

Prison and Probation Series

Prison - coping with arrival (A prisoners point of view)

Falsely Accused

Carers and Teachers

FACTsheet

Fighting injustice lobbying for change

Coping with the initial 'shock' of being 'inside' is probably the hardest. Nobody can prepare you for it and different people react in different ways. You can help minimize the shock and make things easier by:-

- Taking at least £50 in cash with you to Court on the day you are sentenced. This will be paid into your personal account and can be used inside for little luxuries as well as necessities. Leave behind credit cards, mobile phones and excessive jewellery as these will all be taken away.
- You will normally be allowed a watch. Don't take an inexpensive one, or one that has sentimental value – things get nicked!
- Say **nothing** to other inmates about what you are accused/convicted of. The ordinary 'cons' consider us as 'nonces' or 'bacon' and absolutely hate our guts!
- It is better to have a cover story ready (although I didn't) as saying nothing is as bad as an admission of guilt to other inmates
- I found that the Chaplain was very helpful, comforting and non-judgemental. But whatever your faith it helps if you can continue it inside. Most religions are catered for.
- I was lucky making friends with two chaps who really helped me out in the first few days. This is really tricky as it is best not to trust anyone but often even if you are not prepared to open up other 'cons' are prepared to give you a helping hand
- Listen as much as you can to officers, other inmates, chaplains, visitors. Their advice is often the best.
- Read everything, notices, handouts, official documents, landing notice boards, leaflets. There is no shortage of literature in prison. It's very easy to miss something important.
- Whatever else you face you will need to get used to being 'banged up' for long periods especially in the first few weeks (before you get a job). This is not so bad in prisons where cells have TV and kettles but not all do, so be prepared. I read anything and everything I could get my hands on. Prison libraries are often very good. Also, I wrote a lot, kept a diary, sketched, did puzzles, exercised in my cell, played cards with cell mate, listened to radio, prayed, meditated. Again, it doesn't matter what you do so long as you find a way to keep your mind occupied.
- It helps to remember "Don't let the ***** get you down!"
- There are two ways of looking at prison. You can be depressed and downhearted, creep about like a frightened rabbit or you can smile and try and make the best of things. Try to become grateful for small acts of kindness. Give yourself the occasional treat.

- Take outside exercise as often as you can. All these will help. I was quite surprised at how much camaraderie there is among prisoners.
- You don't have to open your soul but just talking to cell mates or neighbours helps pass the time and lifts your spirits. It also helps you decide who to trust.
- Finally, whatever you are given, keep – Don't throw anything away even the most insignificant little thing can be useful; like I through away the plastic guard from my Bic razor. "Don't do that" someone said and showed me how to make a plug to keep the shower switched on. Also it helps if you are courteous to the officers. The male officers prefer to be called 'guv' or 'sir' and the female officers 'miss'. It all helps to make your stay at Her Majesty's Pleasure almost as much pleasure for you too!

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