

Message to People Leaving Prison

Are you ready to reenter the community in ways that will allow you to live there permanently? Many people in your situation hope that they are ready but they are not certain. One of their biggest fears is that they are not ready.

This manual is designed to help you determine your readiness for successful community reentry. It begins by asking you 10 questions. These questions are answered with one of three responses: yes, no, or doesn't apply to me. The "doesn't apply to me" response is used if the question does not relate to your situation. For example, if the question asks: "Will you have a wheelchair upon release?" and you are not using a wheelchair, then the correct response to this question is "doesn't apply to me."

After you answer the 10 questions, you will be guided by simple instructions on how to determine your readiness score. There is a sample "are you ready" case at the end of the manual if you need some help along the way.

The readiness score translates into a green light, you are ready; a yellow light, you should proceed with caution; and a red light, you are not ready.

Don't despair if you get a yellow or red light score because this manual will then help you get yourself ready. The remaining pages of the manual help you determine your UN-readiness scores, to interpret these scores, and then will walk you through the steps to get yourself green light ready.

You can do it! Here's wishing you all the best as you work towards green light readiness and a future that only includes successful community living.

When the world says, "Give up," Hope whispers, "Try it one more time."

~Author Unknown

Question: Are you ready to live and work in the community?

Before you answer, respond to the questions below by putting a check (✓) in the column (yes, no, doesn't apply to me) that best fits your situation. Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 apply to everyone leaving prison, so a "yes" or "no" response is required.

| Readiness Questions | YES | NO | Doesn't Apply to Me |
|---|-----|----|---------------------|
| 1. Do you care about being ready to live and work in the community? | | | |
| 2. Will you have picture identification when you are released? | | | |
| 3. Will you have a safe place to live for at least six months? | | | |
| 4. Will you have a job paying a living wage? | | | |
| 5. Will you have at least \$500 to support yourself in the first month? | | | |
| 6. Will you have reliable transportation to work and other places, like parole office, doctor's office? | | | |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 1-6. TOTAL #1 | | | |
| 7. Will you have family or friends to help you in the "right" ways once you are released? | | | |
| 8. Will you have someone you trust to talk with when you feel sad, hurt, disappointed, frustrated, angry? | | | |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 7 and 8. TOTAL #2 | | | |
| 9. Will you have a one-month supply of all your prescription medications? | | | |
| 10. Will you have medical appointments scheduled for any chronic conditions? | | | |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 9 and 10. TOTAL #3 | | | |

Are you ready? Let's see. (Need some help? See the sample on page 15).

1. Take the totals from the shaded boxes for the "Yes" and "Doesn't Apply to Me" columns above and record them below.
2. For each row, add together the columns for the total "Yes" and "Doesn't Apply to Me" and record them in the shaded column labeled "Readiness Score."
3. Add together the numbers in the Readiness Score column and record in the box with the orange trim – this is your Readiness Score

| Totals from Readiness Questions | Total "Yes" | Total "Doesn't Apply to Me" | Readiness Score |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL #1 | | | |
| TOTAL #2 | | | |
| TOTAL #3 | | | |
| Readiness Score | | | |

Are you ready?

Find the readiness "light" that goes with your readiness score.

| Readiness Score | Readiness "Light" |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Score of 10 | Green: Ready to go! |
| 9 to 7 | Proceed with caution |
| 6 or less | Red: Need to get ready! |

Question: If you are NOT “Green light” ready, how do you get ready for successful community living?

This depends on your individual score totals to the readiness questions. The table below is very important summary information about your UN-readiness for the community upon release. Each total tells you something important about what you need to do to get yourself ready for successful community living.

1. For each TOTAL, record the number of “No” responses from the table on page 3 in the shaded column labeled UN-Readiness Score.
2. The meaning of the UN-readiness score for each row appears in the last column on the right.

| Totals from Readiness Questions | UN-Readiness Score (Total “No”) | What does the UN-Readiness Score mean? |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| TOTAL #1 | | Closer the UN-readiness score is to 6 means: <u>Weak</u> ability to live independently |
| TOTAL #2 | | Closer the UN-readiness score is to 2 means: <u>Weak</u> availability of support |
| TOTAL #3 | | Closer the UN-readiness score is to 2 means: <u>Strong</u> need for medical attention |

→ Getting Read for Independent Living

Your ability to **live independently** upon release is measured by **TOTAL #1**.

| TOTAL #1 Readiness Questions | Steps towards Readiness |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Do you care about being ready to live and work in the community?</p> <p>clh</p> | <p>This is an attitude issue. You are in control here.</p> <p>Do you know why you don't care? Have you tried to live and work in the community in the past and failed? Do you see yourself as a failure? Do you think life is against you? Are you lazy? Are you expecting a miracle or divine intervention? Are you expecting someone else (like a parent, girlfriend, boyfriend, adult child) to save you from yourself? Are you depressed?</p> <p>Green Light Steps: Stop this negative thinking! You are very capable. You've survived a very difficult set of life challenges already. Your ability to survive your past says you can thrive in the future. Get some positive images to look at and think about -- images that will give you hope, work on believing in yourself, give yourself credit for surviving the past, get a book on positive thinking, and practice positive thinking every minute. If you think you are depressed, put in a request to see a mental health professional today. And, remember to get fresh air and exercise daily!</p> <p>Red Light Steps: Maybe you plan upon release to return to the lifestyle that brought you to prison. Perhaps you think you can avoid prison consequences by doing a better job of not getting caught next time. Good luck with that – this reentry manual will be in your future. See you again next time.</p> |
| <p>2. Will you have picture identification when you are released?</p> <p>Ange</p> | <p>This is a process issue. You need to complete and submit applications to the right government agencies.</p> <p>Do you have picture identification without inmate/DOC on it? Do you have a copy of your social security card? Do you have a copy of your birth certificate? Do you have a current driver's license? Do you know how to get a copy of your social security card and birth certificate? Have you been a victim of identity theft while in prison?</p> <p>Green Light Steps: Follow steps on pages 4-6 of the <i>Reentry Survival Manual</i> and get the applications submitted now!</p> <p>Red Light Steps: No big deal. You know who you are and so do your people. You can take care of it when you get out.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>3. Will you have a safe place to live for at least six months?</p> <p>CPK</p> | <p>This is a <u>process</u> and <u>availability</u> issue. You will need to search for a place that offers you the greatest safety and certainty for the longest period of time.</p> <p>Do you have a place to live that will give you privacy? Will you feel safe there? Will you be sleeping on someone's couch or floor? Will you be expected to pay rent? Will you be expected to do childcare in return for living there? Are there expectations for living there that might make you anxious, angry, frustrated, or overwhelmed? Is the lifestyle around the place likely to send you back to old ways of living? Is the place close to public transportation? Is it close to places that are hiring? Is there a lot of crime in the area where you will be living? Have you gotten in trouble there in the past? Are there people in the area who have it out for you?</p> <p>Green Light Steps: Write down all the options you have for places to live. Which places will give you the greatest safety and peace of mind? Which of these places is closest to public transportation and potential jobs but the farthest from trouble areas? Is the safest and most practical place affordable? Your goal here is to find a place that will keep you safe, out of harm's way, close to public transportation, and stable for at least six months. The best strategy is to identify your first choice, second choice, third choice, and fourth choice. Having back-up plans are essential to your success and peace of mind. Things go wrong and you need to be prepared.</p> <p>Red Light Steps: No big deal. You know people who will let you stay with them. Your people will take care of you. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. They have a plan for you.</p> |
| <p>4. Will you have a job paying a living wage?</p> <p>Angie</p> | <p>This is a <u>process</u> and <u>availability</u> issue. You will need to search for jobs that offer a living wage and health benefits.</p> <p>Do you have vocational skills that will pay a living wage? What jobs could you do? What skills do you need to get the job you want? Do you know how much you will need to make per hour to earn a "living wage"? Do you know how to handle the question on a job application that asks if you have a "felony conviction"? Do you know the consequences of answering incorrectly? Do you know the jobs that felons are not eligible for? Do you know employers that are felon-friendly? Do you know how to apply for a job on-line? Do you have a resume? Do you know how to interview for a job, dress for an interview, or write a cover letter?</p> |

4. Will you have a job paying a living wage?

Green Light Steps: Write down your job skills and all the jobs you've had prior to and while you've been in prison. Compare this list to the list of jobs from which your conviction **disqualifies** you (some convictions disqualify employment in insurance, banking, legal, aviation, childcare, medical, nursing homes, transportation, and other industries).

What new skills could you get while in prison towards a job you could do upon release? Sign up for vocational training in these areas. Take a computer literacy class to prepare yourself for completing on-line job applications and functioning in a computer-centered world. Read the newspaper daily to follow events in the world and look at the job ads to see what skills are in demand and what the pay ranges are. Get a list of felon-friendly employers in the area where you will be living. Write to agencies that help felons get jobs in your state and city before leaving prison. Set up an appointment with them. Send them your resume with a cover letter.

To figure out your "living wage", add together your expected monthly expenses (rent, transportation, food, supplies, utilities, clothes, monthly fines/fees and so forth) and divide by 160 hours (40 hours/week x 4 weeks) and multiple by 1.19 (minimum withholding tax from your paycheck). This will provide a ball park figure of what you will need to make per hour. For example, a minimum wage of \$7.14 per hour translates into a take-home wage of \$6.00, or \$960 per month for 160 hours of work.

Write down all the options you have for jobs. Get your resume and cover letter prepared (proof read it for typos and grammar problems – ask someone to proof read it for you). Send it to agencies that help felons. Send it to former employers, to leaders of your place of worship, to friends and in response to ads in the newspaper. Get a plan to handle rejection. Everyone experiences rejection when looking for a job. Your felony conviction will increase rejection by potential employers. Employers can and will legally not hire or fire you because of your felony conviction. You must prove your commitment to becoming a taxpayer and recovering from your past mistakes by proving your eagerness to work (there will eventually be a "you're hired") and to prove your trustworthiness and integrity. It will not be easy or without lots of rejection. Hang in there – you can do it!

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>4. Will you have a job paying a living wage?</p> | <p>Red Light Steps: No big deal. You know people who will get you work. Your people will take care of you. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised you a job when you get out. You are counting on them to follow through with a prior commitment to you.</p> |
| <p>5. Will you have at least \$500 to support yourself in the first month?</p> <p>CK</p> | <p>This is a process issue. You need to work and save while you are inside to have start up cash for entering the community.</p> <p>It is expensive to live in the community. A zone 1 monthly bus pass costs \$49 and a monthly train pass between Newark and New Brunswick, \$60 (\$7.25 one way). Food, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses for a self-sufficient single adult in New Jersey are estimated at \$725. This doesn't take into account any outstanding fines or fees, parole supervision fees, application fees for identification or housing, nor does it include payments for medical or drug treatment. Cashing a DOC check at a check cashing outlet will cost 2% to 6% (or more!) of the face value of the check!</p> <p>Green Light Steps: How much money do you currently have in your commissary account? How much of this money is "savings"? Subtract the savings amount from \$500 and then divide the net amount by the number of months until you are released. [Example: \$100 in commissary account and \$20 is savings: $\\$500 - \\$20 = \\$480$. With (say) 24 months left to serve, the monthly amount that needs to be saved is \$20 ($\\$480/24$)] This is the amount of money you need to save each month to reach the target of \$500. Increase the number of hours worked or upgrade the type of job you do to increase your monthly income.</p> <p>Red Light Steps: No big deal. You know people who will give you the money you need. Your people will take care of you. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. They have a plan for you and you are counting on them to make good on that commitment.</p> |
| <p>6. Will you have reliable transportation to work and other appointments, like to parole office, doctor's office?</p> <p>Angie</p> | <p>This is a process and availability issue. You will need transportation during business hours to find a job, housing, and to make parole, treatment, and doctor's appointments.</p> <p>Who will pick you up at the gate? Are they reliable? If you have to take the bus, do you have a bus ticket and money to buy what you need? How will you get to the parole office on a weekly or monthly basis? How will you get to treatment if</p> |

6. Will you have reliable transportation to work and other appointments, like to parole office, doctor's office?

you are required to complete a drug treatment program? How will you get to the Motor Vehicle Commission, to the police station for reporting, and the courthouse for checking on fines and fees? How will you get to employers to complete job applications, to the doctor's office for medications and routine check-ups, to the store for groceries? Will you have someone available during business hours to drive you to these places? Is there reliable public transportation?

Green Light Steps: Consider transportation issues when making decisions about where to live. Public transportation is critical if you will be living in urban areas. If you will be living in areas without reliable public transportation, walking and biking will be important to you. At \$3.50 to \$4.50 a gallon for gasoline, transportation will be expensive and friends and family members, if available, will find driving you around a burden – increasing tensions over time. Remember your goal is to be self-sufficient! Exercise is likely to fit into your weight control goals as well.

Red Light Steps: No big deal. You know people who will drive you around. Your people will take care of you. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. They have a plan for you and you are counting on them to make good on that commitment.

NOTES:

➔ **Support from Others:**

Your **support from others** upon release is measured by **Total #2**.

| TOTAL #2 Readiness Questions | Steps towards Readiness |
|--|---|
| <p>7. Will you have family or friends to help you in the “right” ways once you are released?</p> <p>OK</p> | <p>This is a process and availability issue. Having positive support from family members and friends is very important in the hours, days, weeks, and months after prison.</p> <p>Do you have family members or friends who can help you in positive ways? That is, provide you with encouraging words, give you money to help you make ends meet before you get your first paycheck, drive you to the parole office, cook you a meal or take you out for dinner, let you live with them for several months until you find a place of your own and so forth. If they help you, will there be strings attached? Will they expect something of and from you? Will they put additional pressures on you? Will their expectations trigger old habits and tensions? Will you feel that you are burdening them too much? Will you feel guilty taking more from them?</p> <p>Green Light Steps: Talk with you family and friends in advance. Be clear about what you need from them, what is expected of you by parole, how long you will need their help, and what you will be doing to get yourself self-sufficient and independent. Make sure that they know that you appreciate what they’ve done for you while you were inside and what they are willing to do for you when you get out. Find ways to help them in positive ways. What do they need that you can do for them? Talk about how to manage conflict and frustration before it happens. If they are taking care of your minor children, talk about your plans to resume your parental responsibilities. Listen to their concerns and work with them to put a plan together that benefits the children.</p> <p>Red Light Steps: No big deal. Your people want to take care of you. This is their job. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. They have a plan for you and you are counting on them to make good on that commitment. All you have to do is show up.</p> |

8. Will you have someone you trust to talk with when you feel sad, hurt, disappointed, frustrated, angry....?

OK

This is a **process** and **availability** issue. There will be times when you feel low, like the hole has been thrown in after you. Maybe your family has lost faith in you. Maybe you've lost faith in yourself. Maybe you've been rejected for days and weeks; no one will give you a chance. At times like these, you will need someone who will listen, understand, not judge, be discrete, and has good judgment. We all need a trusted confidante or mentor to handle the down times!

Green Light Steps: Seek out a mentor. Ask the social worker if there is a mentoring program for people leaving prison. Make it known that you would like a mentor. Write to your place of worship and ask for a mentor there. Be clear what you want from a mentor – someone who will give wise guidance, who will pull you up if you are down or will call you out if you start using “old self” thinking, who will be there to listen, to encourage, to believe in you when you can't believe in yourself. Find yourself a mentor and when you are strong enough, mentor someone else who needs a wise and compassionate advisor, confidante, and friend.

Red Light Steps: You can take care of yourself. You don't need anyone to help you with your feelings. Alternatively, you might think that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. This person will take care of you when you are sad, hurt, disappointed... This person is all you need.

NOTES:

➔Need for Medical Attention:

Your need for **life-sustaining medical attention** is measured by **Total #3**.

| TOTAL #3 Readiness Questions | Steps towards Readiness |
|--|---|
| 9. Will you have a one-month supply of all your prescription medications? | <p>This is a <u>process</u> and <u>availability</u> issue. If you are taking prescription medications for a chronic condition while you are in prison, you must continue taking these medications in the community. They are critical to your health and wellness.</p> <p>What are all the chronic conditions that are treated with prescription medications? What are the names and dosages of these prescriptions? Does the prison provide inmates with a two-week or one-month supply of medications upon release? If yes, how do you make these arrangements in advance of release? Who do you talk with? What forms must you complete?</p> <p>Green Light Steps: Ask a social worker if the prison releases people taking prescription medications with a supply of all medications at the time of release. If yes, ask how you make arrangements to get your medications at point of release: Who do you talk to? What forms must be completed? Who completes the forms? When are the forms completed? What if the medications aren't given to you when you are released? What can you do?</p> <p>Red Light Steps: The prison gives you medications when you leave. It's the prison's job to make sure you get your medications. Not your problem</p> |
| 10. Will you have medical appointments scheduled for any chronic conditions? | <p>This is a <u>process</u> and <u>availability</u> issue. If you have chronic conditions, establishing primary sources of medical and mental health treatment are vital to your health and wellness.</p> <p>Do you have copy of your medical records to take with you when you leave the prison? How would you get a copy of your prison medical records? Will you have health insurance coverage when you leave prison? Will you qualify for Medicaid or Medicare in the community? Do you know the name of clinics in the community that take patients on a sliding fee scale? Are there any lists of community clinics that will provide treatment to people recently released for prison?</p> |

10. Will you have medical appointments scheduled for any chronic conditions?

Green Light Steps: Ask a social worker if the prison releases people with a copy of their medical records. If yes, ask how you make arrangements to get a copy of your medical and mental health records: Who do you talk to? What forms must be completed? Who completes the forms? When are the forms completed? What if the medical records aren't given to you when you are released? What can you do? Is there a cost for these records? How much? Who do your doctors on the outside call at the prison if they want more information about your treatment or want additional records? What is the telephone number to contact? Who is the contact person?

Ask the social workers if they have a list of clinics that provide treatment on a sliding fee scale? Can they make appointments for you in advance? Do you have a family member who can schedule appointments for you? It sometimes takes several weeks or a month to get an appointment with a doctor on the outside and you may only have a two-week supply of medications upon release. You need to plan ahead!

Talk with the social worker about your eligibility for Medicaid or Medicare. Also, ask if you are eligible for public assistance and food stamps. If you are eligible or you think you might be eligible, request application forms for the various public benefits and completed them while you are in prison. Submit the applications at the appropriate office location immediately upon release. See pages 16-19 of the *Reentry Survival Manual*.

Red Light Steps: Your people will take care of you. They make the appointments and handle the bills. Alternatively, you might think this is a big deal but that you have someone on the outside who has promised to take care of you when you get out. They have a plan for you and you are counting on them to make good on that commitment.


NOTES:

SAMPLE "Are you Ready" CASE

| Readiness Questions | YES | NO | Doesn't Apply to Me |
|--|----------|----------|---------------------|
| 1. Do you care about being ready to live and work in the community? | ✓ | | |
| 2. Will you have picture identification when you are released? | | ✓ | |
| 3. Will you have a safe place to live for at least six months? | | ✓ | |
| 4. Will you have a job paying a living wage? | | ✓ | |
| 5. Will you have at least \$500 to support yourself in the first month? | | ✓ | |
| 6. Will you have reliable transportation to work and other appointments, like to parole office, doctor's office? | ✓ | | |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 1-6. TOTAL #1 | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| 7. Will you have family or friends to help you in the "right" ways once you are released? | ✓ | | |
| 8. Will you have someone you trust to talk with when you feel sad, hurt, disappointed, frustrated, angry? | | ✓ | |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 7 and 8. TOTAL #2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 9. Will you have a one-month supply of all your prescription medications? | | | ✓ |
| 10. Will you have medical appointments scheduled for any chronic conditions? | | | ✓ |
| Add up the number of checks in each column for questions 9 and 10. TOTAL #3 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

Calculating the Readiness Score

| Totals from Readiness Questions | Total "Yes" | Total "Doesn't Apply to Me" | Readiness Score |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL #1 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| TOTAL #2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| TOTAL #3 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Readiness Score | | | 5 |



"Red"
Light
Score

Question: If you are NOT "Green light" ready, how do you get ready for successful community living?

| Totals from Readiness Questions | UN-Readiness Score (Total "No") | What does the UN-Readiness Score mean? |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| TOTAL #1 | 4 | 4 is more than half way to 6 <u>Weak</u> ability to live independently |
| TOTAL #2 | 1 | 1 is half way to 2 <u>Limited</u> availability of support |
| TOTAL #3 | 0 | 0 is farthest away from 2 <u>NO</u> need for medical attention |