

# Information sheet for women in prison for the first time

This information sheet contains information for women who may be going to prison for the first time. It covers what happens after court and when you arrive at prison. It may also be helpful to families, employers and people working with women in prison.

## The journey from court

You will be transported from court in an escort vehicle. You may be escorted in the same vehicle as male prisoners.

The journey can be long and uncomfortable.

You should be permitted toilet breaks on long journeys, although this does not always happen. They should stop more often if you are pregnant or withdrawing from drugs.

If you are pregnant, you should only be transported in the usual escort vehicles if it has been assessed as safe by a health professional.

## Where will I be taken?

Women are held in separate prisons from men.

You will be usually taken to the local women's prison that serves the court you are sentenced or remanded at. These prisons are often busy, with lots of people going in and out.

If you are unsure where you will go you can call the court and ask them which women's prisons people normally get sent to. The following prisons accept women from court:

- HMP/YOI Bronzefield, Surrey
- HMP/YOI Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
- HMP/YOI Eastwood Park, Gloucestershire
- HMP/YOI Low Newton, County Durham
- HMP/YOI Foston Hall, Derbyshire
- HMP/YOI New Hall, West Yorkshire
- HMP/YOI Styal, Cheshire

Unless you have a very short sentence it is likely that you will be transferred to another prison soon after this. This might be an open prison or another closed prison. This prison is likely to be more settled and able to offer support with things like training and resettlement support.

## What will happen when I first get to prison?

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

- You will be interviewed for personal details by prison staff
- Staff may take your fingerprints and your photograph.
- You will be given a prison number.
- You will see someone from healthcare. Tell them if you have a health problem. Tell them if you are taking any medicine, or if you have a problem with drugs or alcohol. Also tell them if you feel very upset or worried about things.
- You will be given a rub down search. Searches should always be respectful. A rub down search should not be intrusive and you should not normally be asked to raise or remove outer clothing.

If there is a reason for you to remove any item of clothing the staff should not touch you whilst you do this. At no point should you be fully naked during a search.

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

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

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

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

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

- You will be given bedding and clothes, if needed
- You should receive a 'first night pack' (sometimes called a reception pack) containing items like tea, milk and sugar. If you are a smoker you can also request 'vapes' are also available on arrival. This is to help until you can buy things from the prison shop/canteen. It will usually be taken from future earnings.

- You should be allowed to phone your family or legal adviser, either in reception or first night location. You should also be told how to arrange for them to visit you – you are entitled to a social visit within 72 hours of conviction.

## **What happens after reception?**

On the day you arrive:

- You will be taken to the room you will sleep in.
- You may have to share a room with other people. Often this will be with one other person, but some prisons have dormitories which might be shared with more.
- Speak to staff if you are concerned about this or feel unsafe.
- If you are unconvicted, you should not have to share with convicted prisoners.
- Some prisons have a special area where prisoners sleep for the first night so they can get used to being in prison. This may be called the 'first night centre'.
- You can have a bath or shower if you want one.
- You should receive hot food and a drink even if you have arrived too late for the evening meal

During the first few days:

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

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

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

You can tell

- Prison staff. You may have someone called a personal officer. Or you can talk to the officer in charge of your area of the prison (this is called the wing or landing)
- Safer Custody staff, who check to make sure people feel safe in the prison
- The doctor or nurse who gives you the health check
- The chaplain
- A prisoner called a listener or buddy
- The Samaritans

### **For more information contact our Advice and Information Service**

We can give you information on prison rules, life in prison and how to get help in prison. We are a small service and we are independent of the prison service.

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

This number is open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday - 3.30 - 5.30pm

At other times, you can call on **0207 251 5070**. This number is open from Monday to Friday 10.00am - 5.00pm. This number is **not free** but you do not need to put it on your PIN.

You can also write to us. You do not need to use a stamp. Our address is:

**Prison Reform Trust  
FREEPOST ND 6125  
London  
EC1B 1PN**

## Preparing for prison - Checklist

If you think that you may go to prison it may be worth considering the following things:

Inform a member of your family or a friend

It is a good idea to make sure a family member or friend knows if you think you may be going to prison, and which prison you think you might go to if you know.

Contact numbers for family, friends and legal advisers

When you arrive at prison you will be asked for phone numbers of family, friends and legal assistance that you would like to be able to call so they can be cleared for you to use on the prison phones. You may also be asked for address details and dates of birth for people who you want to visit you.

*Tip from experience: Make sure you have phone numbers written down as you may not be able to get them from your mobile phone when you arrive*

Childcare

You may need to consider childcare arrangements if you could be going to prison. Although the prison can help you with this when you arrive, it will help if you have been able to think about this and discuss it with family or friends beforehand.

If you are due to give birth in prison, or have a child under 18 months old, you may be able to live with them in a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) until they reach 18 months of age. Speak to staff or contact us if you would like more information about this.

Health

You will see someone from healthcare when you arrive at the prison. It is useful to take your GP's contact details and copies of any prescriptions you have if needed. This can help to speed up the process of continuing your medication. If you need things like glasses, hearing aids or walking aids make sure you bring them with you.

Benefits and Housing

It is a good idea to find out how any benefits you get will be affected by you being in prison. You should inform relevant agencies as soon as possible to avoid owing repayments. It may also be useful to make sure you have phone numbers you may need for this such as local housing benefit office, your landlord, etc.

Employment

If you have a job, you should think about whether you want to speak to your employer or arrange for someone to inform them for you if you do go to prison.

## Finances

It may help to have written down account details and contact numbers of your bank in case you need to contact them in prison. You will not be able to keep your bank card with you.

You will not be allowed to keep any cash with you whilst in prison. Any cash you have with you on reception will be taken and credited to your prison account.

*Tip from experience: If you can it is a good idea to take some cash for your account so you can buy things like toiletries, vapes and make telephone calls as soon as possible.*

## Items of property

You will be able to take some items with you into the prison and other will remain in stored property. In possession property should normally fit into two property boxes. Each property box measures 70cm x 55cm x 25cm.

For more information about the kinds of items that may be allowed, please contact us.

*Tip from experience: Do not take valuable items as they can get lost. It can be comforting to take a few photos of family members.*

## Clothing

Women can wear their own clothes in prison. You will be allowed to keep some clothing if it is suitable and fits into your two property boxes (see above).

An item of clothing may not be allowed if it is:

- Hooded or studded clothing
- Uniform or Military style clothing
- Team shirts, such as football, rugby, hockey, or basketball shirts
- Any clothing that is offensive or has inappropriate slogans or motifs
- Clothing that may lead the wearer to be mistaken for a member of staff.
- Clothing that is in a poor state of repair, or has been designed to look like it, for example ripped jeans.
- Clothing which does not meet 'basic standards of modesty and decency', for example short skirts.

For more information about what is likely to be allowed see our detailed information sheet or contact us. You could also call the prison in advance to see what they allow.

*Tip from experience: Bring clothes for warm and cold weather. You are normally allowed unlimited underwear and this often includes vests which can be very useful.*