and how you can obtain this information.¹¹ In general, though, you can expect the following to occur:

Notice of Hearing

Incarcerated individuals are informed of their hearing date, but the amount of time of the notice varies. In California, for example, individuals are typically given about four to six months' notice.¹² Usually prison staff or the parole board will provide the notice.¹³ In some states, victims and the public are also given notice of the hearing date.

Preparation of Case File

Usually a parole agent gathers documents to prepare a case file that contains information about the crime, previous criminal history, incarcerated individual investigation reports and interviews, certificates of programs completed while in prison, mental health evaluations, write-ups while in prison, and letters of support for the individual's release. This file is made available to the parole board panel in advance of the hearing, and the board uses this information to ask questions.

Quick Tip

In some states, like California, incarcerated individuals have a right to review his or her case file. Ask your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or your attorney to request a copy of this file in case your state allows you to review it. You will want to make sure the information is accurate and up to date.

Reentry Plan

In some states, incarcerated individuals work with parole agents to develop a reentry plan and prepare for the hearing. The timing of this preparation varies, but in Pennsylvania, for example, this step usually occurs about five months before the minimum date.

¹¹ Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 32.

¹² "Events Before a Parole Suitability Hearing," Dept. of Corrections, California, available at: http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/BOPH/parole_suitability_hearings_overview.html.

¹³ Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 31-32.

Quick Tip

Get a head start and begin creating your reentry plan as soon as possible. If you get to work with a parole agent, set up meetings with her to prepare. If you do not have an agent or anyone else to help, begin preparing on your own, using **Chapter 3** and the checklist in **Appendix 1**.

Pre-Interview Case Review

Parole board members and/or hearing examiners review the case file and reentry plan.

Quick Tip

Write out your reentry plan and ask your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney to include it in your case file. This will allow parole board members to read it before your hearing.

Hearing

Incarcerated individuals will attend a parole board hearing. Some hearings are conducted by video conference. In some states, incarcerated individuals can have an attorney, family member, or other individual present. In addition, some states allow victims, judges, or the public to be present, but in other states, victims and others can only meet separately with the board or provide their own written statements concerning the incarcerated individual.

Hearings vary in length, with some as short as 15 minutes, and others as long as a few hours. A typical format would be: some findings are read into the record; you make a statement; and the parole board asks questions. The parole board might provide feedback to you at or following the hearing.

Quick Tip

If your state allows you to have a family member or friend present, think carefully if it is a good idea to have them there. Avoid inviting anyone who is a felon or who might try to defend your actions or make excuses for you.

Parole Board Decision

In some states, incarcerated individuals are informed of the parole board's decision the same day as the hearing. In other states, it might take longer, ranging from about eight to 30 days. Only a few states take longer than 30 days to notify the incarcerated individual of the

board's decision.¹⁴ In California and in some other states, the Governor gets to review and potentially change the parole board's decision. In these states, the parole board's decision might not be the final one.

Quick Tip

In many states, if parole is denied, incarcerated individuals are entitled to a written reason for the denial. Check with your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney to determine whether you live in one of these states.

B. Information the Parole Board Considers

The purpose of a parole board hearing is to give incarcerated individuals an opportunity to talk about the crime from their perspective, explain the progress they have made while in prison, discuss their reentry plan, and state why they should be given parole. The hearing also allows board members and hearing officers to discuss an incarcerated individual's case file, including documents showing positive or negative adjustment inside prison, and risk assessments or similar reports; ask questions about the individual's reentry plan; listen to statements from victims, judges, and others, if permitted by the state's parole process; and – importantly – evaluate the individual's demeanor to see how that person interacts with others.¹⁵

The factors that parole boards consider when determining whether to grant parole can be broken into two areas: (1) static factors, and (2) dynamic factors. **Static factors** are things you cannot change, such as the crime that was committed or your criminal history. **Dynamic factors** are things you can control, like your behavior and progress while incarcerated, and your reentry plan. Both types of factors will be discussed at your parole board hearing.

Static Factors: Factors You Cannot Change

Parole boards consider the nature of an incarcerated individual's current offense – that is, what caused the incarcerated individual to be incarcerated in the first place – and any previous adult crimes. They also usually consider the age and maturity of the incarcerated individual at their first conviction, prior juvenile record, victim impact statements, prosecutor input, and history of illegal drug use.¹⁶ These are some of the factors you cannot change.

Dynamic Factors: Factors You Can Control

The parole board will consider many other factors that you can control both during your time incarcerated and into the future. One important factor that most all boards consider is your demeanor, meaning how you act, during your hearing. Other dynamic factors include whether you have a detailed reentry plan, demonstrated pro-social behavior, and completed

¹⁴ Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 33.

¹⁵ "Procedures Governing the Granting of Paroles and Conditional Releases," State of Missouri, Dept. of Corrections, Board of Probation and Parole (Jan. 1, 2017), at 4.

¹⁶ Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 26.

any required treatment programs. It will be extremely important to document your positive actions related to these factors, and you should be able to speak about your actions, too. See **Chapter 3** for more information on these dynamic factors and how you can demonstrate your success with them.

Quick Tip

Many states also consider psychological reports. In California, for example, psychologists interview incarcerated individuals about four to six months before the hearing date, and the board places a lot of weight on these assessments. Therefore, it is important to take such assessments very seriously.

Risk Assessments and Parole Guidelines

Many states use risk assessments and parole guidelines to help bring consistency to decisions concerning parole and to help determine the chances that an incarcerated individual will be successful once paroled. These two tools usually consider both static and dynamic factors to determine a risk level. For example, Nevada's Parole Recidivism Risk and Crime Severity Guidelines consider the incarcerated individual's age at first arrest, history of drug or alcohol abuse, current age, completion of educational or treatment programs, and disciplinary conduct. Points are then assigned to each factor, depending on the answer. If an incarcerated individual had no misconduct of any kind in the past year, Nevada's guidelines assign a point of -1 (minus one); however, a history of frequent drug abuse would result in 2 points. In Nevada, the higher the number of points, the higher the risk level assigned.

Dynamic factors, such as good behavior while incarcerated, can impact the risk determination, so it is important to do everything you can to improve the factors within your control.

Quick Tip

Some, but not all, states allow incarcerated individuals to review and contest (that is, disagree with) their risk assessment scores.¹⁷ Ask your parole agent, counselor, prison staff, or attorney if you can review your risk assessment. If you see a mistake in the assessment or otherwise disagree with a component, ask if you can challenge it.

III. Preparing for the Parole Board Hearing

Being prepared for the parole board hearing can have a big influence on the board's decision. Preparing and practicing should be your number one priority. To be fully prepared, you need to:

- develop a strong reentry program;

¹⁷ Robina Institute, "National Survey," at 25.

- show your success with those factors the board considers that are within your control (the dynamic factors);
- practice what you will say; and
- be mentally prepared.

A. Develop Your Reentry Plan

Putting together a reentry plan is your opportunity to explain how you plan to support and take care of yourself from the moment you are released. In your plan, you should address everything from housing and employment, to who will be in your support network. You will need to show that your basic needs will be met. Below is an outline of what you should address in your plan, along with suggestions and tips that you may find useful. You should be prepared to talk about your plan during your hearing, so become very familiar with it.

Housing

You will need to demonstrate that you have a place to live once you are paroled. Ask your family and friends if you can stay with them, or reach out to a rehabilitation facility to see if they have room to accommodate you. Get a letter in writing stating that you can stay at this location for at least six months. For an example of a letter showing that you have housing (a "**housing letter**"), see the sample in **Appendix 2**.

In addition, the parole board will likely expect that you live outside the city where the crime took place and away from the victim or victim's family. You should also live away from individuals who might be a negative influence on you. Keep this in mind as you look for places to live.

For housing, document the following, and be prepared to talk about it at your hearing:

- The address of your proposed residence;
- Contact information of all individuals living at your proposed residence;
- Your relationship to those individuals;
- A description of the supervision or support provided in the home;
- If possible, statements from those familiar with the location saying that it will be a stable environment for you;
- Whether you have ever lived at this address;
- The positive contributions you will make to the residence (not just paying rent); and
- The positive and negative factors you associate with the proposed residence.

Quick Tip

Some states might have agents visit and investigate the home you will live in. If they find that anyone who submitted a statement about the home provided false information, it can reflect badly on you. Make sure that statements from those familiar with the home provide truthful information.

Employment

Seeking employment before you are released might seem like an impossible task, but there are ways to begin the process while you are still in prison. You can write to potential employers, telling them you expect to be released by a certain date, and ask that they write back and confirm that they will hire you upon your release. Make sure the future employer's response letter makes it clear that the employer knows you will be on parole. See **Appendix 3** for an example of a letter to a potential employer.

Do not be disappointed if you send 20-50 letters in order to receive even one positive response.¹⁸ Make sure you keep copies of all letters you send to potential employers. Even if you do not get a job before you are on parole, you can show these letters to the parole board so they are aware of your efforts and desire for employment.

If you are unable to confirm you will have a job once you are released, you might get help if you live in transitional housing, which may have resources to help parolees with employment. In addition, it will be important to get **letters of recommendation** from family, friends, prison guards, a mentor, or others to show the parole board you have references for securing employment. Sometimes employers will ask for the names and contact information of people you know (called "references") so the potential employer can ask questions about you. Having letters of recommendation already written will show the board you are prepared and ready for employment. See **Appendix 4** for an example letter of recommendation.

To increase your chances of getting employment, take classes that are offered in prison or online. There are several online courses, many of which are free, that you can take if you have access to a computer. See **Appendix 5** for a list of online organizations that offer classes. Try to get a certificate of completion for any training or classes you take so that you can show it to the parole board or future employers. Being able to show that you have the training and skills for a certain job can help.

You will also want to document and discuss the jobs you had while in prison, if any. Be sure to state how long you had the job and how you succeeded. If you did not have a job but did volunteer work, include that in this section, too. You want to demonstrate that you are dependable and consistent, which is very important for employment.

Finally, have copies of your birth certificate available, and know your social security number, or get one. You will need this information for any future employment, and the board might ask about it. Also, ask your parole agent or prison staff how you can obtain an official photo identification card, and get one of those, too.

¹⁸ Penn. Board of Probation and Parole, "Parole Handbook: Your Guide to Parole Success in Prison and in the Community" (Dec. 2016), at 10.

Transportation

Be prepared to explain how you will get to and from work, the grocery store, any counseling or treatment programs, or other activities that you might be involved with once you are on parole. Finding transportation might sound like an easy task, but how easy it will be depends on where you live and what you have access to. For example, if you will be living in a city, you might be able to get around town on a bike or use a bus. Or, maybe a family member will let you use their car. Whichever type of transportation you use, be prepared to explain:

- What the mode of transportation will be (for example, a bike, car, bus, etc.);
- How you will get it (for example, a friend will loan you her car, or you will buy a bus ticket using money from a family member); and
- How you know the route to work, the grocery store, or any other activity you need to do when you are on parole (for example, you can show a map of the city and the route you will take).

Some of this information may sound very easy and basic, but learning about public transportation routes and schedules can be overwhelming. If you will use public transportation, ask a family member, friend, or outside agency to help you determine the type of transportation you will use and the routes you will take. Make sure you understand where you will buy a ticket or card to get on public transportation, and how you will know once you are at the right stop to get off.¹⁹ Seek advice from others who have been through this process and find out what worked best for them and what will work best for you.

Your Support Network

Create a list of contacts, including individuals and organizations, who will serve as your support network while you are on parole. Include names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses, if available. This list should include your parole agent, family members, friends, mentors, churches, and other organizations. Ask each person on this list to commit to visiting or calling you once you are released.

The board might ask about the individuals you have identified. Do not include anyone who may be a negative influence. Instead, identify people who will be a positive, supportive influence. You can even note by each name how you think that person can support you or be helpful. For example, maybe you have a friend who has offered to show you how to use a computer, or perhaps you have identified a family member who has offered to provide moral support. If you cannot identify anyone, explain how you will find people, though church or other organizations, to support your success.

Letters of Support

Having a good support system is very important in the process of reentry. Try to get your family, friends, advocates, mentors, program leaders, correctional staff, and outside

¹⁹ Sometimes it takes practice to know how to use public transportation. Telling someone how you will use public transportation and how you will know when to get off is one thing, but in real life, even people who use public transportation a lot can miss a stop, for example. If that happens to you, do not worry. Just pause and look at a map and the transportation schedule to figure out what you need to do next, or ask the driver or others in the area for help.

community members who are close to you to write **letters of support** – that is, letters stating they will help you spiritually, mentally, financially, or emotionally, or will help with housing, transportation, or in other ways.

Letters of support are different from letters of recommendation. Letters of support are intended for the parole board to see, not future employers. Support letters should explain how the writer has had continued contact with you while you were incarcerated and how the writer plans to be a part of your support system once you are on parole. These letters are important and will show the board that others believe in you and will be there to support you and help during the transition.²⁰ An example letter of support can be found in **Appendix 6**.

Programs and Classes

The parole board will want to know the names and locations of classes, programs, and other activities you plan to attend once you are released. Examples include:

- a 12-step program, such as Alcoholics Anonymous;
- a rehabilitation facility or a reentry program;
- anger management classes or church; or
- educational classes (computer, trade, technical, or other).

Make sure you identify classes or activities that will help you with any problem areas you have. For example, if you have a history of drug abuse, find a drug rehabilitation program that you can attend upon release. The board will want to see that you have identified your potential obstacles and have a plan in place to address them.

Goals

Write down what success outside prison means to you. Does that mean you will find employment, make friends, or see your children or parents? Or perhaps you will earn a degree or master a new skill or trade? List those things that will make you feel successful.

Plan what you would like to accomplish once you are out, and set goal dates. For example, what is your goal for your first week out in the community, and how do you plan to accomplish this? How about after three months on parole? What about after one year on parole? Again, state how you plan to accomplish these goals for each timeframe.

Quick Tip

Once you are paroled, hang your goals on your refrigerator or in your room to remind you of the steps you need to take to achieve them.

²⁰ In order to get these letters of support, you will want to reach out to individuals close to you or who you know in the community. Even if you are not eligible for parole for a while, you should still keep in touch with people from whom you'd like to seek a letter closer to your parole hearing.

Other Items to Address

You should also address the following in your reentry plan:

- How you will open a checking account? Who will help you do this and when?
- How you will leave prison and go to your new home?
- How much money will you have when you leave prison?
- Where will you get clothing? Will someone or some organization help you with this?
- How will you learn to manage your money?

Finally, you should have a back-up plan for housing, employment, transportation, classes, and goals. For example, if you have confirmation that you can live at a family member's house once you are paroled, be sure to state an alternative place you can live in case your family member moves or can no longer accommodate you. Similarly, if you have a job lined up for when you are out, list another job that you might be able to get if the original job falls through. Some board members will ask you about your back-up plans, and some will expect that you even have a back-up plan for your back-up plan!

B. Demonstrate Your Success

As discussed in **Chapter 2**, parole boards consider a number of factors when determining whether to parole an incarcerated individual. One set of factors they consider are dynamic factors, which are behaviors, activities, and actions that are within your control. Review the factors listed below, and think of examples of how you have been successful at each. Then explain each of these factors, along with your behaviors demonstrating them, in writing so that the board can read your story showing how you have improved yourself while in prison. Ask your parole agent to include your summary of these behaviors in your case file.

Assume Responsibility

Parole boards will want to hear your version of the story from your perspective, but they will also want to hear that you accept responsibility for the choices you made, and that there were other choices you could have made. They do not want to hear claims that you are innocent.

Quick Tip

This is not the time to state excuses or blame others, even if you feel that way. The board will not want to hear this. Focus on accepting responsibility and showing remorse.

Institutional Adjustment

Parole boards will want to know how you have adjusted to being in prison and used your time. They usually expect younger incarcerated individuals to misbehave initially, but at some point they will want to see growth and maturity.

Quick Tip

Institutional adjustment can be positively demonstrated through classes, volunteer work, or positive interaction with prison staff.

Good Institutional Behavior

Most parole boards will expect that an incarcerated individual has a history of good behavior for at least the last 12 months. Some might expect even more time, such as two years.

Positive Attitude

Your positive attitude and demeanor at the hearing are extremely important! Parole board members have stated that attitude can make or break the hearing. Do not say things like, "You've already made up your mind and you aren't going to do anything for me." As one board member stated, "come in with a social attitude, not an inmate attitude. Parole is yours to lose. I'm expecting to give it to you. Don't talk me out of it."

Your demeanor will also be carefully reviewed. The board will want to see if you are social and making eye contact. Are you looking remorseful when you talk about what happened? Are you showing emotion? It might be hard to do, but show the board that you are a human being with feelings. You can begin by writing something about yourself that demonstrates your positive attitude and demeanor.

Prosocial Behaviors and Activities

Prosocial behavior means actions that benefit other people or society as a whole, such as helping, sharing, donating, cooperating, and volunteering. You want to demonstrate to the parole board that you intend to contribute to your community in positive ways. The best way to show that you will do this when you are on parole is by describing the prosocial behaviors and activities that you have done while incarcerated. For example, you may have volunteered to help run a class or program, or maybe you have examples of where you have cooperated with prison staff. If you do not currently have any examples of this type of behavior, start doing things now so you will have activities to write and speak about. You could start a wide range of groups, from meditation, singing, song-writing, journaling, and more. You may also want to help mentor and aid a newer or younger incarcerated individual. Think of things that you ordinarily enjoy and ways you can make an impact, and give it a try.

Quick Tip

If you do not have any meaningful contact with prison staff yet, try to start one with a simple "Hello, how are you today?" and get to know them.

Lessons Learned

You were young when you were sent to prison. Sometimes it takes growing up and becoming an adult to reflect on the past and realize that some things are simply wrong. The board will want to hear about any lessons you have learned in prison. For example, maybe you have learned that all lives are precious and valuable, and that you respect each person's life. The lessons learned do not have to be limited to the crime you were involved with, however. Maybe you learned some lessons in prison that you can also share.

Quick Tip

Keep track of lessons you learn while in prison. You can do this by keeping a journal that states each lesson and explains what occurred that helped you learn it.

Acceptance of Impact

The board will want to know that you understand the impact of your decisions and actions on other people, including the victim and victim's family. If you would like an opportunity to express remorse for your offense and its impact, you can consider writing a letter of remorse to the victim's family and have it placed in your case file for the board to see. A remorse letter would not actually be sent to the victim, but it would allow the board to better understand your insights into the impact of your past actions.

Positively Describe Yourself

A parole board member might ask you to describe yourself using three positive words. What words would you use, and what would you say to back them up? If you say you are kind, what have you done to demonstrate that? Maybe you helped an incarcerated individual who fell down, or you cheered someone up who was having a bad day. For each word that you would use to describe yourself, find examples that demonstrate these traits.

This is also an opportunity to tell the parole board anything else you think is important about your growth. Keep in mind that these individuals are trying to decide whether you are ready to go back into society. Are you the type of person that they could see as their neighbor? Share information that will help them feel confident about granting you parole.

Prescriptive Programming

The board will expect that you have completed any prescriptive programs, which are programs assigned to you to complete, such as a drug treatment or addiction program. If you have not been able to enroll in these programs for reasons beyond your control, you should tell the board that you will enroll in the program as soon as you are out. If you have attended or completed any such programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or others, write them down and write some thoughts about what you learned from attending. Also, sometimes incarcerated individuals develop their own AA programs or similar ones. Consider that if one is not currently available.

Educational or Trade Classes

Identify all educational or trade classes you have attended, and explain how that information can be applied to the outside world. When you talk about what you have learned or done, show pride in your effort and work. If you have not had opportunities to take classes due to your sentence, be creative and offer to teach others a skill that you know, such as:

- Certain exercises, like aerobics or yoga;
- Public speaking;
- Board games, like chess or checkers; and
- Meditation or breathing exercises.

If you do not think you have many skills to offer, ask someone to be your mentor and learn something from others.

Reading is another way to be creative and show you have learned new things. For example, boards have been impressed with incarcerated individuals who are aware of current events and can talk about them. You can also read books and write short reports on what you learned, which you can share with the board.

Essentially, you want to create a record showing how you took initiative and tried to improve yourself, despite a lack of opportunities in prison. Be sure to keep a record of those classes you signed up for but did not get in. This will show the board that you tried.

See **Appendix 5** for online educational classes to enroll in.

C. Practice What You Will Say

The parole board may want to hear what happened on the day of the your offense from your perspective. Focus on what it was about you at that time that led you to commit the crime. The parole board will want to know what your role was in the act that led to your incarceration, and you need to be ready to tell your entire story. To be effective, it is important that you take responsibility for your actions and express how you feel. You can also mention if there are inaccurate or incorrect facts on the record. Do not restate the criminal complaint. You can mention if there were any mitigating factors. For example, were there things in your past that contributed to you making some wrong decisions? Were there any contributing factors, such as an abusive family? Be careful, though, that you do not sound like you are retrying your case.

When you talk about the crime, do not blame others for your actions. Not only is this not a productive use of your time at the hearing, but parole board panels do not look favorably on this practice because it can give the appearance that you do not understand your role in the crime or the effects of your actions. It can also suggest that you do not feel remorse. Before you speak, ask yourself how your proposed statement will advance your chances of being paroled, and guide yourself by the following, which parole boards consistently look for:

- Be truthful;
- Accept responsibility for your participation in the offense;

- Express emotion by talking about your feelings;
- Respond to questions with patience, not defensiveness;
- Make eye contact with panel members.

In addition, be as introspective as possible, meaning look at yourself and your actions honestly. Consider that, in the past, you decided to participate in a crime, and although it may not have been clear to you then, there was an alternative decision you could have made that did not involve committing a crime. Be honest with yourself and do not attempt to minimize your role in the crime. Consider who you are now and how you look back on the person you were then. One parole board member stated, "I'm voting for the person you are now, not who you were then."

In addition to discussing the crime that led to your incarceration, be ready to talk about everything the board will consider, including:

- how you have adjusted to life in prison or how you have evolved as a person;
- the rehabilitative programs you have completed;
- any educational or trade classes you have completed;
- your pro-social behaviors, including examples (for example, volunteering or helping others while incarcerated);
- your impact on the victim and victim's family;
- your reentry plan; and
- your plan for positively contributing to society.

See **Appendix 7** for a list of **sample questions** the board might ask you

Use all of the work you did in **Chapter 3** as a guide for what you will say, and plan to practice what it is you plan to say to the parole board. Try not to read from your notes, but keep them handy in case you get nervous or forget anything. By practicing what you will say, you will be more likely to remember it and not rely on our notes too much, which will allow you to make more eye contact.

Practice what you will say with a positive attitude and be genuine. Remember, the board is paying close attention to your demeanor and how you act. Even if you do not like the parole board, you will need to be social, make eye contact, and show your personality and feelings. Picture yourself telling your story. This will make you more comfortable the day of your hearing.

D. Mental Preparation

Talking about your past and what got you into prison can be very difficult. You might feel nervous, sad, anxious, embarrassed, angry, or ashamed. You might also feel overwhelmed by how much work you will have to do to prepare your plan for release. These are all normal feelings, and others who have been through this process have also felt that way.

You might also feel nervous about how you will reintegrate into modern society, especially

if you have been incarcerated for many years. Technology has likely changed drastically. For example, the world today is totally dependent on the internet, cell phones, computers, laptops, and tablets. You may not know how to use these devices or have access to them. However, as with everything else, you can reach out to family members, friends, and organizations that will help you learn how to use this technology.

One parolee shared, “you need to be aware that things will feel strange.” But it is not just the technology that might cause this feeling. In fact, you might feel anxious now just thinking about the relationships that may need rebuilding or those that have grown strained or awkward in your absence. You might also feel stressed about your potential new responsibilities or the fact that others will be counting on you. Or, perhaps you will be afraid of things that you never contemplated, such as being alone in the dark or trying to get on a bus. Find someone you trust and can talk to about these issues and come up with practical solutions together. The best thing you can remember is that things have changed, and it will take time to learn new things. If you remain open and ask for help, you can get on the right path and keep moving forward.

To help calm your mind, there are exercises you can do and articles you can read in **Appendix 8**. One of the articles, titled “Getting Out and Staying Out,” was written by *New York Times* bestselling author Michael Singer specifically for this Parole Toolkit. Try some of the exercises and read the articles in that chapter. Pay particular attention to the breathing exercises. These can be very useful during your parole hearing and during stressful times more broadly.²¹

IV. If Parole Is Denied

Following the guidance in this Toolkit will help you put your best foot forward at the parole hearing or interview. However, keep in mind that, no matter how well prepared you are, parole is rarely granted on the first attempt. If you are denied parole, do not take it personally. Denial is not necessarily a reflection of your true eligibility for parole; rather, the parole board wants to be 100% certain that you are prepared to reenter society before granting parole.

If you are having trouble coping with what feels like a huge rejection, reach out to your support network – your friends, family, religious leaders, a psychologist, attorney, or anyone else you trust. Perhaps you know other incarcerated individuals who have gone through the process before and have been rejected. See if they would be interested in talking about their experience, or even forming a support group.

You may also want to take a moment to sit back and reflect on what you have learned throughout the process so you can better prepare for next time. To help with this exercise, try to obtain a transcript of the hearing and ask yourself:

- What did you say that the parole board responded to positively?
- What did they seem to find problematic?

²¹ Some board members have told inmates to stop and take a deep breath because they could see that the inmates were very nervous.

- Did they comment on your job performance, your education, your good (or bad) behavior while incarcerated, your letters of support from your community?
- Was there anything they asked you that you were not prepared to answer?

Write down your thoughts and ideas while they are still fresh. You can take those learnings and use them to prepare even better for the next time.

Do not give up hope, and do not let a denial of parole change your attitude. In fact, this is exactly when you need to work hard to maintain a positive outlook and character. Continue to live on the inside as though you were already living on the outside. Of course, you will be disappointed, and it is understandable to say so, but try to get back on track quickly and continue to create a record showing your growth, compassion, maturity, and readiness for life on the outside.

APPENDIX 1 - PAROLE TOOLKIT CHECKLIST

Preparation is key for parole hearings. As soon as you learn you are going to be considered for parole, be sure to review the checklist below and work toward completing each step. This checklist is meant to serve as a starting point for the information and material you want to review and prepare. It will help you as you write your reentry plan and your examples of success (**Chapter 3**). Think creatively about other information that may help give the parole board a better understanding of your case and your growth.

Ask your parole agent for the following:

- Information on the parole process and how it works. Some states provide this to incarcerated individuals.
- Form for a living arrangement/home plan. Some states have forms you can use to send to the person who you will live with. If no such form is available, see **Appendix 2** for an example of a housing letter.
- Employment form. Some states have forms that your future employer can fill out. If no such form is available, see **Appendix 3** for a sample letter.
- Names of reentry or rehabilitative programs. You can also ask family and friends to help you obtain this information.

Begin obtaining the following information for your case file:

- Social Security number
- Birth certificate
- Photo identification card (such as drivers license, state identification, etc.)
- List of contacts for support, including people and organizations; include phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses, if possible
- Letters of support from friends, family, mentors, and others
- Letter confirming you have a place to stay (housing letter) (see **Appendix 2**)
- Letter confirming you have a job upon release
- Letters from organizations confirming that they will help you reenter society
- Copies of letters you have written to potential employers
- Copies of letters you have written to potential rehabilitative programs or reentry plans

Write down how you will do the following and practice explaining it:

- How to use public transportation
- How to open a checking account
- How to get from your home to work

- How to get to any rehab or counseling program from home or work
- How to make a phone call

Write down the following and practice explaining it:

- What happened the day of the crime from your perspective
- How you feel about what you did – for example, sad, regretful
- What you have learned in prison – for example, every life matters and is precious
- What steps you have taken to improve yourself in prison, including:
 - Volunteer work
 - Education in prison or through online courses
 - Participation in programs such as AA, drug rehab, church, or others
 - Reading books and writing summaries about them
 - Being a mentor to others in prison
- How you will try to continue to improve yourself once you are on parole
- Why the parole board should grant you parole

APPENDIX 2 - HOUSING LETTER

Subject: Housing for Jane Jones Upon Release

Dear Parole Board,

I am writing to confirm that Jane Jones will be renting a bedroom in my home upon her release. This room is located in my basement and includes a private bathroom and access to the other areas of the home, including the kitchen. We have an active wi-fi network in our home that she can use for work or education needs. Our home is located within two blocks of a bus stop and four blocks from a subway station. We are a drug and alcohol free home.

The other occupants of this home include myself and my daughter. My daughter is enrolled in the local community college and has offered to provide Jane Jones transportation to the college with her to the extent she enrolls.

I have known Jane Jones for several years and I am confident that this living situation will work for the agreed upon period. Please let me know if you have need for additional information about this outstanding man.

Sincerely,

Ann Adams
123 Main St.
Anyville, State 12345
555-123-4567
aadams@email.com

APPENDIX 3 - LETTER TO POTENTIAL EMPLOYER

Some states have forms that a future employer can fill out. If your state does not, or if you'd rather send a more personal message, the example below can be used. It can take several tries to find a job. The effort you undergo to try to find a job before your parole hearing can be helpful. You should consider keeping a list of all positions you apply for so you can share with the board.

Subject: Seeking Employment

Dear Hiring Manager,

If you know the name of the Hiring Manager or Coordinator, you should use the person's name in the address line.

I am writing to you to seek employment from Joe's Garage on State Street as a cashier. I worked as a cashier before at ABC Grocery Store for 1 year. I have great skills with customers and quick math abilities. I am very interested in working around cars and think I'd be a good fit to work as a cashier at Joe's. I've taken some online courses on mechanics over the last few years. Also, I can provide a reference from a past co-worker.

I'm currently serving the end of a sentence at State Prison. I am eligible for parole starting on May 2018 and I am looking for a job upon my release. I have no disciplinary actions on my record during my sentence and am looking forward to starting over during parole. I would like to have a job lined up to help me be successful during the time I am on parole and after.

If you would like to hire me for this position, I would greatly appreciate a letter back confirming the job opportunity to share with the parole board. You can send a reply letter to me at my contact information below.

Thank you for considering me for this job.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Smith
Inmate No: xx5678
State Prison
1 County Road
Smithtown, State 12345

If you do not have any previous or relevant experience, think about adding information about why you think you'd be a good fit for that job. You can also add information about courses you've taken that are relevant.

Only add a reference if you have someone who can help in this way. If not, just leave out a reference.

Only add information here if you think it will help you secure a job. If you have a few disciplinary actions, you do not need to add that information.

Family and friends can also be helpful in following up with the potential employer to help you obtain a job. If you have someone talk to the employer on your behalf, try to have them obtain a letter that you can share.

APPENDIX 4 - LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Subject: Recommendation for John Smith

Dear Hiring Manager,

It is my pleasure to recommend John Smith for employment with your organization. I have known Mr. Smith through the past three years during which time he took a number of leadership classes that I taught.

I have been consistently impressed with Mr. Smith's attitude, hard work, and intelligence during the time that he has been involved in my programs.

Mr. Smith is quite motivated and ambitious. I could tell that after completing each class, his successes lead him to seek even further knowledge in this area. I am confident that he will devote himself to a position with your organization with a high degree of diligence. He is a quick learner and has shown the ability to digest large volumes of information.

Mr. Smith has demonstrated the ability to express information clearly. He has proven that his is highly capable of producing quality work on his own or working well with a group to produce collaborative efforts. He has shown the ability to take initiative.

I recommend Mr. Smith without reservation. I am confident that he will establish productive relationships with your staff and constituents. Please let me know if you have need for additional information about this outstanding man.

Sincerely,

James Johnson
123 Broad St.
Smithtown, State 12345
555-123-4567
jjohnson@email.com

APPENDIX 5 - ONLINE COURSES

As part of the parole preparation process, an incarcerated individual should demonstrate growth and development. This can be done while incarcerated through a variety of online courses. The information below includes a sample of online programming that one can take while incarcerated. The courses are broken into three categories in this Appendix: (1) correspondence and educational courses, (2) self-directed courses, and (3) vocational programs. Financial aid information is at the end of this Appendix.

1) Correspondence and Educational Courses

PrisonEducation.com

- PrisonEducation.com is a website and service that is dedicated to increasing education in prisons. The site contains many links and resources for incarcerated individuals to help them navigate the process of choosing and enrolling in quality, accredited education and job skills programs. Through prison programming, incarcerated individuals are able to obtain and receive a GED and high school diploma, adult continuing education, undergraduate degrees, career vocational courses, and graduate degrees, as well as programs that are faith-based and located on-site in correctional facilities. More detailed information about each of these programs can be found here: <http://www.prisoneducation.com/correspondence-programs/undergraduate-degree/>.
- The site has also compiled a list of accredited institutions that offer correspondence courses for incarcerated individuals, which can be found here: <http://www.prisoneducation.com/correspondence-schools/>.
- The below institutions have well-established programs in which incarcerated individuals throughout the U.S. have participated:
 - Adams State University (https://www.adams.edu/extended_studies/undergrad/prisoncollegeprogram.php)
 - Upper Iowa University (<http://uiu.edu/online/self-paced/index.html>)
 - Colorado State University at Pueblo (<https://www.csupueblo.edu/extended-studies/index.html>).

edX.org

- edX.org was founded by Harvard University and MIT in 2012 with a mission to increase access to high-quality education for everyone, everywhere. edX is an online learning community, offering courses from universities and learning institutions across the globe.
- Courses can be found at: <https://www.edx.org/course?course=all>. Courses either run on a specified time frame or are self-paced allowing for self directed study.

2) Self-Directed Courses

American Community Corrections Institute (ACCI)

- The ACCI curriculum offers five different formats for self-directed study: eLearning, self-directed adult, self-directed juvenile, group courses, and training.
 - Self-directed adult course offerings include anger management, domestic violence, DUI, substance abuse, and parenting, among others. Courses are offered in both English and Spanish.
 - Self-directed juvenile course offerings include bullying prevention, substance abuse prevention, dating violence prevention, positive thinking skills, and lifestyle courses for topics such as anger avoidance, minor in possession, and theft. Courses are offered in both English and Spanish.
 - eLearning offers courses on adult substance abuse, cognitive awareness, driver responsibility, employment, minor in possession, substance abuse, and theft/shoplifting.
 - Group courses include topics like substance abuse, cognitive awareness, sex offender therapy, and offender corrections.
- More information about ACCI and its services can be found here: <https://www.accilifeskills.com/about-american-community-corrections-institute-acci/>.

Khan Academy

- Offers practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalized learning dashboard for students to learn at their own pace outside the classroom. Classes include math, science, computer programming, history, economics, and more. Students can refresh on basics and take more advanced courses, too.
- There are also courses on test prep, college, and careers.
- All content is offered free of charge at: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

3) Vocational Programs

Blackstone Career Institute

- Blackstone Career Institute offers a nationally accredited Paralegal certificate program that provides prisoners with the 900 hours of coursework needed to sit for the Accredited Legal Professional exam and/or the Professional Paralegal certification. Graduates will also meet the accredited business/legal course criteria that is needed to sit for the Certified Legal Assistant/Certified Paralegal exam.
- In order to be eligible for enrolling in the Paralegal certificate program, applicants must have graduated from high school or obtained their GED. Completion time for the program ranges from 4-18 months, with the option to go up to 24 months, if needed.
- There are fees for the programs, but there are also payment options available. For more information on the cost, visit the Blackstone Career Institute directly.

- More information about the Blackstone Career Institute's Paralegal certification program can be found here: <https://blackstone.edu/paralegal-courses-inmate-information/>.

PrisonEducation.com

- PrisonEducation.com has a list of institutions that offer career and vocational-based correspondence programs.
- They also have a list of correspondence schools that offer paper-based formats that are accessible to prisoners who do not have access to the internet. <https://prisoneducation.com/correspondence-schools/>.

Financial Assistance

Second Chance Pell Pilot Program

- Through the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, participating institutions provide federal Pell Grants to eligible students who are incarcerated in federal or state penal institutions. The pilot program was part of the Obama Administration's efforts to test new models that would allow incarcerated Americans to pursue postsecondary education, with the goal in mind of helping them obtain jobs upon their release, support themselves and their families, and reduce their likelihood of reoffending.
- According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, Pell Grants do not have to be repaid (unlike loans). More information about the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program can be found here: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-second-chance-pell-pilot-program-incarcerated-individuals>.
- In order to be awarded a Pell Grant, individuals must first complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. This can be done online, or by downloading and printing the form and submitting a hard copy by mail. More information about the Federal Pell Grant Program can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fpg/index.html>.

APPENDIX 6 - LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Included below are some ideas and suggestions for letters from friends, families, colleagues, community members, and others that may be provided to the parole board. Please keep in mind that these are only suggestions. Support letters should be personal to the author of the letter. It should be open and honest, and personal to the parole candidate.

Support letters are an opportunity to show the parole board that an inmate has support resources that will be available to him or her upon release on parole. Letters are also an opportunity to tell the board other important information about the inmate and who he is today, including commenting about his sorrow, remorse, growth, progress, and rehabilitation.

TEMPLATE FOR LETTER OF SUPPORT

DATE

Board of Parole Hearings

Re: Inmate Name (CDCR No. _____)

The letter should address the Board of Parole Hearings and refer to the inmate by full name.

Dear Parole Board:

1. **Start your letter by explaining who you are and how you know the inmate.** This should include how long you have known him, how you came to know him, and the frequency of your communication with him. Feel free to explain your personal background, including your occupation, and any religious or community affiliations you may have. This kind of information gives the board a picture of who is writing the letter. This is important because the more you come across as a person, the more the board is likely to identify with and pay attention to what you have to say about the inmate.
2. **Explain the purpose of your letter and the nature of your support.** This includes both the support you or your organization has provided for the inmate in the past and the support you are willing to provide her should she be paroled. This support may be financial, emotional, or otherwise. Financial support is an especially important factor; if friends and family are willing to financially support an applicant upon their release from prison, the board may be more likely to find that applicant suitable. Financial support may include assistance with transportation, housing, food, or assistance finding employment. Emotional and spiritual support is also important, and the board looks favorably upon applicants who will have access to a supportive community network upon release. Your letter should discuss the specific support you may be providing.
 - a. **If the letter includes an offer of a place to live,** it should include the address and a brief description of the residence ("my home at . . .", "a three-bedroom apartment at . . .", etc.).

- b. If the letter includes an offer for employment**, the letter should include the name and address of the employer, a description of the job, the pay, and number of hours per week. If the work place will be somewhere other than the employer's address, that should be specified, and if part of the offer of employment includes assistance with work-related transportation, that should be included, as well.
- 3. Comment upon the inmate's suitability for parole.** The inmate's ability to return to society and become a productive person is a crucial consideration for the board. If you have an opinion about the inmate's suitability, likelihood of success on parole, her cultivated skills, good character, rehabilitation, remorse, or other good qualities, explain your opinion and the bases/reasons for your opinion. Feel free to include memories and shared experiences regarding the inmate from the past and changes you have seen in her over time, etc. If you knew the inmate as a youth, please share your observations of what his life was like at the time of the crime and how he has grown since then. Specific examples are better than general statements. Also, please let the board know if the inmate has been helpful to others you know in some way (such as giving good advice, setting a good example for others, being a leader in a group, or providing encouragement, etc.). The board is interested in the skills that the inmate has cultivated and the steps that she has taken to overcome personal difficulties which will make her more likely to contribute valuably to society. The board is interested in your honest evaluation of the inmate as a person as well as her goals and intentions upon returning to society.

Sincerely,

Full Name

Street Address, City, State, Zip Code

E-mail

Phone Number

*Finally, provide your name, address, and phone number in the letter. The board will not consider the letter without verifiable contact information. If you are writing on behalf of an organization or business, please write your letter on your official letterhead or attach your business card to the letter. Do not forget to date your letter.

LETTER OF SUPPORT - EXAMPLE

Subject: In support of John Smith

Dear Honorable Members of the Parole Board,

My name is Jane Smith, and I am 50 years old. This is a support letter for my brother, John Smith.

I am two years older than John, so I have known him for his whole life. There was a time after he was first arrested that we didn't speak much, but other than that, we have been very close throughout our lives. We were best friends as children and have become so close again as adults. John and I speak on the phone multiple times every week and my kids and I visit him whenever we can, which is usually twice each month. John has become a wonderful uncle to my kids, who both look up to him. My husband of 25 years has come to know John as his family as well.

Although John made some grave mistakes in the past, I know that he is a changed man who will be a productive and law-abiding citizen upon release. John is so remorseful about his crime. He speaks to me about the responsibility and guilt he feels so often when I talk to him. I know this was on his mind constantly when he was becoming an adult.

The John I know now is so different from the John I knew as a child. When we were young, John was very reckless and very quick to anger or get into a fight. A lot of this was because of the friends he was hanging out with, but a lot of it was because he was simply immature. The John that I know now could not be more different. John is one of the calmest, most centered people that I know now. His attitude now is the opposite of reckless. He is so diligent about keeping a schedule for himself and avoiding people that he knows could be a bad influence on him. While the John I knew as a child was immature and hostile, the John I know now is so strong and mature. I have learned so much from watching him grow up.

As he got older, John was able to take some programs in the prison like anger management, leadership, and some educational classes. I know that he wanted to take more, but wasn't always able to get placed into classes because of his sentence. These classes helped him tremendously, as he is such a centered person now.

I am proud to say that John will be well-supported upon his release from prison. If he receives parole, my family has worked hard with him to develop a plan for his successful re-entry.

First of all, John will be able to stay with me. My husband, Robert, and I live in a three-bedroom house at 123 Pine St. in Smithtown, and both of my children have moved out, so there is plenty of room. We are happy to have John stay with us for as long as he needs to

in order to get on his feet. We have two cars and are prepared to teach John how to drive when he comes home. Smithtown has good public transportation and in the meantime, we will help him navigate that system. My husband and I both work five days per week – my husband is a teacher and I am a manager at a restaurant near our house – but I can arrange my schedule so that at least one of us will be around most days when John needs help. My older daughter also lives in town and will be happy to help John in a pinch and just generally provide emotional support.

For employment, I can say that I have worked at a number of restaurants in town and have good relationships with some hiring managers. I have spoken to a few already, and while none have been able to fully offer a job yet, they've all said that they would be happy to strongly consider John for a position if he is released. John has sent out inquiries to each of the restaurants that I've spoken to as well. Also, my husband Robert has a cousin who is a building manager in a strip mall with lots of coffee shops and food places. Robert's cousin has offered to take John to introduce him to managers at places that might be hiring. As a group, we have come up with many ideas for John's employment, and while he doesn't have an offer yet, we know that we'll be able to find him a great fit quickly. In the meantime, Robert and I are happy to support John financially.

In general, my family will be able to provide John with a solid and healthy support system. This will be the same support system that is helping John so much while he is in prison, and we will make sure he successfully re-enters society.

In summary, I want to re-iterate that I think John will be an excellent candidate for release. He has completely transformed since his crime, and has become a totally different and amazing person. Through his remorse that he has demonstrated to me, I know that he has taken full responsibility for his crime. If John is released, he will be a productive and law-abiding member of society. His re-entry will be made so much easier by the fact that I and my family will be able to help him every step of the way, and will be able to welcome him into a warm and healthy home where we can plan for his future. Most importantly, John's diligence, maturity, and ambition will ensure that he makes a wonderful and safe new life for himself.

Thank you for taking the time to review John's application. If you have any questions at all, please contact me, and I will help in any way that I can.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith
123 Pine St.
Smithtown, State 12345
555-111-2345
janesmith@email.com

APPENDIX 7 - SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Prior to your hearing, it is important that you put together a list of possible questions you may be asked. Review the documents you are assembling for the parole board and read the sample parole board questions below. You should also review the trial transcripts and all the letters of support or opposition in your file. Be prepared to answer questions about specific people or incidents. Although there might not be a particular order to the questions asked, parole boards generally cover three main areas:

- the offense that caused your incarceration and prior history of criminal acts;
- institutional adjustment; and
- parole release plans.

Once you have completed your list of questions, practice answering them with someone, and have that person vary the tone of the questions. For example, you might have them ask questions in a confrontational, or aggressive, way because board members might do so to see how you react to negative pressure. Practice answering the questions in a measured and controlled manner without losing authenticity. You do not want to sound like you are reading a script. Your demeanor and the content of your responses should be well thought out and clearly delivered. This takes practice. You will need to speak clearly and loudly during your hearing as it is likely being tape recorded. Nods, head shakes, shrugs, and non-verbal gestures will not be part of the record. Do your best to speak your answers. You want to create a clean record in case others review the transcript.

Formerly incarcerated youth and parole board members stated that the questions below are the ones that they have heard in parole board hearings or interviews. It is not a complete list, but it represents the type and range of questions you may be asked at your hearing.

Opening questions

- How are you doing?
- Why are we here today?
- What do you want us to do for you today?
- Why do you think you should be paroled?

Questions about the original offense

- What was your role in the crime?
- What were your actions in committing the crime?
- What happened during the crime?
- How do you feel about it now?
- Do you accept responsibility for what happened?
- How have you grown or changed since the offense?

- Can you explain what happened from your perspective?
- Did you kill the victim just to collect his insurance money?
- Do you accept responsibility for what happened?
- Do you feel remorse for the victim and/or the victim's family?
- How do your actions that day/night make you feel?

Questions about your time in prison

- How are you spending your time?
- Did you participate in any educational programs?
- Did you participate in any vocational or training programs?
- Did you participate in moral recognition therapy? What have you learned from it?
- Did you participate in substance abuse programs (if applicable)?
- What progress have you made since you were incarcerated?
- How will these lessons help you avoid conflict in the future?
- Questions about any disciplinary issues while in jail? (if applicable)
 - Tell us about the incident in prison that led to disciplinary action.
 - What happened and why?
 - How do you feel about it now?

Questions about release

- Are you rehabilitated?
- Do you think you are worthy of release and why?
- The risk assessment report says you pose a low degree of danger, do you agree?
- How can we be assured you won't re-offend?
- How will we know you won't get violent once you're released? (reference write ups in prison)
- How will you become a productive citizen?
- How will you be a better parent/spouse/son/daughter?
- How will you apply what you learned while incarcerated?
- What is your plan if you are released?
 - What are your release plans?
 - Where will you live and for how long?
 - Who else will live there?
 - Will you have a room there?

- Will you pay rent?
- Will you earn sufficient income to cover expenses?
- Where will you work?
- Do you have an employment offer?
- What will you do if you lose your job?
- Do you have a plan for transportation? How will you get to/from work?
- How will you get a job/support yourself?
- How will you avoid the situations/people that led to your original offense?
- Will family or friends provide support?
- Will you take part in addiction counseling upon your release?
- Do you know where you can obtain social support?
- How will you deal with a setback in your reentry plan?
- What will you do to make better choices if you are released?
- How do you plan to spend your time outside of prison?

APPENDIX 8 - MINDFULNESS READINGS AND EXERCISES

Getting Out and Staying Out²²

by Michael A. Singer

Michael Singer is a New York Times bestselling author, and the founder of a long-established yoga and meditation center. He was founding-CEO of a billion dollar software company, and spent thirty years volunteer teaching in maximum security prisons.

It is not always easy to live in this world, whether incarcerated or not. The everyday unfolding of life around us often creates discomfort and turmoil within. Nobody wants to experience discomfort, and it is perfectly natural to want to do something about it. The problem is that some things we do to avoid inner discomfort can have serious consequences for the rest of our lives. More than anything else, how we deal with inner turmoil will determine whether we get out and stay out or fall back into old patterns that lead to recidivism. It is certainly worth taking the time to understand inner discomfort and examine our options for dealing with it.

To begin with, what is inner discomfort? Why do some events bother one person and the exact same events don't bother someone else? In fact, something that didn't bother you yesterday could bother you today, and vice versa. It's actually very simple. All of us have had different experiences in our lives. Some of these experiences were pleasant and some were not so pleasant. For example, seeing a rattlesnake coiled up in front of you is generally a very scary experience. On the other hand, if a beautiful butterfly lands on your arm and sits there—that's kind of cool. Everything has its own vibration, and we experience that when it passes in through our senses. The problem is that if we don't want to experience what we've experienced, we try to push it away inside so it stops bothering us. As innocent and natural as that sounds, it actually causes big problems down the road.

Perhaps you've noticed that experiences you've pushed away inside manage to come back up. You didn't like seeing the snake, and that was bad enough, but now a coiled rope or any rattling sound brings up fear. Because we store disturbing experiences inside of us, they get triggered as life passes by. If you had an argument with a person named Ben, and days later someone calls out the name Ben, you get uptight. It wasn't even the same Ben! It doesn't matter—you stored disturbance inside of you, and it is going to come back up one way or another.

Over the course of our lives, imagine how much stuff we've stored inside. All these negative events back to our childhood have the potential to create disturbance for the rest of our

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lives. No wonder we get so upset about seemingly meaningless things, not to mention the big events.

So we see that there are two distinct causes for inner disturbance: (1) what is actually happening is disturbing in and of itself, or (2) what is happening is hitting our stored disturbances from the past. If you pay close attention, you'll see that the vast majority of what disturbs you is very personal and is based upon what you already have going on inside. That's why what disturbs one person doesn't bother another in the slightest.

Now that we understand the cause of our inner disturbances, and why each of us gets upset about different things, the question becomes what to do about it. You really only have three possible choices: (1) attempt to control the world as it unfolds around you so that it doesn't hit your stuff, (2) learn to control your inner reactions so that they don't mess up your life, or (3) learn to clean out all that stored stuff and don't build up any more.

Let's look at each of these and see which one actually works the best. What is the probability that you can control everything as the world unfolds before you? How about not a chance. Every moment presents something new, and there are billions of forces that have caused it to be the way it is. There is no way you are going to control all those forces so that they behave in a way that fits your inner patterns. That's why attempting to control the world to fit your stuff just creates more anxiety and stress. And what's worse, it will never be over. There will always be new moments unfolding in front of you that need controlling. What kind of life is that?

The second method, attempting to control your inner reactions, has a better chance of success because at least you're only trying to control yourself—not everything else. The problem is that the disturbance caused by your past stuff getting hit is very strong. If you had an argument with someone and then you see them later, how will you stop from getting tight inside? Unfortunately, attempting to control our inner reactions leads to suppression and that will just come back up stronger later. One of the worst things you can do is to allow the energy to build up inside and explode later.

That leaves us with the final method of dealing with inner disturbance: letting go of the root cause of disturbance—your stored stuff from the past. If you can learn to remove the discomfort you carry from your past, the world can unfold around you without bothering you. You are sitting on a little planet spinning through outer space, and you get to experience what's going on around you. It's exciting; it's challenging—like a sport. It may not be unfolding the way you want, but if it's not bothering you—so what? Someone who can handle what's happening can deal with it. If you can't handle what's happening, you get disturbed inside and have to deal with that disturbance instead of the outside situation. You are always better off being able to handle things than you are freaking out over them.

How do you learn to let go of what is stored inside? This falls into the category of 'working with yourself.' To begin with, if I look in your eyes and ask you "Are you in there?"; what will you say to me? You are in there aren't you? You look out through your eyes, and you see the world unfolding before you. Who are you that is in there looking out? If you close your eyes, are you still in there? Of course you are. Do you notice that you have thoughts going on in there? "Where's Joe, he was supposed to meet me here. I hope he's okay—he had a really hard time yesterday." You have thoughts all the time, but who are you that is aware of the

thoughts the mind is creating? Do you ever feel anger, self-consciousness, embarrassment, or guilt? Of course you do, but who are you that is experiencing these emotions?

There is only one of you in there doing all of these things. You are the 'owner' of all of this, the 'end-user'. Just look at how you naturally express yourself: "my hand is swollen", "my thoughts are driving me crazy", "my heart hurts". 'My' depicts ownership; who are you in there that has a hand, thoughts, and a heart? You are the awareness of being who is aware of all of these things. You are in there and you have the power to do whatever you want in there. It's your kingdom and yours alone. No one else is in there—only you.

You can make it very pleasant inside if you work on it. There's really no competition like there is in the outside world. And if you make it nice inside, the outside cannot disturb you. You can be your own person; strong, self-reliant, and deeply at peace with yourself. But you have to be willing to work on yourself.

How do you do this inner work? On a day-by-day basis, you learn to let go of the reactive stuff that is coming up inside. Not control it—let it go. There is a big difference between struggling with what is coming up inside versus being able to let it come up and pass right through. That's the key to freedom in this world: can you handle yourself enough to let go of the stuff causing all the trouble inside? You are perfectly capable of doing this, but you have to learn how to do it. Then you have to practice, just like with a sport or a musical instrument. Practice makes perfect. But in this case, what you are perfecting is yourself.

The key is to always be aware of what is going on in there. What you do about it—well that's up to you. What usually happens is that we immediately react to the changes experienced inside. If someone says something and we feel anger start to brew, we try to release the discomfort by expressing it outwardly, either through words or physical actions. This is true of all the uncomfortable emotions—we can't handle them inwardly so we either try to suppress them or release them outwardly. Those outer expressions of our inner problems happen almost automatically and can cause big problems in our life.

What choice do you have? We can't control the world so that disturbing situations never happen. We can't make ourselves not feel what we feel, and if we suppress our feelings they just become more powerful and distorted over time. The answer is that we can learn to consciously relax in the face of the disturbed inner energies. If we can relax and not get involved in the inner disturbance, over time it will pass on its own. Somebody says something that hits you wrong and the disturbance starts. If you immediately relax instead of reacting, the power of the disturbance will pass by inside, and you will have remained centered and clear. It may get hot in there, but it's worth it. You used the situation to become a stronger person. It's really that simple—just relax and release the energy that starts to come up inside. It doesn't mean you don't deal with outer situations. You just get clear before you do so. Once you are cool and centered, you can make reasonable decisions about what is the best action under the circumstances. This is always better than reacting to your own inner disturbance. A centered person is very powerful and will be successful in all aspects of their life.

Remember, it's always the same thing—you are either forced to control the world in order to be okay inside, or you take control of your own inner kingdom and learn to make it a nicer place to live. Every time you inwardly release the reactive energies that are coming up, you are also letting go of the power the past has on you. This is how you get rid of all that

garbage stored inside. You use your daily life to release what is getting hit. Now if the world unfolds in a way that is pleasant—good, enjoy it. If it unfolds in a way that is hitting your stuff, enjoy letting it go so that it can't stay in there and keep disturbing you. It is a win-win situation.

How do you learn to relax in the face of inner disturbance? You start with the small things you bother yourself about, like the weather. Why bother yourself about the weather; it's not going to change anything. You are just creating inner disturbance for absolutely no reason. What a perfect time to work on yourself. Instead of complaining about the heat, remind yourself that you're close enough to a star to feel its heat. Stars are amazing things, but we generally think of them as very far away. Well as it turns out, you are close enough to one that it can burn you. How hot is a star that's 93,000,000 miles away and can still burn you? Now isn't that a more pleasant thought than "It's so hot. I hate it. Why does it have to be so hot?" You live in there. It's your mind, your thoughts, and your emotions. Stand up, be strong and own what is going on in there.

Once you're able to do this with the small everyday situations that shouldn't cause you stress, you'll become strong enough to let go of some of the older ones you've stored from the past. Just keep relaxing and releasing, and over time you will begin to feel much better inside. You will have gained the ability to control your own destiny. Not because you are controlling the world, but because you can handle whatever comes your way without reacting to inner disturbance.

Another way to practice staying centered is meditation. Meditation is really very simple if you do it right. You put aside fifteen minutes in the morning and the evening to practice letting go inside. The best way to avoid getting caught up in your mind is to realize that you don't need to stop your thoughts, you just need to put your awareness elsewhere. The easiest way to do this is to watch your breath—instead of watching your mind. Watch the breath go in and out, and count the inhales and exhales. Count to twenty, then start over. If you drift into your thoughts, and you will to begin with, the moment you notice just gently bring your awareness back to your breath. Little by little you will be able to stay with your breath instead of the noisy mind. This vacation from the disturbing mind will leave you refreshed and feeling clean inside.

The other benefit of this meditation practice is that it becomes a very healthy habit. During the day when something starts to disturb you, you have the option to begin watching your breath. That will keep you centered and in control of your inner environment. Even inner counting can become your friend. When your mind is creating negative thoughts, just start counting and pay attention to the numbers instead of the disturbing thoughts. You now have given yourself choices over how you direct your life. You in there, you are now in charge of what's happening to you. Too often if we have a problem outside, we let it cause a problem inside. What good is that; now we have two problems!

All of these techniques will help you get out and stay out. The ability to stay centered in the face of life's changes is what will make you great. While others are losing it, you are clear and open for business. Be strong and make yourself great inside. If you can learn to handle yourself—you can handle anything.

Mindfulness²³

Carl Fulwiler, MD, PhD

Carl Fulwiler, MD, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Medicine, Medical Director and Associate Research Director at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Fulwiler is an Addictions Psychiatrist with a doctorate in Neuroscience and specialized training in clinical applications of Mindfulness.

Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention to one's inner and outer experiences in a non-judgmental manner from moment to moment. When we are mindful we are more aware of the current moment and simply observe our thoughts, feelings and sensations as they are without reacting to or trying to change them.

Most of the time we are immersed in a constant stream of inner experience without being aware of it, or of how our thoughts, feelings, desires and impulses influence us. Frequently our thoughts—whether about illness, not getting what we want, problems from the past or worries about the future—make us feel angry, anxious or depressed. By cultivating mindfulness, we can learn to step back from our inner and outer experience, freeing us from habitual patterns of reacting to it or judging it. Instead, we can learn to live in the moment and make wise choices about how we respond.

Although mindfulness practice may result in relaxation and a calm mind, mindfulness is a skill that can be applied in any situation, including the unwanted or unpleasant. Mindfulness has been practiced for thousands of years in different spiritual traditions. In 1979, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn developed a mindfulness-based curriculum at UMass Medical Center to help medical patients to incorporate mindfulness practice in their daily lives to cope with stress, chronic pain and other chronic conditions. The program he developed, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction or MBSR, has been replicated around the world and helped spark the growing popularity of mindfulness practices and a growing body of research on its benefits. In the MBSR program, mindfulness is developed through a variety of formal meditation practices, and informal practices applied in daily life. Formal practices include sitting meditation, the body scan, mindful yoga, and loving-kindness meditation. With informal practice, one brings mindful awareness to everyday activities such as eating, breathing, walking, even washing the dishes and brushing our teeth.

As the evidence grew for the effectiveness of MBSR for a variety of conditions including stress, anxiety, and chronic pain, variations of the program were developed to target other conditions such as recurrent depression, eating disorders, and addiction relapse.

Research on Mindfulness

Randomized clinical trials are the gold standard for research on the effectiveness of all treatments used in psychology and medicine. Numerous such trials have demonstrated that MBSR and some other programs derived from it are beneficial for a number of psychological

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and physical conditions. In addition, research on the biological effects of these programs has shown they produce beneficial changes in the brain and improvements in immune function. For example, mindfulness practice leads to improvements in brain functions that help us to respond better to stressful and upsetting conditions and situations, like chronic pain, or upsetting thoughts.

Mindfulness for Well-Being

The stress response is our body's way of dealing with a threat, pressure or demand. In true emergencies it activates our fight or flight system. But most of the time the stress response is triggered by our automatic reactions to situations. Repeated activation of the stress response leads to health problems and reduces our quality of life. Mindfulness works to reduce stress and increase our ability to enjoy life by bringing awareness to these automatic reactions and breaking the chain of habitual responses.

Mindfulness can help us to take responsibility for our own health and well-being. Learning to pay attention and be present with whatever arises in experience encourages health-promoting behaviors like exercise, healthy eating, and good sleep habits. In addition, it can help rid us of unhealthy habits like smoking, emotional eating, and alcohol and drug use.

Hints and Suggestions for Learning, Growing, and Healing through Mindfulness

Meditation – try to do at least 5 minutes and if possible up to 20 - 30 minutes once or twice a day.

Sitting as still as you can in a comfortable position with a straight back, head erect:

1. being aware of the in breath and the out breath
2. being aware of any sensations in particular regions of the body
3. being aware of the body as a whole
4. hearing silence and sounds
5. observing thoughts and emotions as they move in and out of your mind without getting involved in the content of them, just observing them and letting them pass away
6. when you notice the mind has drifted into thinking, gently bring it back to alert attention in the present moment

Meditation begins with the non-judgmental observation of life from moment to moment. When you find that the mind is being judgmental, i.e. pushing away things it doesn't like, and holding on to things it likes, simply observe that this is occurring. Meditation is an effortless and choiceless awareness of life being expressed within you and around you in any given moment. It is a state of being, not an activity. It is not something to do, it is allowing yourself to just be. It is not a tuning out process, it is being fully present with a larger perspective grounded in the sense of being.

It is helpful to sit quietly in this way one or two times a day and to do it at regular times, and every day. By doing it every day, whether you feel like it or not, you allow a sense of strength and balance to develop in your life which goes beyond moods, emotional turmoil, busyness. By practicing in this way every day you will establish a more relaxed and balanced tone for your day's activities and whatever life presents.

Mindful Walking (Do as often as you can during the day)

It is helpful to catch yourself every once in a while as you are walking, and just slow down a little and remind yourself "Here I am, complete in this moment." Notice the way you carry your body, the feeling in the feet, the legs, the chest and head as you walk. Do what you are doing mindfully. Be open to the sights around you. This can be done anywhere. Try it while walking down the street, going up or down stairs, or while standing and waiting in line. Of course, this can be combined with an awareness of breathing and an opportunity to notice the body: stopping at any time to simply stand in mountain pose.

Mindful Eating

Much physical illness comes from improper eating habits. You might want to pay attention to the quality and the quantity of the food you put into your body and what functions eating is performing at this moment. Are you eating to nourish your body and to keep it finely tuned? Are you eating to satisfy cravings for taste sensations, to feel more full, more complete, more secure? Are you aware of the source of the food you are eating? Does much of it come out of factories? Have the substances you eat been processed? If so, how much? What has been removed? What has been added? Are chemicals really harmless in food? Do you pay attention on this level?

Try eating with greater awareness, and somewhat slower than usual. As an experiment, you might try intentionally eating one meal a week in silence just to experience the eating itself. Also, you might consider not reading or watching TV during meals. This will help you become more sensitive to how you eat and what you are choosing to eat. Explore bringing increased awareness to not only the foods you eat, but awareness of those you might eat with, and your surrounding environment you eat in.

Yoga

Some forms of yoga are quite mindful, such as gentle hatha yoga. Yoga is a great way to bring mindful awareness to the body. It can help to develop body-centered awareness which allows us to stay anchored in the present with a felt sense of the body. Try to find yoga classes that take this approach to stretching and movement exercises, or experiment with videos available on the web or through a library. Do 20-45 minutes of yoga-type stretching and relaxing as regularly as you can. Remember to do it slowly, mindfully, and working with the breath.

Also see if it's possible to bring awareness to all movement throughout the day, allowing the breath to complement and enhance however you're moving. It may help to ask yourself every day: What is my body like right now? How is my health right now? Do I know? Do I need an expert to know? Am I allowing some aspect of my body or mind to be in an

unhealthy condition through neglect, inattention, or inactivity? Is greater wellness an intention of mine? What am I doing today to realize this intention?

Coping with Stress

1. Be mindful of physical, mental, and emotional cues informing you that a particular situation is stressful. Remember the possibility of a measured response rather than a knee-jerk reaction. Be mindful of the breath at these times in particular.
2. Be aware of how much our moods and reactions to events influence how we feel physically. Be in touch with how you carry yourself, how you look, how and how much you eat, drink, talk. Use the breathing to tune in to the difference.
3. Practice using awareness of the breath to help ground you in the present moment. Right now... And now, too . . .
4. Notice strong and overwhelming emotions when they come up. Notice how they cause reactions in your body and bring awareness to these sensations. Try breathing into the areas of tension or tightness and see if it's possible to anchor yourself in the present by paying attention these sensations and how they change over time. Notice the thoughts that are associated with difficult emotions. Are these thoughts accurate? What thoughts might you think to support your self-esteem and sense of well-being? Are these thoughts more accurate?

Daily Mindfulness

1. STOP – as soon as you notice a stress warning signal, choose to step out of the automatic way you usually react and come into the present moment. Bring awareness to your breath, the sensations in your body, thoughts and feelings, without getting caught up in them. In this way, you will be free to choose how to best respond to whatever is arising rather than be driven by stress reactivity.
2. “3 Minute Breathing Space” – schedule a few times during the day for this. The more you do it intentionally, the more you will just naturally know what's going on inside yourself and can better access your innate resources for coping. Also, by doing this as a regular practice, you make it more likely that you will be able to check in with yourself in the midst of a challenging situation or conflict, a time when it is often difficult to think clearly and act skillfully.
3. Before going into an appointment or answering the phone – take a few breaths, feel your feet on the floor and your breath, letting go of what you have been thinking about and what you are going to do next. In this way, you bring your whole self to the conversation or situation. From this present place, you will be able to focus on what is important, see and hear more clearly what is presenting itself, access more knowledge, creativity and options, embody compassion and be able to make more skillful choices.
4. “Do mindfulness” whenever and wherever you can – when you take a flight of stairs, walk down the hall, at transitions from one activity or one place to another, while eating or taking the first few sips of a cup of coffee or tea and whenever you remember. When

you are feeling really stressed, experiment with taking a minute to walk very slowly and mindfully.

5. Find something you do every day and commit to using it as a mindfulness practice – take one minute when you first get to work to look out a window and really see what is before you, take a full breath and long exhale every time you look at the time or check your email, take a purposeful pause before you send an email, stop and take 3 breaths every time you sit in your chair, etc.
6. Conversations – How does it feel when someone is totally present for you in an interaction? When they're not? Every time you interact with someone is an opportunity to practice being fully present. What is it like to listen to another without planning what you're going to say, evaluating what he or she is saying, wondering what he or she thinks of you or trying to control the situation (the ways most of us listen when someone is speaking). How does it feel to take a breath before speaking and stay connected to your posture, tone, content and body while you speak?
7. Bring mindful awareness to negative thoughts whenever you notice them and strengthen the capacity to intervene in them as soon as they arise. Get familiar with your home movies and repetitive stories (I'll never have enough time, I'm not good enough, this always happens to me, etc.) and recognize the running commentaries that loop around in our heads. Do you really have to believe all of what it says in there?

All of the above practices will come more naturally and be more satisfying if you are also building the muscle of mindfulness with a daily meditation practice.



- S**top what you're doing, step out of auto-pilot
- T**riangle of awareness – thoughts, feelings, body sensations
- O**bserve for one minute what's happening with you right now
- P**roceed with the freedom to choose how to respond

"Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

-Victor Frankl

3-Minute Breathing Space

AWARENESS

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes.

Then ask: "What is my experience right now . . . in thoughts . . . in feelings . . . and in bodily sensations?"

Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.

GATHERING

Then, gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each inbreath and each outbreath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

EXPANDING

Expand the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

Additional Resources

The list below includes several other resources that may be helpful in the area of mindfulness. The author, title, publisher and year of publication is included for reference.

American Yoga Association	20-Minute Yoga Workouts. Ballantine, 1995
Baran, Josh	The Tao of Now: Daily Wisdom From Mystic, Sages, Poets, and Saints. Hampton Roads Publishing, 2008.
Bays, Jan Chozen	How to Train a Wild Elephant. Shambala Press, 2011
Boccio, Frank Jude	Mindfulness Yoga: The Awakened Union of Breath, Body and Mind. Wisdom, 2004
Boorstein, Sylvia	It's Easier Than You Think. Harper Collins, 1997
Brach, Tara	Radical Acceptance. Bantam Dell, 2003
Brantley, Jeffrey	Calming your anxious mind: How mindfulness & compassion can free you from anxiety, fear & panic. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications. 2007
Brown, Brene	Soul Without Shame: A Guide to Liberating Yourself From the Judge Within. Shambala, 1999
	The Gifts of Imperfection. Hazelden, 2010
Chodron, Pema	When Things Fall Apart. Shambala, 1997
	Start Where You Are. Shambala, 1994
	The Wisdom of No Escape. Shambala, 1994
Coleman, Mark	Awake in the Wild. Green Press, 2006
Flowers, Steve & Stahl, Bob	Living With Your Heart Wide Open How Mindfulness and Compassion Can Free You from Unworthiness, Inadequacy, and Shame. New Harbinger, 2011.
His Holiness The Dalai Lama	Ethics for the New Millennium. Riverhead Books, 1999
Huber, Cheri	What you Practice is What you Have: A guide to Living the Life You Want. Keep it Simply Books, 2010
Hanh, Thich Nhat	The Miracle of Mindfulness, Beacon, 1976 Taming the Tiger Within: Meditations on Transforming Difficult Emotions, Riverhead Books, 2004
Joko Beck, Charlotte	Everyday Zen. Harper, 1989
Jackson, Phil	Sacred Hoops. Hyperion, 1995
Jones Claywell, Cheryl	Mindful Exercise - A Bridge Between Yoga & Exercise. Infinity Publishing, 2008

- Kabat-Zinn, Jon **Full Catastrophe Living, Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness.** Delacorte Press, 1990
- Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday life.** Hyperion, 1994
- Arriving at your own Door: 108 Lessons in Mindfulness.** Hyperion, 2007
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon and Myla **Mindfulness for Beginners: Sounds True** 2012
- Everyday Blessings, A Guide to Mindful Parenting.** Hyperion, 1997
- Lozoff, Bo **We're All Doing Time.** Hanuman, 1985
- Madson, Patricia Ryan **Improv Wisdom,** Random House, 2005
- Martin, Philip **The Zen Path through Depression.** Harper, 1999
- McEwen, Bruce **The End of Stress as We Know it.** Joseph Henry Press, 2002
- Phillip Moffett **Dancing with Life.** Rodale, 2012
- Moyers, Bill **Healing and the Mind.** Doubleday, 1993 (also DVD of the program)
- Naperstek, Bellruth **Staying Well with Guided Imagery.** Warner Brooks, 1994
- Oliver, Mary **New and selected Poems,** Beacon Press, 1992
- Rabinowitz, Ilana **Mountains are Mountains and Rivers are Rivers – Applying Eastern Teachings to Everyday Life.** Hyperion, 1999
- Ram, Dass **Still Here, Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying,** Riverhead Books, 2000
- Remen, Rachel Naomi **Kitchen Table Wisdom.** Riverhead Books, 1996
- My Grandfather's Blessings,** Riverhead Books, 2000
- Richard, Matthieu **The Monk and the Philosopher,** Schocken, 1998
- Rinpoche, Sogyal **The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying.** Harper, 1992
- Rosenbaum, Elana **Here for Now: Living Well with Cancer Through Mindfulness.** Satya House Publications, 2007
- Being Well (Even When You're Sick): Mindfulness Practices for People Living with Cancer and Other Serious Illness.** Shambhala,, 2012
- Rosenberg, Larry **Breath by Breath.** Shambala, 1998
- Rumi (trans: Coleman Barks) **The Essential Rumi.** Harper, 1995
- Salzberg, Sharon **Loving-Kindness.** Shambhala, 1995
- A Heart as Wide as the World.** Shambhala, 1997
- The Force of Kindness: Change Your Life With Love and Compassion.** Sounds True, 2005
- The Kindness Handbook: A Practical Companion.** Sounds True, 2008
- Santorelli, Saki **Heal Thy Self, Lessons on Mindfulness in Medicine.** Bell Tower, 1999
- Sapolsky, Robert **Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers.** W.H. Freeman and Company, 2004

Schade, Edith Royce	From May Sarton's Well , Papier-Mache Press, 1994
Segal, Zindel; Williams, Mark; Teasdale, John	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression . Guilford, 2002
Shulevitz, Uri	The Treasure . Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978
Simmons, Philip	Learning to Fall: The blessings of an imperfect life . Bantam, 2003
Singer, Thea	Stress Less: The New Science that Shows Women How to Rejuvenate the Body and the Mind . Hudson Street Press, 2010
Stahl, Bob & Goldstein, Elisha	A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook . New Harbinger, 2010.
Williams, Mark; Teasdale, John; Zindel, Segal; Kabat-Zinn, Jon	The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness . Guilford 2007

Applications ("Apps"), Online Resources, and Places to Practice

Insight Timer

The highest rated free meditation app was originally developed as just a timer but now includes a large selection of guided meditations, metrics to track your progress, and a social component. The guided meditations include some of the best meditation teachers and they can be sorted by newest, highest rated, most played and various durations. It's a great way to explore different styles, teachers, and techniques. *You can learn more about the free app at: <https://insighttimer.com/>.*

10% Happier: Meditation for Skeptics

This app features guided meditations and videos by respected meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein. A \$10-per-month subscription gives you unlimited access to the app's two courses (with more to come) and pairs you with a personal coach, to whom you can text any questions.

Available for iOS, seven lessons are free, \$10 a month for unlimited access, www.10percenthappier.com.

Headspace

This app by Andy Puddicombe, a former Buddhist monk, is hugely popular. Headspace is full of accessible guided meditations and lessons on everything from the fundamentals of meditation to how to turn everyday activities (cooking, running, commuting) into opportunities to meditate.

Available for Android and iOS, first 10 lessons are free, \$13 a month for unlimited access, www.headspace.com.

cfmHOME at UMass Medical School

Launched in 2015, cfmHOME is a project of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. It's a virtual online community where you can access discussions, videos and audio recordings of talks and guided practices.

You can access free content on the site: <https://cfmhome.org/about>.

UCSD Center for Mindfulness Guided Audio and Video

The University of California San Diego Center for Mindfulness offers a broad range of mindfulness-based programs and initiatives. *You can access free content from UC San Diego's site here: <http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/programs/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>.*

The University of California, Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center

The Greater Good Science Center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. Several free resources in social and emotional well-being can be found on their website at: https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what_we_do/greater_good_magazine.



A Pro Bono Project By:

