



the
**NORTH TEXAS
REENTRY GUIDE**



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS®

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The North Texas Reentry Guide was written and edited by the following people:

- Haley Zettler, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, University of North Texas
- Adam Trahan, Professor of Criminal Justice, University of North Texas
- Jessica Craig, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, University of North Texas
- Wendy Watson, Principal Lecturer of Political Science, University of North Texas
- Jeremy Read, Transitional Case Manager, House of Mercy Ministries
- Advisory Committee: Johnny Robinson, Alexa Garza
- Student Research Team: Lindsey White, Sabrina Wenk, Lindsey McDowell

About the North Texas Reentry Guide

The North Texas Reentry Guide (NTRG) is adapted from *Mapping Your Future* created by members of the Education Justice Project (EJP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The NTRG was created by faculty members of the University of North Texas, content experts with lived experience, and student researchers from the University of North Texas.

Disclaimer: We have listed a lot of programs, services, and businesses in this guide as resources for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. We do not endorse any of these organizations. We also do not guarantee that these resources will be helpful (although we hope they are). The world is constantly changing, so we cannot be sure everything in the guide is accurate. We have tried to include the best, most up-to-date information from trusted sources.

Request Our Guides

- You can download an electronic version for free at <https://hps.unt.edu/cjus/welcome-criminal-justice>.
- To request print copies you can order by phone at (940) 565-4338 or email: Haley.Zettler@unt.edu.

We work hard to provide free copies of our reentry guide to all incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals who request them. If you or your organization are able, [please donate online](#).

Please help us give the *North Texas Reentry Guide* to every person who wants it. Thank you!

Welcome Home!

Congratulations on this next step in your journey! We are so glad you have received this copy of *The North Texas Reentry Guide* and hope it helps you start your life on the outside. This reentry guide has information that can help you before you leave and after you get out. This guide is designed for people in North Texas, but there is information that might help anyone leaving prison or jail. If you are a family member, friend, or service provider for someone who is coming home, this book can help you as well.

Doing time is hard and you should be proud to have completed your stay inside! However, now you will face new challenges. You may find it hard to locate housing or employment or enroll in school. People will often judge you and treat you differently. You may have to reconnect with family and friends. You may also face physical and emotional health challenges. And, on top of all this, if you are on parole all of these things can become more complicated. You can do it, though, and this guide can help you succeed. Some people and places want to help you. You just have to find them. That's what this guide is for – to help you find help.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	1
ABOUT THE NORTH TEXAS REENTRY GUIDE	2
REQUEST OUR GUIDES	2
WELCOME HOME!	3
BEFORE YOUR RELEASE.....	6
PREPARE MENTALLY FOR RELEASE.....	7
GATHER YOUR DOCUMENTS.....	9
PREPARE FOR YOUR JOB SEARCH	10
FIND HOUSING BEFORE RELEASE	12
HEALTH BEFORE RELEASE	15
PAROLE.....	18
AFTER YOU GET OUT.....	23
GETTING YOUR ID	23
RESOURCES TO MEET YOUR BASIC NEEDS.....	27
HOUSING AFTER RELEASE	32
EMPLOYMENT	40
EDUCATION	51
HEALTH	57
TRANSPORTATION.....	67
TECHNOLOGY	71
LEGAL MATTERS.....	81
FINANCES, CREDIT, AND TAXES.....	89
TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH	99
SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS	113
VOTING	123
DEPORTATION	126
OTHER HELPFUL REENTRY RESOURCES.....	127



Before Your Release

This main section addresses what an incarcerated person can do before their release to feel more in control of their situation. It includes the following chapters:

1. Prepare Mentally for Release
2. Gather Your Documents
3. Prepare for Your Job Search
4. Find Housing Before Release
5. Health Before Release
6. Preparing for Reunification
7. Parole

Prepare Mentally for Release

It is normal to feel anxiety and fear before release. It's never too early to get ready to leave prison. Even if you have a very long sentence, keep your eye on life after release. Find ways to learn and grow while you are there.

- Take Adult Basic Education classes or get your GED.
- Take college classes or vocational classes.
- Meditate, draw, join a choir, or read a book.
- Start going to religious services.
- Attend substance use programs or anger management classes.
- Get involved in volunteer activities.
- Make an effort to be involved with things beyond just doing time.
- And re-establish or work on connections in the free world.

These activities can help you meet other people who can support you. They will help you think about what you have to offer.

If you're getting released soon, there is a lot more you can do to prepare. In this chapter, we address how to build your support network and prepare mentally for the challenges of reentry.

Build your Support Network

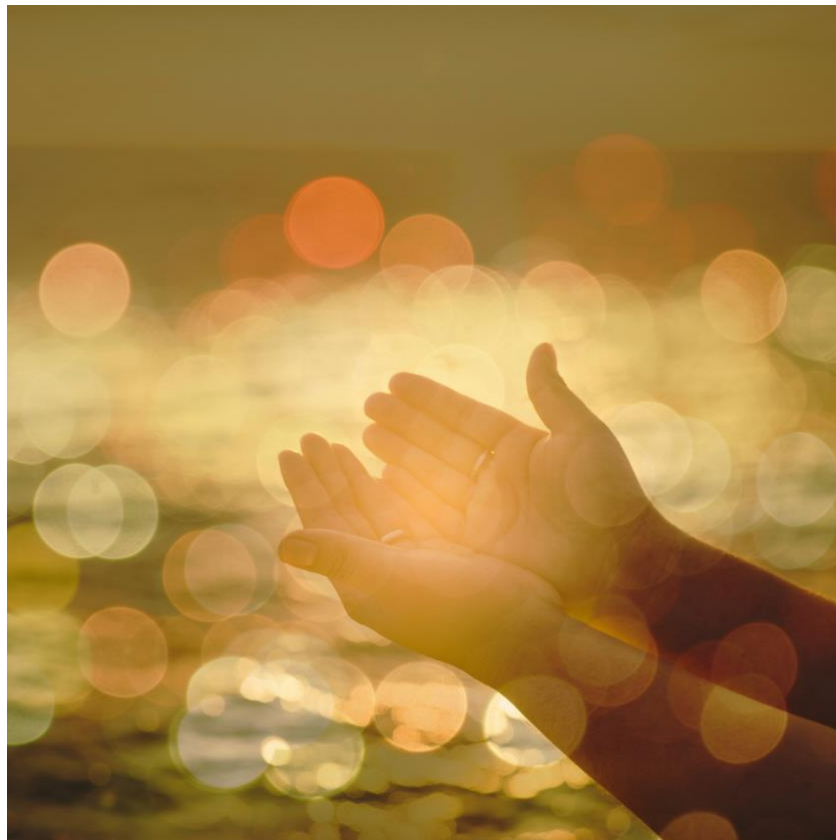
People often isolate themselves during tough times. But it can help to stay connected to positive friends and family members. Think about the people you know. Contact family members and friends. Be honest about what you need from them, whether it's housing, help with money, or just support and love. Find out what they expect from you.

"Best thing that can reduce anxiety is to have a plan. You don't have to be rigid with that plan, because you're going to get out and realize that the world isn't what you expected it to be." — Joe Joe

Prepare for Challenges

Before leaving prison, work on practicing patience, both with others and with yourself.

You will need to accept that things may not be perfect or easy. Unlike in prison where most things are determined for you, you will have to do most things for yourself, and you will encounter setbacks. You have to prepare mentally for them and forgive yourself if you make mistakes. You will probably have some awkward talks with people on the outside. Let yourself laugh them off. People in the outside world have awkward experiences all the time! You may think everyone will know you've just gotten out of prison, but they probably will not.



Patience is important on the outside. Things will not always go the way you want them to. Sometimes you will feel confused by how much things have changed since you went away. Go slow. Breathe. It is normal to feel stressed sometimes, but you don't want it to get out of hand.

Gather Your Documents

You will need your birth certificate, Social Security card, and ID on the outside. As your release date gets closer, you should start the process of getting them. It is harder to get them on the outside. Try to begin this process at least one year before you are released. For more information about the process and required documentation, see our Getting Your ID chapter in the guide.

As part of TDCJ’s reentry program, someone from the Rehabilitation Programs Division (RDP) may be on your unit to assist those eligible in ordering a replacement social security card, birth certificate, military service record, and state identification card. These documents will be issued to you at the time of your release.

Document Checklist

Item	Taken care of	Need to tackle	Not applicable
Social Security Card			
Birth Certificate			
Temporary ID			
State ID or Driver’s License			
Marriage License			
Divorce Decree			
Passport or Green Card			
Military Discharge			

“Work with clinical services as much as possible. As early as possible. Find out what programs, classes, or resources are available to prepare for release. Sometimes that stuff is hidden. Make inquiries into what necessary steps you must take to secure documents that would assist you with housing, identification, mental health services, as well as food and clothes and shelters in your area.” – Kilroy

Prepare for Your Job Search

If you are getting ready to leave prison, you’re probably thinking about getting a job. This is an area where you may hit many roadblocks and challenges. The good news is that there are employers who are willing to give you a chance. There are ways you can prepare while still in prison to find a good job. Be hopeful. Many people have found good jobs after incarceration. As long as you’re prepared, persistent, and have the right attitude you can find one too.

Build Experience

In the facility where you're locked up, can you earn certificates, learn new skills, or work? Any experience like this can help you find a job on the outside. They can also make you more confident and help you build skills you didn't know you had.

School is another good way to get ready for work on the outside. Enroll in school programs, from Adult Basic Education to college programs. School records can also show employers you are intelligent and dedicated. Try other things too. Parenting classes and other programs will give you new skills and confidence.

“If you sat at a table playing cards for ten years and now you want to come out and you want to go out and get yourself a job that’s paying \$18-20 an hour – well, be realistic. You’re not gonna do it. You’re not going to have that job because you didn’t do anything to prepare. What are you going to put on your resume, that you played cards for ten years?” —Anonymous

Write Your Resume

Another important thing you can do while you're in prison is to write your resume. You will have to create a resume during your CHANGES class before release, so you must take it seriously and do your best. A resume is a summary of your skills, strengths, and work experience. You will need a resume to search and apply for jobs. Your resume should have several parts:

1. Your name, address, and contact information. If you are not sure of your address yet, ask a friend or family member if you can use theirs.
2. Education. Your resume should have a list of schools you've attended. You can add any education you had in prison, especially if you earned any degrees or certificates.
3. Work experience. List your jobs, including volunteer work. Include where, when, and for how long you held each job.
4. Other professional skills. This includes certifications, technical skills, and languages you speak other than English.
5. Awards (optional). If you've ever received an award for your work, like employee of the month, or a scholarship, list them at the end of your resume.

Are you worried about what people will think when they see school or work you did in prison? You do not have to put those on your resume if it worries you. You can also leave out dates on your previous work experience so that potential employers do not see the time gap during your incarceration. It is also a great idea to mention skills you acquired while inside in your resume.

For information about how to find and apply for jobs once you are released, see the Employment chapter.

“Be ready to pivot. Be patient with yourself. You're eager to get out, eager to do all of those things. Be realistic with yourself, what you can really do, what is within your control. You're going to be facing a lot of things.” — Roberto

Find Housing Before Release

One of the most important decisions you will make is where to live after release.

Some people choose to live with family or friends after release. You will need to submit the address where you plan to live as part of your parole plan. The people you live with will need to fill out forms. Talk to them to make sure they understand the parole rules that you need to follow. Some of these rules will affect them, too. A parole officer may visit the home and decide if it's OK for you to stay there. See our Parole chapter for more information.

If you are not able to live with family members or friends upon release, you may need to find a halfway house (also called transitional housing). Halfway houses present some advantages, but they can also pose some challenges:

Advantages

Many halfway houses provide support services, such as employment help, case management, life skills training, and medical referrals. Having this support can be helpful while you navigate reentry.

Halfway houses can provide structure and community. They can help set you up for success. They can remove some unknowns and allow you to focus on your priorities.

If rent is required, it is usually cheaper than an apartment and includes bills, which will allow you to save money for when you move out on your own. Even if you have no money when released, many of these will work with you if you promise to get a job.

Challenges

The quality of halfway housing varies a lot, and different halfway houses may specialize in different things. Do your research. Find out about other people's experiences with a halfway house. Ask for information before committing.

Although many halfway houses are low-cost or even free, some charge very high fees. Be sure to ask about payment and the payment schedule.

Program rules and expectations vary widely. Many have strict rules. Depending on your needs, these rules may provide helpful structure, or they may feel punitive and strict. Make sure you understand the rules before you commit.

How to Find Halfway Housing

For help finding housing, our directory provides a list of different reentry organizations organized by county that may be able to connect you to housing. Here are a few websites that can help:

- [Transitionalhousing.org](https://www.transitionalhousing.org)
- [Homelesshelterdirectory.org](https://www.homelesshelterdirectory.org)
- [Shelterlistings.org](https://www.shelterlistings.org)
- [Soberhousedirectory.com](https://www.soberhousedirectory.com)



Applying to Halfway Houses

While the application process for each halfway house may be different, here are some general steps you may follow:

1. Fill out an application. Ask your re-entry case manager if they can help you or you can write to a halfway house to request one. The Chaplain sometimes has access to a list of halfway houses you can write or may have applications on hand. You may need to share documents like disciplinary history, convictions, programs, and letters of recommendation or support.
2. Interview. If you meet the requirements, the halfway house may schedule an interview to see if you are a good fit.
3. Waiting list. If you are accepted, they will give you a letter to show parole. You may have to wait to see if there is a bed available. This is one reason why some people apply to multiple halfway houses.
4. Payment. Another factor impacting your acceptance will be your ability to pay.
5. Transportation. When your release date is confirmed, usually a parole official will talk to the halfway house to make sure they have a space for you.

The Housing Assistance Program (THAP)

Texas has a housing assistance program available to certain people awaiting release from TDCJ. This program is only for people who have been approved for parole or mandatory supervision and are waiting for a halfway house placement. The program provides vouchers for temporary housing in a community-based housing facility in the county of your release. No application is necessary and those eligible will automatically be identified and notified of their eligibility by TDCJ.

Residential Reentry Centers

For those without an approved residence, there are two residential reentry centers in North Texas, one in Dallas and one in Fort Worth. There are two ways you can be placed in a residential reentry center:

1. People can be assigned to reentry centers as part of their parole.
2. Parole staff can refer you if you don't have an approved residence.

You can find more information about residential reentry centers on the [TDCJ website](#).

Finding the Right Fit

There are a lot of good and bad halfway houses out there. Here are a few questions you can ask people at the halfway house to see if it is a good fit for you:

- Who do you serve?
- How long can I stay?
- What is the cost? What is the payment schedule?
- What programs and services are offered? What will I be doing when I live there?
- Do you provide mental health or substance use treatment?
- What rules will I have to follow while I am there? What freedoms will I have?
- Is this a faith-based program? Will I be required to attend services?

Unfortunately, there are a lot of transitional houses that do not let in people who have been convicted of sex-based offenses, and some do not let in people who have been convicted of violent offenses. Our Housing After Release chapter has some advice about how to find housing if you have a sex-based offense.

Health Before Release

Planning for healthcare before you leave prison saves money and helps you avoid problems. There are a few steps you should take before you are released.

Enroll in Medicaid. Depending on your facility, you may be able to apply for Medicaid before you leave. Ask your case manager to help you get started. If you have a loved one with internet access, they may be able to help you apply at healthcare.gov. Once you submit your application, it takes 30 days to get insurance, so get started early! This is especially important if you have a health problem that requires treatment.

Enroll in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Food assistance program (it used to be called food stamps). Each month, money is put on a special debit card (LINK card). This card can be used to buy food from most grocery stores (and Amazon.com or Walmart.com, who deliver). Texas recently passed a bill that allows you to automatically apply for SNAP 6 months before release.

Get your health records. If you have family or friends on the outside, you may have them assist you with this process. You may need to fill out a form. Upon release, if you have an insurance healthcare provider you can ask them for a copy of your medical records.

Get your exams. Request a dental exam, an eye exam, and a physical exam before you leave prison. Start early (a year before release) in case they find something you will need to address.

Make a birth control and sexual health plan. If you plan to be sexually active after release, discuss birth control and safe sex during your physical exam. This may help you avoid unwanted pregnancy and STDs. Women should request a gynecological exam with a PAP smear and ask for a mammogram if over age 40.

Consider your options carefully. Some forms of birth control, like condoms, are easy to get and are fairly cheap. They need to be used every time you have sex and may not be as effective as other options. Other kinds of birth control require a prescription from a doctor or a medical procedure. When you have your physical exam, you may be able to request longer-term birth control options, like pills, patches, or intrauterine devices (IUDs). Implants or IUDs can protect you for several years from unwanted pregnancy.

No doctor should pressure you into a permanent or long-term birth control or sterilization procedure. Unfortunately, some doctors at prisons have pressured women to have hysterectomies (sterilization) and men to have vasectomies. While vasectomies are reversible, hysterectomies will prevent you from ever conceiving. Take time to ask questions and decide what is best for you. If you are feeling pressured, remember: it's your right to say no.

Make a medication plan. Many prisons offer people a 30 to 90-day supply of medication upon release. Generally, you will pick up your medications the day before you are released, but you may want to request these medications ahead of time, just to be safe. The doctor will usually give you a prescription so you can get more. Make a plan to get more medication after you leave. Set up an appointment with a doctor on the outside so that you don't run out. This can help you avoid going to the ER to get medications filled, which can be costly.

Plan for doctor visits after release. Before you are released, ask your case manager for a list of healthcare providers that accept Medicaid or low-cost community clinics. If you have a serious mental or physical health issue, be proactive and set up appointments ahead of time. A counselor or family member may be able to set up the appointment for you.

You may have been in a drug or alcohol treatment program while in prison. Continue treatment after release to make sure you don't relapse. Ask your doctor, clinical services, or a family member to help you find a treatment center. Try to schedule the appointment for a few days after your release. Our directory includes a list of many low-cost health clinics and substance-use treatment centers.

For more information, see our Health chapter, our Trauma and Mental Health chapter, and our Substance Use chapter.

Health Checklist

	Taken care of	Need to tackle	Where to get help
Enroll in Medicaid			
Enroll in SNAP			
Get health records			
Physical exam			
Eye exam			
Dental exam			
Contraception plan			
Medication plan			
Set up doctor visits after release			
Set up mental health treatment after release			
Set up substance use treatment after release			

Parole

If you are just getting out of prison, you are probably on parole. This means you will be supervised by the Texas Department of Corrections and probably have to follow some specific rules. This can be frustrating. It's hard enough putting your life back together. Having to follow these other rules can make things harder. It's very important to be patient with yourself and take it one step at a time. A lot of people finish their parole and you can too! Here are some things that can help you be successful.



Parole Rules

The Parole Board and Parole officers will decide what rules you have to follow while on parole. Your parole officer will give you a document that shows these rules. Your parole officer will also ask you to sign it. You need to understand these rules and what is expected of you. Read this document carefully and ask questions when you don't understand. Some common rules of parole are listed below:

1. Report as instructed to your parole officer.
2. Obey all municipal, county, state, and federal laws.
3. Get your parole officer's permission before changing residence.
4. Obtain your parole officer's written permission before leaving the state.
5. Do not own, possess, sell, or control any firearm, prohibited weapon, or illegal weapon as defined by the Texas Penal Code; not unlawfully carry any weapon; and not use or attempt or threaten to use any tool, implement, or object or threaten to cause any bodily injury.
6. Do not enter into any agreement to act as an informer or special agent for any law enforcement agency without specific written approval by the Parole Division.
7. Follow all rules of your parole, whether ordered at release and listed on your release certificate or ordered at a later date.
8. Follow all rules of parole and laws if you are facing revocation, including appearance at any revocation hearing, or proceeding.
9. Pay the Parole Division monthly supervision and administrative fees for each month you are required to report to your parole officer.
10. Make payments towards any outstanding fines, court costs, or fees against you at the time of sentencing.

Note: When you are released on parole you will be tested for drugs and alcohol – everyone is. You will likely have to take additional tests, maybe frequently or maybe occasionally. This depends on the results of the first test and your prior substance abuse history. Your parole officer might have you take an unscheduled test as well. This is to see if you are following the rules of parole.

Reporting to Your Parole Officer: What You Need to Know

You must call the parole office number you were given within 24 hours after release. The people who are hosting you may have to complete a document to be approved to host you in their home. This document may come in the mail or your PO may bring it when he or she comes to visit the home.

Before you leave the prison, make sure you have the parole office number. Remember – the State of Texas expects you to get in touch with your parole. If you were not given a phone number to call, call a local parole office immediately upon release.

Your reporting requirements are based on your level of supervision as determined by the Texas Risk Assessment (TRAS) tool. You can ask your PO what your supervision level is. Except for those on a specialized caseload, the general reporting guidelines are:

Risk Level:	Reporting Requirements:
High	One office contact every month. One home or field contact every month. One unscheduled home or field contact every month.
Moderate	One office contact every month. One home or field contact every quarter.
Low Moderate	One office contact every month. One home contact every six months.
Low	One electronic contact each quarter. Annual home verification.

Parole Rules and Violations

The Parole Board can require you to follow different rules. Sometimes these rules will be specific to you and your needs. Some rules are pretty common, though. If you break the rules, you could be sent back to prison. If something happens that might make it look like you broke a rule, contact your PO right away to explain what happened. You must be diligent to safeguard your freedom; it is up to you.

If you are charged with breaking your parole rules, a lawyer may help you with your case, however, you will have to find and pay for it yourself. The lawyer can help you make the case that you should remain on the outside.



Parole Violations: What You Need to Know

If you are on parole, you need to follow some rules. If you break a small rule, like being late for a meeting, you might get a warning letter. If you break a big rule, like committing a new crime or running away from your parole officer, you might get arrested and sent back to prison. You have the right to a hearing before that happens. The hearing will decide if you did something wrong and will recommend what should happen next. You might get to stay on parole with some changes, or you might have to go to a different facility, or you might lose your parole completely. To learn more about the parole violation process you can visit:

Sex Offense Registry

The State of Texas requires people convicted of certain offenses to register for the sex offender registry. This registry is an online database that anyone can see. Anyone can look up photos of people on the registry, their name, address, birthday, conviction, and victim age and gender.

If you do have to register, you are likely to face additional challenges. People will make hurtful comments. It will be very hard to find housing and a job. Focus on what you can control and know that you are more than your conviction.

Make sure you know and understand the rules about this registry. It can be very easy to make a mistake and go back to prison or jail. Some people have gotten into trouble because they didn't know all the rules or missed deadlines to register again. Talk with your parole officer and ask questions to make sure you know everything you need to do. Here are some general tips to help you avoid any mistakes:

Individuals on the Sex Offender Registry: What You Need to Know

Who is Required to Register?

1. Any person with a "reportable conviction or adjudication."
2. Any person required to register as a condition of parole or release to mandatory supervision.
3. Any person required to register as a condition of community supervision.
4. Any person who is required to register under the laws of another state.

Registration Requirements:

1. Register with the local law enforcement of the city you reside in. If you do not reside in a city, you will need to register with the local law enforcement authority of the county you reside in.
2. Provide the local law enforcement agency the following information that includes, but is not limited to: name, address, color photograph, and the offense you were adjudicated for.
3. You will be required to periodically report to the local law enforcement authority to verify the accuracy of the registration information.
4. You must promptly report certain changes in the registration information as those changes occur.



After You Get Out

Getting Your ID

Some people can get an ID before they get out. If you didn't get an ID yet, this should be one of the first things you do. There are three types of personal documents that are important – a birth certificate, social security card, and state ID or driver's license. Let's talk about each one and the easiest and fastest way to get them!

Birth Certificate

If you already have a copy of your birth certificate, you're off to a good start! If you don't have your birth certificate, don't worry. Here are the best ways to get a copy of yours:

- [You can order your Texas Birth Certificate here.](#)
- You can also call or go to [the Vital Records Office in the county where you were born.](#)
- If you were born outside of Texas, [visit this website run by the CDC for information about vital records in every state.](#)

Copies of your birth certificates in Texas cost \$22.00 (free for military veterans). Mail-in requests can be paid using a check, cashier's check, or money order made out to DSHS Vital Statistics. Online requests can be paid by credit or debit card.

If you are having difficulty getting your birth certificate ask your parole officer at your first visit and see if they can assist you with the process.

Social Security Card

Having a social security card can be important for many things, but maybe the most important in the beginning is that you need a copy of your social security card to get a state ID or driver's license. So, if you don't have a social security card, getting one will be your first step before applying for an ID or driver's license. There is no cost associated with getting a copy of your social security card. Here are the quickest way to get your social security card

Step 1: [You might be eligible to start the application process here.](#)

Step 2: [Locate your closest Social Security Office for hours and contact information here.](#)

Step 3: Bring the required identifying documentation with you including at least two (2) of the following:

- Birth certificate
- Driver's License/State ID card
- U.S. Passport
- Employee/School identification card
- U.S. Military identification card

Please see the SSA website for a complete list of accepted documents:
<https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/ss5doc.htm>

“It took me seven months to get my Social Security card and ID; this time would have been cut in half if I would have been given the information shared here.” -Antonio

State ID or Driver's License

Once you have a copy of your birth certificate and social security card, you can now apply for a state ID or driver's license. This is an important step because you need an ID or driver's license for so many other things! Let's talk about the best ways to get each. You don't need both, so please think about which one is best for you. The easiest way to decide whether to get an ID or driver's license is whether you plan to drive a car soon. If you drive without a license, you might not be able to get a driver's license for a while, have to serve some jail time or have your car seized.

New applicants, or those whose license/ID expired more than two years from the date of application must apply in person at a Department of Public Safety (DPS) office to be photographed. Please note that some DPS offices are closed on weekends and you might have to find a location outside of the county you reside. Additionally, if you do not see availability online at your local DPS, this means there is no current availability to schedule an appointment.

Appointment Tips:

- [Schedule an appointment online at your local Texas Department of Public Safety \(DPS\) office.](#)
- During weekday mornings—around 7:15 a.m.—DPS lists available same day appointments online.
- If you are able to, you can also show up to your local DPS office before they open and try to wait for a same-day appointment, although there is no guarantee that they will be able to see you.
- If going in person, you can use a self-service kiosk in the DPS office to schedule an appointment if one is available that day, or to schedule a future appointment.
- Check to make sure you bring all required documents to your appointment. [Visit this website for a list of required documents.](#)
- [For more information regarding your appointment, visit the DPS website.](#)

Suspensions. The State of Texas can suspend driver's licenses for a few reasons. If your driver's license is suspended, you can get it back after the suspension period is over, but you may also have to complete some requirements and pay a fee to get your license back.

Revocation. Having your license revoked means your driver's license is taken away. Driver's licenses are often revoked for more serious DUIs. For example, if someone was injured or killed because the driver was drunk or using drugs. If your license is revoked, you can get a new one. But you will have to wait for some time.

If your license was revoked because someone was killed while you were driving, you may not be able to get a new one. But you should still check to be sure.

Getting Your License Back. Getting your license back after it was suspended or revoked can take several steps. It's best to visit the Texas Department of Public Safety website to find out what you need to do to get your license back. This information can be found [here on the DPS website](#).

For a step-by-step guide on eligibility and how to obtain your driver's license/state ID see pgs. 19-49 of [the Legal Guide to Reentry, which you can find at this website](#).

Signing up for the Selective Service

When you're getting your ID or license, you may have to sign up for the military draft. You will have to sign up for the draft if you are:

- Male
- Between 18 and 25 years old
- A US citizen or an immigrant

Signing up for the draft does not mean that you are in the military or that you will be drafted into the military. This may only happen if there is a serious national crisis.

Resources to Meet Your Basic Needs

This section should help you find places and ways to meet your basic needs. It is important to remember that it might take some time to find good places to live or ways to get food. Stick with it and be patient with yourself! There are a lot of places and people that want to help you. Here are a few to help you get started.

The State of Texas has several programs that can help you with your basic needs. It is a good idea to apply for these programs soon after your release. If you need help applying for these programs, you can visit a hospital, non-profit organization, church, or other service provider.

You may have to meet some requirements to get these benefits. Some programs help people who are a certain age or who don't make a lot of money. But, don't worry! There are a lot of programs and you're sure to find some help! When you sign up for benefits, make sure to ask if there are other services you can get, like help with rent, bills, or childcare. Here are the best places to get help with your basic needs in North Texas.

This chapter has two main sections:

- How to apply for government benefits to meet your basic needs
- Specific benefits and other programs that can help you meet your needs

How to Apply for Government Benefits

The following resources will help you identify benefits for which you might be eligible:

- [Your Texas Benefits](#) is a website that can help you determine your eligibility for certain benefit programs and help you apply for these services.
- Visit [a nearby Health and Human Services Commission \(HHSC\) Benefits Office](#) to apply for services.
- For those on parole, please ask your parole officer if you need help accessing services related to health care and obtaining health insurance.

- For those on federal supervision, [the Northern District of Texas has limited funds/resources available for individuals who meet certain eligibility criteria, including emergency service.](#)
- Call 2-1-1 or visit [their website](#) to find information about available local resources.
 - Press “1” to learn about local services such as food and housing assistance.
 - Press “2” to learn about state benefits and programs including SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Specific Benefits and Programs

Health Care and Health Insurance

- *Medicaid.* Program for people who make little to no money to pay for medicine, doctor appointments, hospital visits, etc.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Affordable Care Act Marketplace.* If you are not eligible for Medicaid, you can search for low-cost health insurance through the Healthcare Marketplace.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Medicare.* This program provides health insurance to people over 65 and people with a disability.
 - [Apply here.](#)
 - Helpline: 800-252-9240
- *Medicare Savings Program (MSP).* Helps to pay for all or some of Medicare monthly payments for elderly people and people with disabilities.
 - [Apply here.](#)

- Aging and Disability Resource Centers. Provides personal and nursing care to individuals who are older or have disabilities.
 - [Apply here.](#)

Income Support and Support for Daily Bills

- *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*. Monthly cash payment assistance for families in need.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. Food assistance program (it used to be called food stamps). Each month, money is put on a special debit card (LINK card). This card can be used to buy food from most grocery stores.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program (CEAP)*. Provides help in paying utility bills.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Social Security Retirement Benefits*. These benefits are for people older than 62. To be eligible, you must have worked or paid Social Security taxes for at least 10 years before you went to prison.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*. These benefits are for people over 65 and adults and children who have a disability.
 - [Apply here.](#)
- *Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)*. This program gives money to adults and certain family members with disabilities who have worked for many years.
 - [Apply here.](#)

Other Assistance Programs

Type of Assistance	Find out more and apply
Rental assistance	https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness/emergency-rental-assistance.shtml
Utility bill assistance	https://texasutilityhelp.com/
Internet bill assistance	https://www.getinternet.gov/
Discount drug card	https://www.goodrx.com/discount-card
Free and discount phones	Lifeline Support Safelink Wireless

“I came home after ten years, I went to a homeless shelter and three days later I had a job. A week and a half later, I had an apartment. My first paycheck, I got a cheap studio apartment. So you can do it. Don’t let your feelings from being incarcerated judge who you are and what you can do. Because you can make it.” — Tony C.

“The advice I would give is to be patient. Things in the outside world move very quickly and I think that you have to be aware and accepting that you don’t have to catch up.” —Edmund B.

Other Places to Go for Help

I need help with...	Where to get help	Website or phone number
Food	Food pantries, soup kitchens	Find one on this website.
Healthcare and dental care	Community health clinics and dental clinics are cheaper or even free. You can use them even if you don't have insurance. Go to an emergency room if you have an emergency.	Find one on this website.
Substance use treatment	Support groups, treatment programs	Call the SAMHSA National Helpline at (800) 662-4357. For a support group, go to aa.org (Alcoholics Anonymous) or na.org (Narcotics Anonymous).
Housing	Emergency housing, transitional housing	TDHCA website.
Mental health (emergency)	Suicide hotline, hospital emergency room	Call the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. Call 911 if you are having an emergency.
Mental health (non-emergency)	Mental health clinics that offer free or low-cost services	Find clinics on this website.

Housing After Release

Finding a place to live is one of the most important parts of setting yourself up to be successful after release. Finding a place that fits your needs can be hard, though. Here are some questions you might want to ask about housing:

1. Is it close to my work and family?
2. Can I afford it?
3. Is it stable? (You can stay there as long as you need.)

If released on parole, you will be paroled to the county where you resided at the time of offense or county of conviction. However, this can vary based on circumstances like employment or location of family members or convictions of certain sex crimes. While under parole supervision, you must have an approved residence.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Emergency Housing and Homelessness
- Affordable/Supportive Housing
- Private Housing
- Your Legal Rights
- Housing for People on the Sex Offense Registry

Emergency Housing

If you find yourself without a place to stay, there are emergency shelters. Some shelters are safe houses for victims of domestic abuse. Some shelters may have certain restrictions—restrictions on pets, on particular genders, or for people convicted of sex and/or violent offenses. Many shelters offer food, laundry, and support services to help you find more permanent housing.

If you need emergency housing or find yourself on the streets, the following resources can help:

- The Texas Housing Assistance Line 1-855-802-0014 provides 24/7 help to people facing housing instability or homelessness.
- Call 2-1-1 or visit <http://www.211.org>
 - Provides Information on local shelters and other social services. Operates 24 hours a day/7 days a week.
- Texas Homeless Network: <http://www.thn.org>
 - Directory of organizations offering assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness. Phone Number: 1-800-531-0828.
- [Homeless Shelters Directory](#)
- [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)
- [National Coalition for the Homeless](#)

Affordable/Supportive Housing

You must apply through your local **public housing authority (PHA)**.

[A complete list of Local PHA \(by city in Texas\) is available on this website.](#)

Agencies for specific local communities

- [Dallas County](#)
- [City of Dallas](#)
- [Denton County](#)
- [City of Fort Worth](#)



Private Housing

Private housing can be easier to find than public housing because there is more of it. However, it also costs more. Private housing can be found online and in the classified section of newspapers. Some websites include:

- www.apartments.com
- www.zillow.com
- www.forrent.com
- www.craigslist.org
- www.trulia.com

You are likely to run into barriers because of your background. It may take a while to find a landlord who will rent to you. Large property management firms almost always conduct background checks, so you may have better luck with units in smaller complexes or in private homes. You can ask the apartment if they do background checks and how far these go back and then disclose your conviction depending on how far they check.

Others who have come home from prison before you may be your best source of information. If you are part of a reentry program, use it as a resource. Use your network of friends and family. They may know of places where you can stay.

Renting an Apartment

Once you've found an apartment, call the landlord and set up a time to view it. Arrive on time and dress nicely. You want to give a good first impression.

At your visit, you may be asked to fill out an application and pay an application fee. The application will ask for information such as your employer, rent history, and current address. You may also be asked for references—people who can vouch for you, like employers or church leaders.

The application may also ask about your criminal history. Many landlords conduct background checks. You may worry that if you share your history, you may hurt your

chances of getting the apartment. Even though this may be true, we suggest that you be upfront if they ask. It may not disqualify you.

Questions you might ask a landlord:

- What is the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- Is there an application fee?
- Are utilities included?
- When is the rent due?
- What is the parking like?
- Are tenants able to make changes (e.g., paint the walls)?
- Is there an additional cost for pets/additional family members?
- Is there a background check, and if so, who would be excluded from eligibility?
- What are the terms of the lease?
- What is your timeline?

Warning: *If anyone asks you for money before you have even seen the apartment, you are probably being scammed. Wait to pay anything until after you have seen the apartment.*

If a landlord agrees to rent to you, you will sign a lease or a rental agreement.

- A **lease** is usually a year-long commitment, and you agree to pay a certain amount each month for the whole year.
- A **rental agreement** is typically month-by-month. After 30 days, both you or the landlord are free to back out or change the agreement.

Read it carefully before signing or paying any fees. It is legally binding. You won't be able to back out once you have signed. Keep a copy in a safe place.

Security deposits. Many landlords require one to two month's rent as well as a security deposit before you move in. The security deposit shows that you are serious about renting the apartment. If you choose not to move into the apartment, the landlord keeps this money. Ask for a receipt for the security deposit and any other fees you pay.

When you move out, your security deposit will be used to cover any damages to the apartment that you caused. It's a good idea to take pictures of anything that is damaged when you move in so that you can show that you didn't cause it. Your landlord should not use your security deposit to pay for the regular wear and tear of living in your apartment but for items like a broken light fixture or carpet damage. You should receive a receipt for damages when you move out. Any leftover money from the security deposit should be mailed to you within 30 to 45 days.

Breaking a lease. If you need to move out before your lease ends, you can do so, but you will have to pay a fee. The amount that you pay should be listed in the lease, so read it carefully. You may have to keep paying rent until they find someone else to rent the apartment.

Help with Rent

If you need help paying rent or utilities, there may be programs in your community that can help. Many of these programs have long waitlists, so it is important that you apply as soon as possible. Here is a list of a few rental assistance programs:

Housing and Rental Assistance Programs

Agency	Help with	Contact Info
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development	Subsidized housing, Section 8 Vouchers	https://www.hud.gov/states/texas/renting
Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs	Finding reduced rent apartments, Rent payment help, Legal and eviction help	https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/texas.htm
Texas Low-Income Housing Information Service	Supports low-income Texans seeking to obtain affordable housing	https://texashousers.org/

Your Legal Rights

Important Housing Laws

Below we've listed some of the housing laws to be aware of. If a landlord breaks one of these laws, you can file a complaint. These laws apply if you are renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, or seeking housing assistance.

Federal Fair Housing Act

- Cannot discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), family status, and disability.

US Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Housing Act Guidelines

In 2016, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released guidance for how the Fair Housing Act applies to people who have arrest or conviction records.

- Arrest records and convictions can be used to deny people housing, but landlords who automatically refuse someone with a criminal record may violate the law.
- In 2022, HUD released additional guidance for housing providers, encouraging them to not consider criminal history. If they do, they should consider each individual's circumstances instead of excluding all individuals with convictions.

State and City-Specific Laws

- Depending on where you live there may be additional laws that protect you from discrimination.

Additional Information About Your Legal Rights

Eviction. Are you worried about getting kicked out of your apartment? There may be organizations in your community that can help. Search the name of your community and keywords like "eviction help" or "housing resources." HUD offers [information about eviction on their website](#), and you can find your local office [in their online directory here](#).

Housing Discrimination. If you have been discriminated against, there are several ways you can file a complaint:

- You can file a complaint through the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency. Submit the complaint as soon as possible. Call them toll-free at (800) 669-9777 or (800) 877-8339, or email ComplaintsOffice05@hud.gov.
- You can file a complaint with the state where you live, possibly the Department of Human Rights.
- You can file a complaint in the city where you live. You may be able to file a grievance at your city's Human Relations Commission or similar agency.

Legal Assistance. Here are a few resources to help:

- [Legal assistance for at-risk renters](#)
- [Eviction laws database](#)

Housing for People on the Sex Offense Registry

Unfortunately, there are often many housing restrictions for people on the sex offense registry. It can be very difficult to find housing that meets supervision requirements and has a landlord that will accept tenants who are on the registry. We wish we had better news, but the reality is it is hard for people on registries to find housing.

We know of many people who are required to register who have not been able to be paroled because they could not find housing. Some people have even stayed past the end of their prison sentence because they don't have a place to stay.

Still, there is hope. You may be able to live with family members, or there may be transitional houses in your state that serve people on the registry. You also may be able to find private housing. Have patience and be in frequent communication with your parole or community supervision officer as you navigate housing challenges. Whenever possible, seek support from local organizations that may be able to help.

Help and Advocacy. We encourage you to reach out to organizations in your community for people with sex offense convictions if they exist. Here are a few to get you started:

- <https://sexoffenderonestopresource.com/search-by-state/texas-resources/>
- <https://sexoffenderhope.org/>
- Dallas County:
 - [BBAM Foundation \(males, adult victims only\)](#)
 - [Forgiven Felons \(males, no offense restrictions\):](#)
 - [Free Man House \(males and females, no offense restrictions\)](#)
 - [Home for You \(males and females, adult victims only\):](#)
- Hunt County:
 - Beacons of Grace Ministry provides faith-based housing: Phone 903-513-9640.
- Tarrant County:
 - [Hope Prison Ministries \(males\)](#)
 - [New Name Ministries \(males, no offense restrictions\)](#)
 - [Under the Son Outreach \(males, no offense restrictions\)](#)
 - [United House Ministry \(males, no offense restrictions\)](#)

Employment

You will probably hear a lot of discouraging talk about how hard it can be to find a job with a criminal record. Certain types of jobs and companies are willing to hire people with records. Be patient with yourself and don't give up! We know that finding a job is important, so this chapter covers the following topics:

- Employment Resources
- Job planning
- Looking for jobs
- Your legal rights
- Unemployment benefits



Employment Resources

Finding a job and building a career is hard, especially with a criminal record. We strongly suggest you find people or programs to help you. Here are a few places to start:

[Workforce Solutions for North Texas](#). Assists with job training and finding jobs.

Employment counselors assist with career counseling, resume preparation, and interviewing.

[Texas Workforce Commission](#). Resources for career planning, skills building, and finding jobs.

- For **individuals with disabilities**, the [TWC provides a Vocational Rehabilitation Program](#) to assist with finding and keeping a job
- Texas has the [Website for Work](#) program that matches individuals with potential employers. You will need to register with your local workforce solutions office.
- Talk to your **parole officer**, and check the bulletin board at your local parole office. Jobs, transitional living homes, and apartments are frequently listed here.

Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative (T.O.R.I.). TORI is a non-profit, faith-based organization that provides many reentry services including employment assistance. *Unfortunately, they do not offer help to people on the sex offense registry.* To enroll in the program call the intake specialist at 214-941-13255 x 101. To learn more visit: <https://medc-tori.org/>

Goodwill Job Resource Centers. Provide full job search assistance in North Texas.

- [Dallas](#)
- [Fort Worth/Denton](#)

[Cornbread Hustle](#). Staffing agency for individuals with criminal records. Also provides a 12-week “Starting Over” program.

[Dallas FreshStart Employment Program](#). Program for eligible individuals with criminal records to gain full-time employment with the City of Dallas:

[Dallas Dress for Success](#). Provides support and professional clothing to women to succeed inside and outside the workplace

“No matter what, don’t stop persevering.” –Anonymous

Job Planning

For a lot of people who leave prison, the goal is to get any job that pays, even if it's not a job you want. Remember – you don't have to do this job forever, but it can help you get back on your feet. It can lead to a better job in the future.

“I thought I'd be prepared because I had my resume in hand. As it turns out, you need several resumes, adjusted to different jobs, and the ability to write cover sheets on the fly.” —Pablo

It's good to explore different careers when looking for jobs to meet your basic needs. Think about what careers match your interests and skills. Look for jobs that are in demand where you can earn the best money possible. Learn about any training or certification you might need.

It's a good idea to spend some time making a plan. A lot of the programs listed above in “employment resources” have career counseling that can help you. Here are some other ways to get help with planning to find a good job.

The following resources will provide you with information about the types of jobs that are in demand, the type of work that is more likely to be available:

- The [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) describes hundreds of occupations, duties, training and education requirements, and expected earnings.
- [Texas Career Check](#) provides information about career options in Texas
- [The Texas Workforce Commission](#) offers information about the labor market in Texas
- [Workforce Solutions of North Central Texas](#) provides more local information about the job market.



To learn more about self-employment and starting your own business in Texas visit the following resources:

- <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/sls/forms/Small-Business-Tool-Kit.pdf>
- <https://www.txnp.uscourts.gov/content/self-employment>

Also, consider reading “Take Charge of Your Future.” This guide for formerly incarcerated people will help you take steps to get education and training for a career. It was developed by the US Department of Education. Request a FREE copy by calling (877) 433-7827 or emailing edpubs@edpubs.ed.gov. [You can access it online here.](#)

You can also use the worksheet on the next page to explore some of your career interests.

Job Planning Worksheet

Fill out this worksheet alone, with a career counselor, or a trusted friend or family member.

What am I good at? Knowing your strengths is an important first step.

What are my weaknesses? Everyone has them. What kinds of things are hard for you to do? What things don't come naturally to you? Are there tasks that are physically or emotionally difficult for you?

What do I know how to do? Take some time to think about the skills you already have. This could include skills you learned on the job, in prison programs, or by caring for family members.

Check some of the things you like to do:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like to work with people. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like communicating with others. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like working with food. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like making a difference. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like working with animals. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like helping people. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like routine. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like helping people who are sick. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like using my hands. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like being part of a team. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like working with computers. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like being my own boss. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like solving problems. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like being a leader. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like building things. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like variety in the things I do. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like being creative. | <input type="checkbox"/> I like routines and predictability. |

Jobs that match my skills and interests	Are there a lot of openings?	Is special training needed?	What is the average hourly wage?

How will my criminal record impact my ability to get a job in these fields?

Based on my interests and skills, what is my short-term career goal?

Based on my interests and skills, what is my long-term career goal?

How can I reach my goal? What do I need to do? List the training or experience you may need.

Where can I go for help to reach my goal? List any family, friends, job centers, training programs, reentry programs, or community colleges that can help.

Looking for Jobs

It's a good idea to use the resources and worksheet above to think about what jobs you might have the best chance at getting, but please don't sell yourself short. Be confident in yourself and your abilities. Remember, sometimes you can get the training you need on the job.

You will probably have to apply for several jobs before you get hired. Don't lose patience, though! You've already dealt with a lot of difficult things. You can do this too! Here are a few resources to help you look for jobs, write resumes, and prepare for interviews:

Online. There are some websites where you can search for jobs. Some of the most popular websites are listed below:

- <https://www.monster.com/>
- <https://www.indeed.com/>
- <https://www.careerbuilder.com/>
- [Work in Texas \(TWC\)](#)

There are also some websites focused on second-chance jobs, specifically for people with a criminal history:

- <https://www.honestjobs.com/>
- <https://jailstojobs.org/second-chance-employers-network/>
- <https://jobsthathirefelons.org/>



Job Fairs. To find in-person and virtual job fairs around the state visit the [Texas Workforce Commission website](#)

Tips for Writing Cover Letters/Resumes. Check out these resources to help you write a cover letter and resume for your job applications:

- <https://hbr.org/2014/02/how-to-write-a-cover-letter>
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/
- <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/job-hunting-with-criminal-record>
- <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/resume-dilemma-criminal-record>

Interview Tips. For help with your job interviews, including ones that happen online you can explore the following resources:

- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/job-interview-tips-how-to-make-a-great-impression>
- <https://hbr.org/2021/11/10-common-job-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer-them>
- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/zoom-interview>

Unemployment Benefits

You are not eligible for unemployment benefits right after your release. If you find a job and then lose that job through no fault of your own, like a layoff, you may qualify for unemployment benefits. To find out if you're eligible and to apply for unemployment, visit the [Texas Workforce Commission website](#).

Your Legal Rights

It is important to know what legal rights you have when applying for and interviewing for jobs. The law protects you in certain ways from being discriminated against based on your criminal record. Here are the major legal rights that protect you while looking for jobs.

The **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** is a federal agency that enforces federal laws prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. These laws apply to all job applicants and include the following issues:

Background checks. Employers who wish to do a background check must:

- Get the applicant's or employee's written consent ahead of time.
- Tell the applicant if the report will be used for employment decisions.
- Give the applicant or employee a copy of the report before taking adverse action (like not hiring an applicant or firing an employee) based on the report.
- Inform the applicant or employee of their right to review and dispute the report.

Employment Denial. The EEOC cannot prohibit employers from obtaining or using arrest or conviction records. However, the EEOC does ensure that arrest and conviction records are not used in a way that discriminates against a person because of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. EEOC guidance suggests employers limit their questions about arrest or conviction records to records that are job-related. Factors employers could consider include:

- The seriousness of the offense.
- How much time has passed since the offense?
- The nature of the job (location, supervision & interaction with others).

Employers can still choose candidates with more or better experience, but the EEOC discourages the use of irrelevant criminal history when making employment decisions. If you believe you have been discriminated against, you can file a complaint by mail, telephone (800) 669-4000, or in person at an EEOC office: <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

Texas's "7-Year Rule": If a job pays \$75,000 or less per year, criminal arrests and convictions that are more than seven years old cannot be included in a criminal background check. **NOTE:** This rule does not apply to certain jobs including in-home services (like plumbers, electricians, delivery drivers), insurance providers, and local and state governments.

Clean Slate Texas is a coalition focused on getting criminal record sealed. See if you are eligible for a clean slate in Texas: <https://www.cleanslatetexas.org/am-i-eligible>

Conflicts and Safety at Work

If you are being harassed or discriminated against because of your race, sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation, your civil rights are being violated. If you are comfortable enough where you are working, you can speak to Human Resources about what you have experienced. Sometimes it's better to seek help elsewhere.

Some resources can support you. If you have been sexually harassed, you can contact RAINN, the National Sexual Assault Hotline, at (800) 656-4673 for personal support. They can help you file a complaint.

It is a good idea to get a lawyer before starting a lawsuit. There are pro bono lawyers who can help without charging you; see our Legal Matters chapter for more information. If you are ready to file a complaint on your own, you may do so at the **US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division**.



If you are working in an unsafe place, you can file a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) by calling (800) 321-6742 or [online](#). If you think that your workplace may be unsafe but don't have proof, you may notify your employer in writing. If they do not resolve the issue, you may then file a complaint with OSHA. It is illegal for employers to retaliate against you for filing a complaint.

Of course, it is hard to address these problems if you are in an insecure position and need to keep your job. If you can talk to a pro bono lawyer, they might be able to give you advice so that you are not put in a worse situation. See our Legal Matters chapter for more information.

Education

A lot of people think about going back to school after they leave prison, whether it's to finish high school, earn a GED, or take classes in college. There are many benefits to going back to school. It can help you learn more about the world you reentered. It can also help you meet people and get better jobs with better pay.

This section has information about different education programs, like:

- High school equivalency programs, like the ABE and GED
- Job training programs, like vocational training and apprenticeship
- College
- Paying for your education

It is never too late to learn or work toward earning your high school or college degree! Learning can even make you feel happier and more fulfilled. Remember – you don't have to go to school full-time. Many of the programs described below will help you work toward your degree while taking classes part-time.

High School Equivalency – ABE and GED Programs

Adult Basic Education (ABE)/High School Equivalency Programs

Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs can help you get better at reading, writing, math, listening, and speaking. These are basic skills that can help you find jobs and do your job well! Usually, you can find ABE programs at adult schools, career centers, libraries, and community colleges. These programs are free or cost only a little. There are companies, like Kaplan and ELS Language Centers, that offer ABE programs, but these charge more money.

ABE programs can also help you learn English or prepare for the GED. Here are some places where you can find ABE programs in the North Texas region:

- [Adult Literacy Programs](#)
- [Adult Learner Programs](#)
- [Dallas College WorkReadyU](#): Free ESL classes, GED classes, Job Training:
- Check the School District and/or Community College closest to you as many offer free Adult Education Programs.

General Education Development (GED) Test

The General Education Development (GED) test is like a high school diploma. If you did not graduate from high school, you can take this test and it will count on your resume as a diploma. A GED or high school diploma is a requirement for most jobs.

The test will have questions about things you would learn in high school. The GED is not an easy test. You will probably need to study before you take it. Below is some information about how to prepare for and take the GED in Texas.

Getting a GED

- [Steps to earn your GED](#)
- **GED prep:**
 - [Texas Education Agency](#)
 - [Dallas Library](#)

GED/High School Diploma. If you have your GED/High School Diploma and need a copy of the certificate or scores you can access it through the [Texas Education Agency at this website](#). You will need to provide your full name, date of birth, and social security number.

Job Training Programs

Vocational training programs help you learn important job skills. You can learn things like welding, car repair, plumbing, and more. You can find vocational training programs at many community colleges, technical colleges, and trade schools.

Vocational programs help you get some experience and see if you like the work. A lot of vocational programs will help place you in entry-level jobs or apprenticeships after you finish. Remember, apprenticeships will pay you while you learn the job. Below is some information that will help you find vocational programs and apprenticeships in North Texas:

Vocational Training and Apprenticeships

- [Find occupational and vocational training](#)
- [Texas Workforce Commission Apprenticeship Program](#)
- [Dallas College Workforce Training](#)
- [North Texas Job Corps](#)

College

Taking college classes and earning degrees can be a good way to get jobs you want and ones that pay better. There are a lot of options when it comes to college. A good place to find information about what college or program is right for you, tuition information, and tips to help you get started is [College for All Texans](#).

Community college. If you haven't been in school for a while, you might want to start at a community college. Community colleges are less expensive and offer a lot of different classes and degrees. Some community colleges have programs where you can get a GED and college credit at the same time. Community colleges usually offer associate degrees, certificate programs, and workforce training. You can find the community college closest to you on the [Texas Higher Education Data website](#).

Four-year college. Many people who want to earn a 4-year Bachelor's degree start by going to community college for a year or two. Then they transfer to a 4-year college to finish their degree. You can save a lot of money by going to a community college for the first few years.

You have to earn a certain number of credits to get a 4-year degree. Some of these credits have to be in general classes like science, math, and history. If you can take these classes at a community college and then transfer to a 4-year college, your credit for these classes can transfer over. Make sure to check that your credits for courses at a community college will transfer to a 4-year college before you take them. Below is some information about how to apply for college and get help paying for classes.

Applying for College

Most four-year colleges in Texas use the common application found on [the Apply Texas webpage](#).

It is important to check to see if the college you are applying for requires the SAT/ACT. You can contact the admissions office at the school you are interested in applying to. If it requires test scores, it is helpful to study for the test.

- [Free SAT prep](#)
- [Free ACT prep](#)

Paying for Your Education

Paying for your education can be difficult. Below we describe how you can get money for college.

Financial aid: FAFSA. Do you need financial aid for college? The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the place to start. You can apply online at www.fafsa.gov, or you can request a paper copy from 800-4-FEDAID ((800) 433-3243). Applying for federal student aid is free. But it can be complicated. If you're worried or have questions, ask for help. College financial aid offices can help you over the phone email or in person.

Check on the form to see when the FAFSA is due for your state. You should also ask your college when it is due. They might want it much earlier. Look at the school's website or call the financial aid office. Turn in your FAFSA as soon as you can because some financial aid runs out fast. If you can, turn in your FAFSA while you're in prison. That way everything will be ready in time for you to start school.

[College for All Texans](#) includes information about the different types of aid available to Texas students.

What kind of aid will I get? The aid you get will depend on how much money you make and the cost of your school. Your aid package may include the following:

- [Pell Grants](#) are government grants that are based on financial need.
- Scholarships can come from the college or other organizations. Ask your financial aid office about scholarships. Scholarship information can also be found at public libraries and online.
- Education loans have a lower interest rate than banks, and you won't have to start paying it back until after you graduate. Be aware that if you take out student loans, you will have to pay them back. Think carefully about how you will repay your loans. Your loans will impact your decisions about money and jobs.
- Work study positions allow you to pay for college by working for the school. You can say you are interested in work-study when you fill out the FAFSA. Work-study is a good way to make money and get more work experience. They are often offered first come, first served.

Your financial aid package may include several kinds of aid. You don't have to accept the whole package. You can choose the parts that work for you. For example, you could accept a grant but not a loan. Reach out to the office if you have questions or want help understanding your package.

Can I get federal student aid if I have a criminal record? In most cases, yes. You cannot get federal student aid if you were subject to an involuntary civil commitment after completing a period of incarceration for a forcible or non-forcible sexual offense.

For more information on federal financial aid for those inside prison, on parole, and those with a felony conviction, [visit the Student Aid website](#).

Remember to keep copies of all applications and related paperwork in a safe space.

If a grant, loan, or scholarship offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Many for-profit companies take advantage of people who are looking to go to college. Applying for financial aid should be free, and you should research the agency or company before applying.

Defaulted student loans. If you have outstanding student loans that are currently in default, this will impact your eligibility for financial aid. Being in bad standing with old loans can be overwhelming, but you have options! You can even begin exploring these options in prison. Your priority will be to get out of default. You may not need to pay off the entire loan or even make a large payment. You may be able to rehabilitate or consolidate your loans at little to no cost—sometimes \$5/month to get back in good standing. You can do this [online](#), by phone, or by mail.

Helpful Resources

For useful information about how to get your education after incarceration, see Study.com's guide, "[How to Earn Your Degree and Get Hired After Incarceration.](#)"

The Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network is an amazing resource! Build community, find support from peers, share resources, find job openings, advocate for policy change and share your story. Visit: [.](#)

Health

You will need to manage your health after you leave prison. This can be stressful. There are a lot of different options for health insurance. There are many different kinds of clinics, hospitals, and doctors to choose from. You'll want to figure out any medical bills, applications, and other paperwork. Don't be afraid to ask for help from family and friends as you figure things out. There may be a lot to figure out as you get things set up, but it will get easier from there.

This section covers:

- Community health clinics
- Health insurance
- Dental and vision care
- Pharmacies
- HIV/AIDS and other diseases

Community Health Clinics

You'll want to get health insurance, but sometimes people have medical issues that can't wait. If you have a health problem that you need help with right away, there are clinics in North Texas that provide low-cost or even free healthcare. You can find information about these clinics by using the resources below.

Texas Health and Human Services provides information on healthcare programs across the state. For more information about healthcare services in the state go to:

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/health>.

Community Health Clinics: Find a public health program or clinic at

<https://freeclinicdirectory.org/>

“Go to a community medical center. You can get a free full physical when you get out of prison. We have to make sure there are no underlying conditions that we aren't aware of.” —Joe Joe

DFW Free/Low-Cost Community Health Clinics

Clinic Name/Location	Services Provided	Contact Info
Agape Clinic (Dallas)	Medical care, Pediatrics, Women’s health, Mental health.	https://www.theagapeclinic.org/ Phone: (972) 707-7782
Christ’s Family Clinic (Dallas)	Medical care, Women’s health, Vision, Dermatology, Diabetes treatment, Limited Dental.	https://christfamilyclinic.org/ Phone: (214) 261-9500
Hope Clinic (Mckinney)	Medical care, Prescription assistance, Women’s health, Vision, Counseling.	https://hopeclinicmckinney.org/ Phone: (469) 712-4246
Los Barrios Unidos (Dallas, Multiple locations)	Medical care, Pediatrics, Women’s Health, Dental care, Mental Health, Pharmacy. Spanish-speaking services available.	https://losbarriosunidos.org/ Phone: (214) 540-0300
Mercy Clinic (Forth Worth)	Medical care, Dental, Prescriptions, Spiritual care.	https://www.mercy-clinic.org/ (817) 840-3501, Select Option 2

Health Insurance

Getting medical care can be costly, especially over time. Health insurance can help pay for doctor’s visits, medications, vaccines, laboratory tests, and emergencies. Health insurance can be costly too, but medical care can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars more if you don’t have insurance.

Health Insurance Vocabulary

When thinking about getting health insurance, it helps to know the vocabulary. Ask questions and make sure you understand what you are getting.

- **Premiums.** The amount you pay for your health insurance every month.
- **Yearly deductible.** The amount you pay for covered health care services before your insurance plan starts to pay. With a \$2,000 deductible, for example, you pay the first \$2,000 of covered services yourself. Many plans cover the costs for certain services, like a checkup or disease management programs, before you've met your deductible.
- **Copay.** A fixed amount (\$20, for example) you pay for a covered health care service after you've paid your deductible.
- **Coinsurance.** The percentage of costs of a health care service that you pay (20% for example) after you've paid your deductible. In this example the insurance plan would pay the other 80%.
- **Out-of-pocket maximum.** The most you have to pay for covered services in a plan year. After you spend this amount on deductibles, co-payments, and coinsurance for in-network care and services, your health plan pays 100%.
- **Approved network or in-network.** The facilities, providers and suppliers your health insurer has contracted with.
- **Out-of-network.** Health care providers who don't contract with your health insurance or plan. Out-of-network costs are usually higher than in-network.

These definitions and more can be found at: www.healthcare.gov/glossary/

Ways to Get Health Insurance. There are several different ways to get health insurance. Here is a list of the most common ways:

- **Government health insurance:** Medicare, Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance (CHIP) and the County Indigent Health Care Program (CIHCP) are government health insurance programs for certain populations. For more information, see below.
- **Employer health insurance:** Some employers offer health insurance plans for their employees. The employer might cover some of the cost, and the rest will be taken out of the employee’s paycheck.
- **Student health insurance:** If you’re a full-time college student, you may be able to purchase health insurance through your college or university.
- **Through a parent:** People who are age 26 or younger and have a parent with health insurance are allowed to be added to their coverage as a dependent.
- **Healthcare Marketplace:** Created by the Affordable Care Act, the Marketplace offers health plans for purchase, and the cost may be discounted depending on your income.
- **Through a private agent:** You might be able to purchase personal health insurance directly from the company or through an insurance agent.

Medicaid and Medicare. Medicaid and Medicare are government programs that offer assistance with healthcare costs. Most hospitals and health clinics accept Medicaid payments.

- **Medicaid:** Program for people who meet eligibility requirements (such as income requirements).
- **Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP):** Program for children in families that earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private insurance.

To apply for Medicaid/CHIP:

- [Apply online.](#)
- Call 2-1-1 or go to <https://www.211texas.org/> for more information about the programs available to you.

- **Medicare:** Program for those 65 years old or older. Texas has a free Medicare helpline. Call 800-252-9240 for help guiding you through the process.

To apply for Medicare:

- [Apply online.](#)
- Texas has a free Medicare helpline. Call 800-252-9240 for help guiding you through the process.
- To apply in-person, visit your local Social Security Office.

Before applying you need to have a few documents ready:

- Income verification. This could be pay stubs, a financial aid award letter, a written statement from your employer, or a copy of your check stub showing your total income before taxes.
- Your Social Security number.
- Proof of residency (any official document that shows your address and name together).

When you fill out your Medicaid application, you can also apply for other benefits, such as SNAP and TANF. See Resources to Meet your Basic Needs for more information about these and other assistance programs.



If you are receiving Medicaid/CHIP or benefits from any of these other programs, report any changes to your income or dependent status as soon as possible. If you begin making more money than is allowed, you may no longer qualify for these programs. You will start to lose parts of your tax refund on a monthly basis. You can report these changes online through [Your Texas Benefits](#).

Other Health Insurance Options. If you don't qualify for Medicaid or Medicare, there are a few other options to help you get healthcare.

The [Affordable Care Act Healthcare Marketplace](#) provides information on low cost insurance plans.

The **County Indigent Health Care Program** helps low-income Texans who don't qualify for other health care programs have access to health care service including:

- Vaccines
- Medical screening
- Annual physical exams
- Inpatient and outpatient hospital visits
- Lab and radiology services
- Skilled nursing facility services

The program is available to anyone who:

- Lives in Texas
- Has an income level at or below 21% of federal poverty guidelines
- Has resources less than \$2,000
- Isn't eligible for Medicaid

To apply for the program, locate the office nearest you through <https://www.211texas.org/> or call 512-438-2350 for more information about the program.

“You have to be in charge of everything yourself. You're not going to get called in later for a physical. The onus falls on you.” —Pablo

Dental and Vision Care

Get your teeth cleaned and examined regularly. Your oral health is important for your overall health. Problems with your teeth or gums can lead to bigger health problems in the future.

It's also important to get your eyes checked regularly. It is especially important to get medical help if you have problems like glaucoma, cataracts, or retinal tears.

Find low-cost dentists through the [Texas Department of Health and Human Services](#).

There are several programs that provide low-cost eye exams and glasses:

- [Center for Vision Health](#) (eye exams).
- Walmart and Target have stores with eye shops where you can get an exam and glasses for cheap.
- [Eyecare America](#) (eye exams).
- [InfantSEE](#) (free eye exams for babies 6-12 mo.)
- Sight for Students (glasses for children) - (888) 290-4964
- New Eyes (free glasses program) - (973) 376-4903
- Purchasing glasses online for cheap: <https://www.zennioptical.com/> and <https://www.goggles4u.com/> offer frames starting at around \$10. You will need a prescription.

Doctor Visits

It's a good idea to establish a regular relationship with your doctor. Most health insurance plans require you to pick a primary care provider. This person will serve as your "medical home" and is usually a family physician, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or internal medicine physician. Having regular visits with a primary care provider is the best way to manage your health. Go see this person instead of going to the emergency room or urgent care. This will save you money and time and keep you healthy.

A primary care physician can give you a full physical exam, perform lab work, and provide prescription renewals. It is recommended that you have a full physical at least

once a year and complete routine exams. Below are age and sex-based recommendations for health screenings.

ROUTINE EXAMS THAT CAN KEEP YOU HEALTHY

Age	Men	Women
18-39	blood pressure, cholesterol, flu shot, syphilis screen, TDAP shot, HPV shot, chlamydia/gonorrhea, HIV, skin exam	blood pressure, cholesterol, flu shot, TDAP shot, HPV shot, breast exam, after 21 PAP smear, skin exam, chlamydia/gonorrhea, HIV
40-64	blood pressure, blood sugar, colonoscopy (over 50), stool test, flu shot, shingles shot (over 60), prostate screen (over 50), lung cancer screen only if you smoke, skin exam	blood pressure, blood sugar, colonoscopy (over 50), stool test, flu shot, shingles shot (over 60), breast screen, mammogram (over 40), lung cancer screen only if you smoke, postmenopausal bone screening, PAP, pelvic, HPV, skin exam
65+	blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, colonoscopy until 75, hearing test, aneurysm screen if smoker, only prostate and lung screening if you have risk factors, pneumonia shot x2, skin exam	blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, colonoscopy until 75, hearing test, mammogram until 75, bone screening, PAP until 65, pneumonia shot x2, skin exam

Your primary care provider can also refer you to specialists for some health concerns. One way to contact your primary care physician is by signing up through your hospital network’s online portal. This will allow you to access your medical records, send messages to your doctor and schedule appointments.

[Get Tips for Your Doctor Visit!!](#)

“Going to the office of my primary care physician was actually a pleasant experience. It was nothing like it was on the inside.” — Pablo

Pharmacy

Some insurance plans will help you pay for expensive medical prescriptions, while others do not. If you are having trouble paying for your prescriptions, here are a few options:

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if there is a generic version of the drugs you need. Generic drugs are much less expensive.
- Get a free [Texas Rx Card](#) for discounts and coupons for prescriptions.
- Go to [Goodrx.com](#) to compare prices of prescription medications. It tells you where you can go for the best price. You can download their app on a smartphone.
- [CostPlus Drugs](#) provides a number of medications at a low cost.
- Stores like Target, Walmart, Costco, and Sam's Club often have special programs where you can purchase generic drugs for very cheap (\$4 for 30-day quantity or \$10 for a 90-day quantity).
- Go to [www.rxassist.org](#) to find out if the medication you need is offered for free to people who qualify.





HIV/AIDS and Other Diseases

Being in prison increases the risk of getting some diseases. After release from prison, consider getting tested for HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), Hepatitis B (HBV) and tuberculosis. HIV, HBV and HCV can be detected by a blood test. Tuberculosis can be tested by blood or by a skin test; if these tests are positive, the disease is confirmed by a chest X-ray. Locations for HIV and STD testing can be found by using [the HIV and STD Test Locator](#).

If you test positive for HIV or another serious disease, know that you can still live a long and meaningful life. You should make an appointment to see a healthcare provider to stay healthy and possibly begin treatments.

- The **Texas HIV Medication Program (TMHP)** provides medications for the treatment of HIV to low-income Texans. To learn more about program eligibility [visit the program website](#) or call 800-255-1090.

You should still be cautious if the test comes back negative. It is possible that the tests cannot yet detect the virus in your body. You can request another test at a later date.

Transportation

North Texas is a big place! How are you going to get around? Transportation is important for finding a job and going to work, spending time with friends and family, and for staying active and enjoying life. Unfortunately, transportation can cost a lot of money.

If you return to a large city, like Dallas, you'll have a lot of transportation options. In smaller towns, your only choice might be a car. Below we discuss the options you might have so that you can decide what will work best for you.

This chapter covers:

- Transportation options
- Driving legally
- Buying a car

Transportation Options

Local Transportation. You can visit www.google.com/maps and enter the location where you want to start your trip and your destination. The website will give you step-by-step instructions of what public transportation is available.

Public transportation options in the DFW area include:

- [DART](#)
- [Trinity Metro](#)
- [Denton County Transit Authority](#)
- [Trinity Railway Express](#)

Long Distance Transportation. If you need to make a longer trip, there are several options:

- Buses (the cheapest option):
 - [Greyhound](#)
 - [FlixBus](#)

- Trains:
 - [Amtrak](#)
- Flights:
 - [Dallas Love Field](#)
 - [DFW Airport](#)
 - If you have never flown before or have questions about how flying works, check out [First Time Flyer HQ](#).



Rideshare/Taxis. If you have a smartphone and a debit or credit card you can use a rideshare app to make local trips. Rideshare services work like taxis, but drivers use their own cars. For safety tips, [please check out this list from Uber](#).

- [Uber](#)
- [Lyft](#)
- [Taxis \(DFW\)](#)

Driving Legally

Driver's License Status. It is important to check the status of your driver's license when you are released, as Texas law suspends driver's licenses for certain offenses and driving without a valid license is a parole violation.

[You can check the status of your driver's license and pay suspension fees online.](#)

If your driver's license is suspended or revoked, you might still be eligible for an occupational driver's license. [Visit Texas Law Help](#) to learn more about how to get your occupational driver's license.

Car Insurance. If you do not have car insurance and get pulled over, you can get a fine or even be charged. When you have car insurance, you will pay a monthly fee, and the insurance will cover some of the costs if you get in an accident. If you get into an accident, your monthly fee will likely increase.

Texas law requires that drivers have insurance that can at least pay for the accidents they cause. This is known as liability insurance. You must have insurance coverage for a minimum of:

- \$30,000 per injured person (up to a total of \$60,000 for everyone injured in an accident); and
- \$25,000 for property damage.

Some insurance plans cover all or most of the costs if you are in an accident, while others do not. We suggest calling or visiting an insurance agent in-person. That way you can make sure you understand what your plan covers and how much you will have to pay if you get into an accident.

To learn about different car insurance options and how to shop for car insurance visit [the Texas Department of Insurance website.](#)



Car Registration & Inspection. In Texas, you must register your vehicle with the state. Failure to register your vehicle can result in a fine and potential charges. In order to register your vehicle, you will need to complete the following steps:

1. Until 2025, it is required that your vehicle passes an inspection. Take your vehicle to a certified vehicle inspection station and get a passing Texas inspection. You will need to take your insurance card with you to get your car inspected. To find a car inspection station [please visit the DPS website](#).
2. To get your registration sticker, visit your local tax-assessor collector office. You will need to bring your:
 - Insurance card
 - Vehicle Inspection Report issued by the inspection station
 - Proof that you own the vehicle such as the registration or title from another state.
3. You will need to renew your registration every year. You can renew your car registration online at: <https://renew.txdmv.gov/>

Technology

Technology has changed a lot in the last few years. If you have been inside a long time, you might feel stressed by all the new technology. Don't worry! You'll be able to figure it out.

You will need phones and computers for a lot of things after you leave prison. You will use them for work, banking, communicating with family, making appointments, meeting with parole officers, ordering pizza, watching TV shows, paying bills, shopping, applying for jobs, and much more.

Ask your family and friends to help you learn how to use a cellphone, smartphone, or computer. Learning how to use them can be fun! Play around with games, news, sports or even watch cat videos! Playing can help you learn to use them. Take your time and get used to the technology that you use - soon it will feel easy!

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Getting a phone
- Technology basics
- Using the internet
- Email accounts, passwords, and security
- Smartphone apps
- Social media
- Video conferencing

Getting a Phone

We recommend getting a phone when you get out. You will need a phone to keep in contact with family, friends, your employer and your parole officer. There are three types of phones:

- **Basic cell phones** let you call people and send text messages. They are not so costly and easy to use.

- **Smartphones** can make calls and send text messages, and they can also get on the internet (more about the internet below). Smartphones have programs (called “apps”) that can do things like play music, give driving directions, check the weather, take pictures, and go on social networks like Facebook. A smartphone can help you find jobs, look up services, find your way around, and more.
- **Landline phones** are phones connected to people’s homes or businesses. They can’t move around. Few people use landline phones these days.

Lifeline and SafeLink

Do you have Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, or Public Housing Assistance? If you do, you should also be able to get a free or discounted phone or internet. SafeLink will provide you with one of these for free:

- Smartphone
- SIM card. If you buy your own phone, they will give you a SIM card to put in it. A SIM card is a memory chip that lets your phone connect to their mobile network.
- Phone plan. A phone plan lets you text, make calls and use data. Their basic phone plan limits how much you can do, but you can add more for a fee.

Lifeline is a program that works with SafeLink to lower the monthly cost of phone and internet. If you qualify, you can get up to \$9.25 toward your monthly bill. Lifeline can be used for phone or internet, but not both.

How to apply. When you apply for public benefits (such as SNAP or Medicaid), ask if you can apply for SafeLink and Lifeline as well. Ask a friend, family member, case manager, or counselor to help you apply for SafeLink at safelinkwireless.com. You can also get help by calling (800) 723-3546. You can apply for Lifeline at lifelinesupport.org. To apply for these services, you will need your contact info, mailing/home address and Social Security number. You will also need proof that you meet the income requirements. These services are typically limited to one person per household.

You can find SafeLink phones and service plans at many stores around the state, including Walgreens, CVS, Family Dollar, and Schnucks.

Phone Services and Plans

What if you need to buy your own phone? MetroPCS and Family Mobile (Walmart) are good, cheaper choices. They aren't the best phones, but they won't be too expensive. If you had a cellphone before you were incarcerated, ask your family if they still have the phone. It might still work, and you may want to use it again or change the number. Contact the phone service provider for help with this.

Cell phones come with service plans that you have to pay every month. You have two basic options for service plans:

- **Prepaid phone plans or no-contract plans.** You pay at the start of each month. You can stop your service at the end of each month or switch to a different service. Tracfone is a popular no-contract phone option.
- **Post-paid phone plan with a contract.** You enter a contract to pay a monthly fee for service. They add up your costs at the end of each billing cycle and charge you.

Phone plans have different options. Generally, the services will cover the following:

- **Talk:** How many minutes you can talk on the phone each month. Many plans these days have unlimited talk time.
- **Text:** How many text messages you can send each month. Many plans these days have unlimited text.
- **Data:** Data lets your phone go on the internet when you don't have access to Wi-Fi (see Technology Basics below). If you only need a phone for calls, you may not need to purchase a data plan. You can use the internet on your phone for free at the library and many other public places and restaurants. If you do need data, start with a small amount, like 1 or 2 GB, and use your data carefully. You can always get more if you need it.

Phone service companies like T-Mobile and MetroPCS have different plans and rates. Some offer deals for sharing a cell phone plan with family members. Think about what you will use your phone for and how much you can afford to spend on it. Some phone or internet service providers may also offer discounts.

Technology Basics

Here are some technology basics to help you get started.

Internet or world wide web: A network that connects computers and phones all over the world. Through an internet connection, people can share information, access resources, and communicate. Sometimes people call the internet the world wide web, or they will say, “you need web access,” which means you need to be able to connect to the internet.

Online: When you are “online” you are connected to the internet. People might say, “Get online to access this resource.” This means that you can access the resource on a computer or smartphone through the internet.

Smartphone: a phone that does a lot of the things a computer can do. It usually has a touchscreen surface, internet access, and you can download applications (apps). Apps have different tools to help with work, entertainment, money and more. Most people these days have a smartphone.

Wi-Fi: To access the internet, you need to be connected to it. One way to do that is through Wi-Fi access. Wi-Fi access allows you to connect to the internet without using wires. You can access Wi-Fi for free at public libraries and some restaurants (McDonalds, Starbucks), or you can buy Wi-Fi access for your home.

Data: Another way to connect to the internet is through a smartphone data plan. Data allows you to connect to the internet on your smartphone if you are in a place that doesn’t have Wi-Fi. Data plans can be expensive, and they usually have limits to how much data you can use every month.

Web browser: A web browser is a program that allows you to access the internet on your phone or computer. Examples of web browsers are Google Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Safari.

Search engine. A search engine is what you use when you are trying to find information on the internet. First, you will open a web browser. You should see a bar at the top with a little magnifying glass. This is how you can use the search engine. You can type a question or web address into the bar and it will search for the information you need. Google, Yahoo, and Bing are examples of search engines.

Website: All types of organizations have “websites” where you can find information, resources, entertainment and more.

Web address or URL: This is the “address” or location of the website or resource on the internet. You type this address into the search engine bar to go to the website or resource. We have included many web addresses to websites in this guide and in the directory. Web addresses usually look like this: <http://example.com>. When you type in a web address, you can leave out the <http://> or www.

“I need assistance with the most basic things. That does make me somewhat defensive, and I’ll end up trying to do things on my own and then I crash and burn.” –Pablo

Using the Internet

Make sure you have a way to get on the internet when you need to. Until you have your own device, you can borrow one from a family member or use a computer at the public library.

Do you have a smartphone, laptop, or tablet? Free wireless internet is available at the library, as well as many restaurants, coffee shops, hotel lobbies, chain technology stores, and even parks! You may have to ask what the password is before you can log on with your device.

Most things on the internet are found using a search engine like Google. Open up a web browser such as Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Firefox, or Safari. The home page will have a search box where you can type in what you are looking for. Here are some tips for good searches:

- Start with the basics. Start with a simple search like “Where’s the closest Amtrak?” or “Pizza in Dallas.” You can always add more words if you need.
- Don’t worry about the little things. Even if you spell things wrong, it should still work.

Getting Help Using the Internet

- Ask a librarian to help you figure out the basics. They are there to help.
- Go to Northstar at digitalliteracyassessment.org to test your skills and learn more. You can access classes online or find a Northstar location where you can attend classes. They offer certificates for skills you have mastered.
- GCF global has a lot of free courses on how to use technology. Type this address in your search engine and click on a topic: <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/>
- Wikihow also has lots of resources to help you figure out how to use technology. Type “wikihow” in your web browser, and then enter your question in the search box at the top of the page.
- Many community colleges, libraries, and adult basic education programs offer lessons on everything from basic word processing to programming code.

Email Accounts, Passwords and Security

You will need your own email address. Email is now used more than paper mail. One way to do this is through Gmail, because Gmail accounts are free. Type gmail.com into the web browser and click “Create account.”

You will select your own email username. It should be something easy for you to remember, like your own name, or some combination of your name, initials, and numbers. You will probably use your email to apply for jobs, so make sure your email address is professional.

Your password should also be something easy for you to remember, but hard for other people to figure out. The best passwords use capital letters (ABCD), small letters (abcd), numbers (1234), and symbols (#\$%^).

You will probably use the internet to set up accounts for things like paying bills or accessing files for school or work. Protect your information by keeping your password secret and changing it every so often. Don’t use the same password for every account you have. If you forget a password, you can usually change it by following instructions on the website. If you had email and other online accounts before you were

incarcerated, you may want to reactivate them or close them. Change the passwords to keep everything safe.

If possible, do not put in sensitive personal information (like your Social Security Number or credit card information) at a public computer or over public internet.

Smartphone Apps

Most smartphones come with these basic apps:

- Text messaging
- App to make phone calls
- A camera
- A clock
- A map service
- A browser (for example, Safari or Chrome) that you can use to get to internet websites
- A calendar
- A calculator
- An address book (sometimes called “contacts”)

You can also download more apps. They can be found in your phone’s store (the app store or play store). Many useful apps are free. You will need to have either data or a Wi-Fi connection to download apps. You may have to enter your phone’s password to buy it. It should show up on your homescreen in just a few minutes. If an app costs money, your phone should give you the option to enter your credit or debit card information and will ask you to confirm the purchase before downloading.

Here are some apps you may want to use:

- Facebook Messenger is a text or video messaging app where you can communicate with family and friends.
- Facebook and Instagram let you share and view photos and comments.
- Spotify lets you listen to music. It will shuffle the music and also play advertisements, like a radio.
- Banking apps help you manage your money and pay bills.

- Transportation apps, like Citymapper, can help you use public transportation or find your way around.

Be careful with apps. Use careful judgment about what you'd like to keep private. Be aware that apps can use up your phone data and can sometimes gather information about websites you visit.

Social Media

Many people stay in touch with others and get news through social media. Social media are websites that allow people to talk and share photos. Some social media sites are used mostly for friends and family while others are used for jobs. Here are two popular social media platforms:

- **Facebook** is the most popular social media company in the US. People use this site to share photos, updates, and news. It helps people stay in touch with family and friends; others use it for work. You can comment publicly on posts created by others or message users individually. You can also join Facebook groups to meet other people and get support. Signing up for Facebook is free. To sign up, type facebook.com into the search bar and click "Create Account."
- **LinkedIn** is a social network created for finding jobs. You can use it to talk with employers and share your resume. To create an account, type linkedin.com into your web browser and click "Join Now." Search "How to Create a LinkedIn Account Wikihow" to learn more.

Staying Safe on Social Media. Be careful when sharing information on Facebook or other social media apps. You can change the privacy settings so that only your friends see your posts. Public posts can be accessed by parole officers and employers. Social media sites track what you do and they can use that to try to sell you things. Sometimes scam artists use social media to trick people into giving away money. Remember, the information that you see on social media may not be trustworthy. It's a good idea to check with other sources.

Video Conferencing

Many people use video conferencing to talk to family, friends, and co-workers. With video conferencing, you can talk to multiple people at the same time and see people's faces. Video conferencing apps can be a great way to stay connected to family members and friends. Lots of meetings these days aren't in person; instead, they use video conferencing. Many job interviews also use video conferencing.

Here are a few video conferencing options:

- Facetime
- Google Chat
- Skype
- Zoom

If you have a computer or phone you can download an app for these video conferencing services. Some are free.

In most cases, you will be a guest in a video conferencing meeting. This means you will get an invitation to your email with the link that says "Click to Join." When the webpage opens, you may join via the app or your web browser.

There may also be an option to call in with your phone.

Video conferencing etiquette tips:

- If you are in a group, mute yourself when you're not talking (click on the microphone). This way other people on the conference will not be distracted by noises around you, such as other people talking, dogs, barking, or traffic sounds.
- Be aware of your backdrop. It's nice to turn your camera on so people can see you, but you can also turn your camera off (click on the camera icon) or use a virtual backdrop if you don't want people to see you or your living space.



Digital Literacy Resources

Learning technology is a lot like learning a new language. There are many free resources to help you learn.

- The [Texas State Library and Archives Commission](#) provides a free toolkit that can help you learn computer and technology skills.
- Check with your local public library as many offer free digital literacy classes.
- [Techboomers.com](#) is a free website that teaches people basic computer skills to help them improve their quality of life. You can learn about helpful websites, social media, online shopping, and technology basics
- [netliteracy.org](#) has a huge amount of digital literacy resources. Visit their site for resources and training on everything from basic email and social media to artificial intelligence.

Legal Matters

After you are released, there may be times when you need to go to court or get legal help. For example, you might want to get your record sealed so you can get a better job. Maybe you want to get back custody of a child.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Getting legal help
- Child custody
- Child support
- Fees and fines
- Sealing records

Getting legal help

Here are a few resources that can help you get legal help in the State of Texas:

- [Texas Court Help](#) is a website that can help you locate free and low-cost legal assistance in your area.
- [Texas Law Help](#) is a very useful website to find more information about your legal rights.
- [Locked Out: A Texas Legal Guide to Reentry](#) provides a very detailed and comprehensive review of legal rights for formerly incarcerated individuals in Texas. You may find the guide useful to help you ask questions about your legal rights to your parole/probation officer, an attorney, and reentry programs that you are working with.
- [Women's Law.org](#) is a website that provides easy-to-understand legal information specifically for women.

Pro bono. Figuring out the courts can be frustrating. It is best to get the help of a lawyer. Lawyers understand the rules and know how local judges and courtrooms work. Lawyers are often expensive, but there are lawyers who will work on your case for free (pro bono). These services are available through legal aid programs.

Some cases can be handled without lawyers. These are called pro se cases. Things like sealing criminal records, family law, and small claims matters often don't use lawyers. This is cheaper, but it is almost always better to hire a lawyer or find one who will work for free.

Pro se help desks. If you decide to file pro se, most counties offer pro se help desks. The service is free. There are workers who can help you with pro se forms, courthouse directions, and legal consultations. Call your county district clerk's office for information.

Child Custody

Both parents have equal rights to their children, unless a court order has been signed that limits or defines custody, access, and possession of the child. Incarceration alone does not affect the rights of the parent. The only way that your rights can be changed or custody can be determined, is if there is a signed court-order that has been filed.

The court can decide which parent should be named the child's primary custodial parent. The court will determine what is in the "best interest of the child." Non-parents can also be awarded custody of the children. A non-parent caregiver may decide to also seek to get legal custody of the child.

Custody can be complicated. Many people hire a lawyer to help them. If you choose not to have a lawyer you will need to file a petition to modify custody. Petitions can be found online, or by visiting your county's circuit clerk office. There will usually be a fee. Once your petition is filed and read, a hearing should be set to change custody.

Foster Care and Reinstating Parental Rights. What if your child is in foster care or with a relative? What if your parental rights have been terminated? The first step is understanding how the process works. The second step is understanding where you are in your own case.

If CPS has been involved with the children, the newly released parent should confirm whether or not the CPS case is still active. To request CPS records, [visit this website](#). In an active CPS case where the child has been removed based on allegations of abuse or neglect, parents have the following rights:

- The right to an attorney, if CPS is seeking to terminate parental rights.
- The right to admit or deny the allegations.
- The right to be notified of all court hearings.
- The right to attend all court hearings and meetings.
- The right to an interpreter in court if you do not understand English or are hearing impaired.
- The right to talk to the CPS caseworker and attorney.

Child Support

If you don't live with your child, you may need to pay child support. Child support is money that you pay to the person who is taking care of your child. Child support lasts until children turn 18, or 19 if they are still in high school. You will pay a certain amount of your income in child support. The amount you pay depends on how many children you have. A judge may order you to pay for other things too, like healthcare, child care, or school costs.

Unless your parental rights have been terminated by a court order, you have a legal duty to financially support your children. Texas law does not permit an exemption, automatic suspension, or reduction in child support payments for incarcerated individuals who are court ordered to pay child support. If you were under a child support order when you entered prison, the support owed remains the same and the debt continues to grow, with interest.

It is possible to be facing a large amount of child support debt after a period of incarceration. Once released, it is expected that you will secure employment and continue to pay on the amount you are ordered to in addition to catching up on missed payments during your incarceration.

While you may be facing a number of financial obligations after incarceration, it is important that you do not ignore the child support debt. Doing so may result in the following negative results:

- Violating Conditions of Release
 - Previously incarcerated parents that are on parole are in danger of violating the conditions of their parole if they fail to pay child support payments.
- New Charges
 - In Texas, it is a state jail felony to intentionally fail to pay court-ordered child support.
- License Revocation
 - Continuing to fail to make payments can result in loss of both driver's and vocational licenses in Texas.
- Asset Forfeiture:
 - Income tax returns can be kept by the State and applied to child support debt. Bank accounts and other assets may also be seized.

Modifying Support. In order to see if you can get your payments lowered, you will need to receive a modification through a new court order. Typically, you have two options:

- [Request a "status review" from the Texas Attorney General Office](#)
- File a lawsuit called a "Petition to Modify in Suit Affecting Parent-Child Relationship" (SAPCR). You can hire a lawyer to do this or do it yourself. Once you file the petition you'll probably need to go to court to talk about your case.

Modifications can be made in Texas if:

- It has been three or more years since the order was last established or modified **and** the monthly amount of child support ordered differs by either 20 percent or \$100 from the amount that would be awarded according to child support guidelines, or
- A material and substantial change in circumstances has occurred since the last order. Examples of these changes include:
 - An individual's income has either increased or decreased.
 - An individual is legally responsible for additional children since the last order.

- The child/children's medical insurance coverage has changed.
- The child/children's living arrangements have changed.
- Incarceration and release from incarceration.

Getting Payments You are Owed. Are you getting child support from your child's other parent? If your childcare expenses have gone up, you can ask for more child support from your child's other parent. Childcare expense changes include things like:

- Medical bills for the child
- New education expenses
- A big change in your household's cost of living
- If the other parent is making a lot more money recently you can also ask for more

If you are not getting the child support payments you believe you are owed, contact your state's child support enforcement office.

Fees and Fines

There are many different fees and fines you may have to pay. You might have court fees or fines, like:

- Traffic tickets
- DWI fees
- Payments to the victims of the crime you were convicted of
- Other fines related to the crime
- Fines and debt for failing to pay child support
- Parole or probation costs, such as fees for anger management or parenting classes, and fees for any required registration

Even small fees can make it hard to get back on your feet. Still, it's important to plan for how you will pay them. Not paying your fees or fines can get you in more trouble.

- Suspension of your Driver's License.
- Officials can hold those fees against you if you return to jail.
- Sometimes people are returned to jail for not paying fees, especially if they "willfully" do not pay them.

- Sometimes fees have a high interest rate, meaning the amount you owe will get larger the longer you wait to pay.

“It’s hard to make a decision between paying fines and staying out of jail, or paying bills and having somewhere to live.” –Anonymous

Waivers for court fees. In Texas, a judge can waive the court costs associated with your case. To learn more about eligibility for fee waivers, visit [Texas Law Help](#).



Sealing records

A criminal record can create barriers to employment, housing, credit, and other areas of your life.

NOTE: *Many people believe if they received a “deferred adjudication” sentence that the information regarding the arrest will not remain on their record. Instead, the record will not show a conviction for the charge, but will still contain the arrest details.*

It may be possible to remove arrest records not resulting in conviction, or limit information that is released depending on the offense. Two ways this is done in Texas are through petitions for nondisclosure and expunctions.

Petitions for Nondisclosure. A non-disclosure does not remove the information surrounding your arrest, but it does limit public access to this information. Government agencies such as law enforcement and licensing agencies could still access the information regarding the arrest.

Eligibility for nondisclosure. In Texas, you are only eligible for nondisclosure if you have not been convicted of the charges you were arrested and/or are no longer on community supervision. There are several offenses that if ever committed, makes a person ineligible to receive an order of nondisclosure. Additionally, any offense that resulted in a conviction, is not eligible for an order of nondisclosure. For a list of the eligibility requirements [see this website sponsored by the Texas courts](#).

We also suggest that you consult with a lawyer to determine whether or not any previous cases you have are eligible for nondisclosure.

Expunctions. An expunction removes the information surrounding the arrest from your criminal record. In Texas, expunctions are extremely restricted and are limited to cases where you were not convicted (i.e., completed a deferred adjudication sentence). Expunctions cannot remove the record of an adult criminal conviction except in rare cases when the individual has been pardoned, where the conviction was overturned on appeal, or where the individual was granted relief on the basis of innocence.

Expunction Eligibility in Texas

Eligible Cases
Class C misdemeanors where charges were dismissed after a period of deferred adjudication.
Pardons restoring civil rights and pardons granted after a finding of innocence.
Felonies or misdemeanors where the person is no longer on supervision, and the charge has not resulted in a final conviction. However, an individual must wait the following amount of time based on their charge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 180 days for Class C Misdemeanor ● 1 year for Class A & B Misdemeanors ● 3 years for a Felony.
Offenses dismissed because the person successfully completed a pretrial intervention program.

Pardons or Executive Clemency. Pardons are very rarely granted in Texas. Unlike expunction or nondisclosure, an application for a pardon must be made to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. Pardons are granted by the governor following the Board’s recommendation. [TDCJ’s website provides information about the clemency process in Texas.](#)

Finances, Credit, and Taxes

Thinking about money can be stressful. Take small steps toward managing your money, especially if you're doing it on your own for the first time. Making smart decisions about your money can help you have control over your life. Having control over your finances will help you avoid money troubles in the long run and feel more secure about the future.

In this section, we cover

- Banking basics and how to open a banking account
- Budgeting, financial planning, and credit
- Filing taxes.

Banking

It's a good idea to open a bank account so that you have a safe place to put your money. A bank account also helps you avoid the fees that come with check cashing and money transfer services.

There are two basic types of bank accounts: checking and savings accounts. A **checking account** keeps your money safe. It also gives you easy access to your money so you can buy things and pay bills. When you open a checking account, you get checks and a debit card. You can use these to buy things, pay bills, or get cash from your account using ATMs. Some checking accounts have monthly fees while others do not, so make sure you ask about fees.

There are many good reasons to have a bank account:

- Putting your paychecks in a bank account is cheaper than paying fees for check cashing services.
- Some employers put your earnings directly in your account.
- A debit card means you don't have to carry lots of cash. Your money is better protected against being lost or stolen.

- Many banks offer free access to online banking services, which you can use to keep track of your money, pay bills automatically, and transfer money between accounts.
- Apps like Venmo or Cash App let you transfer and receive money without any fees. You can get Venmo on your phone and use it if you have a bank account.
- You can work with banks to get car or mortgage loans, develop a retirement investment plan, and invest in stocks.

You don't have to be a U.S. citizen or have a Social Security number to open a bank account. You can open an account using the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) assigned to you by the IRS, regardless of immigration status. Visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) for more information about ITINs.

Opening a Bank Account. Banks and credit unions offer different products to choose from, like checking and savings accounts, loans, rewards programs, and credit cards. Before choosing a bank, think about what you need. When you first go to the bank, ask to speak to someone who can help you understand their services and how they can meet your needs.

Here are a few things to consider:

- Will you travel a lot for work, fun, or visiting family? You may want to choose a bank that has many branches and ATM locations. Online banks are also an option.
- What fees does the bank have? Some fees might be an overdraft fee (when you take out more money than you have), fees for closing accounts, fees for foreign transactions, and monthly maintenance fees.
- Has a bank ever shut down your checking account? If so, banks might reject your account application. Don't worry, though, because some banks offer second chance checking accounts. Call and ask smaller local banks and credit unions about their account policies. Smaller companies tend to be more open to people who have had financial trouble.
- Is your bank or credit union backed by the government? If it is, that means that if the bank closes or has other problems, your money is protected. Make sure your bank is a member of the FDIC or NCUA.

- Does your employer, school, or community have a credit union? Credit unions are better in some ways than banks. See the chart on the following page comparing banks and credit unions.
- Are you a veteran? If so, you qualify for a USAA account. USAA members and their families can often get good rates on loans. Visit usaa.com for more information.
- Do you have bad credit? Many banks use a database called ChexSystems to check your bank customer history, but they don't always pull your credit report when you apply. Ask them what their policies are.

To open a bank account, you will need:

- A valid government ID.
- If you do not have an ID, there are some banks that allow you to open an account with your prison ID instead. One is Stretch: <https://www.stretch.money/>
- A social security number (or Individual Taxpayer ID for non-US citizens)
- Money to make an initial deposit.

Some banks may also require a second form of ID and/or proof of address, like a utility bill. [Visit the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's detailed Checklist for Opening a Bank or Credit Union Account for more information.](#)

Prior Banking History. When you apply for an account, the bank may pull a checking account report through a screening agency. This report shows history from the bank accounts you've had in the past, up to seven years. If your report shows certain high risk behavior, like unpaid fees or fraud, your application may be denied.

If you are denied, you can take steps to address the problem, or find another bank or credit union that has a more flexible application process. Every bank is required to provide a notice of the reason for a denial. If your checking report is the cause, you can request a free copy. Every person is also allowed to pull their report for free at least once per year. Request yours by visiting: www.chexsystems.com or downloading and mailing a request form to:

Chex Systems Inc., Attn: Consumer Relations
805 Hudson Road, Suite 100
Woodbury, MN 55125

If you have negative banking history, you may be a candidate for “Second Chance Checking”, which has fewer eligibility requirements. [Find a list of banks that offer second chance checking accounts provided by the website “NerdWallet”.](#)

Consumer Finance Protection Bureau Resources

The Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB) has a variety of resources to help you navigate banking. [These tools can be accessed here.](#)

- [The Guide to Consumer Reporting Companies](#) explains how each type of consumer reporting works (banking history, credit reports, criminal background checks and more), plus how you can request or dispute your reports
- The CFPB shows the pros and cons of various methods to receive paychecks, based on your needs and preferences. It compares prepaid cards, direct deposit, cashing checks, and more.
- If you are uncomfortable when it comes to banking or if you have never had an account before, [you might appreciate the CFPB’s guide.](#)

[Visit the CFPB website](#) to find guides on

- Buying a House
- Dealing with Disasters and Emergencies
- Managing a Loved One’s Finances
- Raising Children to be Financially Literate
- Paying for College
- Planning for Retirement
- Understanding Payday Loans
- Is a Payday Loan my Best Option?
- Understanding Prepaid Cards
- Know Your Legal Rights with Payday Loans

Using Bank Cards for Purchases

If you've been in prison for a long time, buying things at the store may be very different. Perhaps you carried around cash in the past or wrote paper checks. Most people these days use debit cards or credit cards rather than paying with cash.

Here are some card options:

- **Debit cards** look just like credit cards, but are different. Most debit cards are linked to a checking account, and you can only spend money that you have in your account. Debit cards can be used anywhere that you use a credit card. You can also use your debit card to get money from an ATM.
- With **prepaid debit cards**, you can load money onto the card when you get it, then use it to make purchases until the money runs out. Prepaid debit cards are often used by people who can't get a bank account. You might use one if you haven't been able to get your ID yet. Bluebird by American Express and Chime are prepaid debit cards with no monthly fee.
- Your **EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card** for food stamps and/or cash benefits. Many states offer cards that you can use just like a debit card at stores that accept EBT.
- With a **credit card**, you are borrowing money and will need to pay it back. We talk more about credit cards in the next section.
- There are also **gift cards** where people can put money on the card and then give it to someone to use like a debit card. Some cards--like a Visa Gift Card--can be used at any store, while other gift cards only work for specific stores.

For debit cards you will need to make a 4-digit PIN number, which is like a password. Before you use your card, make sure you have your PIN number set up. Usually, there is a number on the back of the card that you can call to set up the PIN number. When using a debit card or EBT card, make sure you know how much money you have. If you don't have enough money your card may not work.

Here's a brief guide (summarized from Wikihow) about what to expect when you check out at a store.

1. After the cashier scans your things, they will ask you to pay.
2. There will likely be a card reader on the counter. Card readers look a little bit like calculators. They usually have a screen with instructions to follow.
3. The screen on the card reader may ask if you agree to pay the amount on the screen. You may have to press "enter" or "yes" to continue.
4. Next, the screen may ask you to swipe your card. Other times, the cashier will let you know when the machine is ready for you to swipe your card.
5. For some card readers you'll swipe your card on the right side. For others you'll stick the card in the bottom of the machine and leave it there until the screen lets you know that you can take it out. Don't worry if you don't get it right the first time. Turn the card around and try again. Lots of people make mistakes and have to swipe their cards a few times or get help from a cashier.
6. The card reader may ask whether you want to pay by "debit" or "credit." If you hit debit, it may ask you to enter your 4-digit PIN number. Once the screen says "Approved" you should get a receipt. You can take your items and your receipt and leave.
7. Some debit cards allow you to get cash back with your purchase. The card reader screen will ask if you want cash, and you will enter the dollar amount you would like. The cashier will then give you the cash. The amount will come out of your bank account.
8. If you are using a credit card, you may be asked to sign a paper receipt or sign the screen with a special pen. It will ask you to press "enter" or "accept" when you are finished. Once you have finished signing and get your receipt, you should be ready to go.

Remember: When using a credit or debit card, it's OK to ask for help! Lots of people have problems using their cards. The cashiers are there to help you.

Learn more about how to use a debit card here: [wikihow.life/Use-a-Debit-Card](https://www.wikihow.life/Use-a-Debit-Card).

Learn about how to use an ATM here: [wikihow.com/Use-an-ATM](https://www.wikihow.com/Use-an-ATM).

“The first time I went to the store by myself, I got up to the front of the line and didn't know how to pay for my groceries. I saw this contraption for a card that looked real complicated and didn't know how to use it. A long line of people were behind me and getting restless when I was just standing there looking dumbfounded. I didn't want to tell anyone I had been locked up and didn't know how to use a link or debit card. I was embarrassed and panicked!” – Michael

Budgeting, Financial Planning, and Credit

One of the best things you can do to manage your money is to make a budget. Budgeting can help you know where your money is going so you do not spend more than you make. There are thousands of different budget forms you can download online for free. Or you can make your own. To make your own, add up how much money you make every month. Then, make a list of everything you spend money on in a month and compare the two numbers.

You can find information online about banks, credit unions, account options, and strategies for saving your money. Some financial planning websites have a “chat” where you can ask an advisor a question and get an answer right away. Here are some resources for help with money:

- Learnvest.com and Mint.com: financial planning.
- Thesimpledollar.com: understanding money and budgeting.
- Nerdwallet.com: budgeting, banking, credit, financial planning, investments, mortgages, car and health insurance.
- Annuity.org: budgeting, personal finance, credit and more. Two resources that may be especially helpful are: [annuity.org/financial-literacy](https://www.annuity.org/financial-literacy) and [annuity.org/annuities/types/income](https://www.annuity.org/annuities/types/income).
- [Business Insider Magazine](https://www.businessinsider.com) has a list of some top-rated money advice websites.

The resources listed here are just suggestions. It is important to think on your own about any advice you are given. Feel free to do your own looking online.

Scams

You don't want to become a victim of a scam. [Visit this website for a list of common scams and their warning signs.](#)

Here are a few scams to avoid:

- Be suspicious of emails or calls that offer you lots of money or “free gifts” if you pay a small fee. If the reward sounds too good to be true, avoid it.
- Beware of companies that try to push you into signing up for something immediately. Only sign up for services you understand. You can always ask them for more information if you are confused.
- Only give personal information (such as account numbers and Social Security numbers) to companies you know to be trustworthy.
- Never pay for a letter of credit.

Credit

You may be considering getting a credit card so that you can buy things with credit. Buying on credit means that you buy things now and pay for them later. A bank loans you the money, and you agree to repay the bank later. Usually, this means that you buy something with your credit card, and then you make monthly payments to the bank until the loan is repaid.

Keep in mind that when you buy with credit, you have to pay interest. Interest is a fee to the bank for borrowing the money. Interest rates can be very high. Think hard before you get any credit card, and make sure you do not sign up for too many. The more cards you have, the more payments you will have to make. Also, too many credit cards will have a negative effect on your credit score. Credit card companies make money when people get deeper and deeper into debt. You do not want to be that customer!

A credit counselor at a nonprofit organization can give you good advice about getting a credit card. One example is credit.org, which offers free telephone counseling sessions.

Sometimes, credit cards can lead to a lot of trouble. If you buy too much with credit cards, it can be hard to pay your monthly payments. A service like credit.org can help you figure things out if you get overwhelmed. A good practice is to only buy things

with your credit card that you can pay back within a month. Be very careful: it is easy to slip into the bad habit of making purchases that you can't afford, which can lead to debt.

For some big purchases, such as buying a car, a house, or paying for college tuition, buying on credit makes a lot of sense. You may be unable to pay for a car all at once, but the cost becomes easier if you can spread it out over many months. Make sure to choose a car that is affordable so that you can manage the monthly payments. Try to get an interest rate that is as low as possible. Again, be cautious and talk to a credit counselor before going into debt.

If you decide to get a credit card or buy something using credit, your bank will look at your credit score first. A credit score is a number that tells them whether they think you will repay a loan. If you have a good credit score, it will be easier to get loans and lower interest rates. If you were in debt before you went to prison, you will need to take steps to improve your credit score. Credit scores range from 300 (bad credit) to 850 (excellent credit).

If you have no history of credit, Capital One offers the best secured card to build credit. It takes 6 months of using credit to generate a FICO credit score which is important for future purchases. If you have no credit history, interest rates will be much higher. You can monitor your credit score through free services offered by opening a card.

If you have a poor credit history, there are several ways you can improve your credit score. [Here are some tips from Capital One.](#)

You can also build or rebuild credit through a credit-builder loan. These loans require that you make fixed payments to a lender and then get access to the loan amount at the end of the loan term, instead of borrowing upfront and paying it back over time. Since payment history is used to calculate credit scores, these loans can be used to build credit. These loans may be offered by banks, credit unions, and online lenders.

Guidelines for Managing Credit

Get educated. Being uninformed can lead to costly mistakes. For a good primer on your credit score, [check out this website](#).

Be smart. Avoid businesses (such as car dealerships and payday loan offices) that advertise directly to people with bad credit. They often have extremely high interest rates. They are counting on your not being able to pay your debts. Do not support any company whose business model depends on your lack of money.

Be cautious. Read the fine print carefully and understand the rules before you sign anything. Remember, what counts is what is in the contract, not what the salesperson promised.

Pay your debts. If you've gotten behind on any of your debts—or have had debts fall into collections—pay them, or make a plan for starting to pay them. For information about managing debt, [see this website](#) created by the Federal Trade Commission.

Pay your bills on time. Paying on time is a good habit and can improve your credit score. The easiest way to do that is by setting up an automatic payment with your bank on your bills' due dates. Marking the dates on a calendar is fine, too.

Use credit cards wisely. If you choose to have a credit card, don't charge what you can't pay back at the end of the month. If you must borrow money with a credit card to pay your credit card bills, it's time to talk with a credit counselor.



Trauma and Mental Health

A lot of people struggle with trauma or mental health issues when getting out of prison. Many people enter prison with a mental health disorder, and being incarcerated and dealing with reentry can make these problems worse. Some of these problems can affect you long after you leave.

If you have mental health issues, get help as soon as you are released. Reentry is hard enough. Mental health problems can make everything much harder. Sadly, people who do not get treatment are more likely to return to prison.

Mental health professionals can help you. They can provide talk therapy and help you get medication, if needed. They can help you learn ways to deal with stress and life problems.

Always remember that you matter! Make your mental health a priority. When you do, you will experience deep personal growth and be able to better help others. You don't have to suffer.

“Trauma is something that all of us go through. You have to get to the point that you realize that what you’ve been going through is trauma. Nothing you went through is normal. It’s not normal to be secluded. Even before prison, we were on the streets, experiencing trauma and violence to the point that it became a natural thing. We became desensitized to those things. We didn’t think, ‘Oh wow, this is abnormal.’” –Anonymous

This chapter covers:

- Trauma
- Finding treatment
- Types of treatment
- Attitudes about mental health
- Common mental health disorders

Trauma

Just about everyone who has been to prison has experienced trauma. Trauma is a mental health issue that many people face.

Trauma is the emotional response you have to a stressful and possibly life-changing event. It can also be the result of toxic stress that builds up over time. Trauma is more common than people think, and its effects can be very serious. Traumatic events that you had as a child can have effects throughout your life.

Trauma can come from lots of things, such as:

- Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Witnessing violence
- Having a loved one with substance use or mental health issues
- Parent separation or divorce
- Poverty
- Being incarcerated or having a family member who is incarcerated
- Living in unsafe neighborhoods

People in prison, especially women, are more likely to have experienced trauma. There are strong connections between trauma, poor mental health, and incarceration.

Where to get help

- Visit [Mental Health Texas](#) to search for mental health service providers close to you. When you call to make an appointment, ask if they provide trauma-informed care.
- Your doctor may be able to connect you to a mental health consultant located in your clinic, so ask if one is available.
- Many reentry programs provide trauma-informed care. Ask what services they provide.

Recovering from Trauma. When you face trauma or stress and overcome it, you can strengthen your ability to bounce back from hard things. Being able to bounce back instead of getting stuck is called resilience.

Being resilient does not mean that stress is not hard for you. It means you have taught yourself to better cope with hard things. Resilience can be learned. It is not a trait that only some people have. It is something that everyone has the ability to strengthen, like when you build muscle. It takes time and work, but it can be done. There is hope!

If you feel stuck or are not making progress, seek help from a mental health professional. Seeking help is an important part of building resilience.

“Having a support group provides you with a reminder that there are other ways to cope.” –Kilroy

According to the American Psychological Association, there are four main areas of resilience. Work to improve your resilience in these four areas.

1. Build your connections

Connect with people you trust and who understand you. Remind yourself that you are not alone. If you have experienced trauma, it is common to want to isolate yourself. Fight that urge. Find a group to join and get active in the community.

2. Foster wellness

- *Take care of your body.* Your body needs good food, sleep, water, and exercise to fight off stress. When you take care of your body, you will feel better. There is a big connection between your physical and mental health.
- *Practice mindfulness.* Mindfulness is being in the present moment without judgment. It can be practiced in many different ways.
- *Avoid negative outlets.* When things are stressful, it is tempting to want to turn to drugs, alcohol, or other negative ways of coping. This is like putting a bandage

on a large wound. Instead, try to focus on health things you can give your body to help you cope.

3. Find purpose

- *Help others.* Find meaning and purpose by helping others. Get involved with a community organization or help a friend who is struggling.
- *Be proactive.* Ask yourself, “What can I do about this problem?” Set achievable goals and break them down into smaller steps. Start working on these steps.
- *Look for opportunities for self-discovery.* Self-awareness can help you grow. Think about how you have grown as a result of a struggle, like being locked up. How have you become a better person? You may find that it helps you increase self-worth and appreciate your path in life.

4. Embrace healthy thoughts

- *Keep things in perspective.* You do not always have control of events in your life. But, you do have control of how you make sense of things and respond to them. How you think about your situation impacts how you feel, so move those negative thoughts aside.
- *Accept change.* Being able to accept change is a part of life. There may be some things that get in the way of your goals. It is OK to accept some things. Focus instead on the things that are in your power to change and control.
- *Maintain a hopeful outlook.* It is not realistic to be positive all the time. Allow yourself to feel upset for a little bit, but then focus on what gives you hope. What do you want and how can you make that happen?
- *Learn from your past.* Look back at what has helped you in the past during hard times. Remind yourself of what has helped you find strength before. What have you learned about yourself from your past experiences?

“Advice for socializing outside? Learning coping skills and anger management. Being less abrasive and open-minded.” – Earl

Finding Treatment

Everyone can benefit from mental health support during reentry. Reentry is stressful. Even if you do not have a mental health disorder, you may benefit from talking to someone to help you adjust.

It is a good idea to schedule an appointment with a mental health provider *before your release*. Many community mental health centers have long waiting lists, so set up an appointment ahead of time. This will help you have the support you need when things are tough.

There are several different options for care, depending on what your needs are.

Crisis Care. Are you in a crisis? Are you worried about hurting yourself or others? Do you have suicidal thoughts? Are you seeing and hearing things that aren't there? Are your symptoms so bad that you are having trouble functioning? Get help right away.

If you are in crisis, you may need an emergency evaluation to see if you need to be hospitalized. The types of treatments you get during a crisis are very brief. They are meant to keep you safe and get you stable. You'll get connected to on-going treatment for when you leave the hospital. Be sure to follow up with a mental health professional in your community after a crisis. Here are a few places you can turn to for help:

- If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call 988; available 24/7, online chat: 988lifeline.org.
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HELLO" to 741741, available 24/7.
- [Find your local Crisis Hotline](#).
- If you are a Veteran in crisis, you can connect with the Veterans Crisis Line by calling (800) 273-8255 and press "1" or by texting 838255.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-TALK (8255).
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ Suicide Help): (866) 488-7386 or text "START" to 678780.

Non-Crisis Care. If you need help, but it's not an emergency, find a community provider for treatment. When you call, ask for a mental health assessment or intake with a therapist or counselor (for talk therapy) or psychiatrist (for medication).

These resources will help you find a community provider near you:

- Visit [Mental Health Texas](#) to find services near you.
- **Local Mental/Behavioral Health Authorities** provides crisis services, medication, counseling, case management, treatment and support. To find your local mental health center (by county), [check out their website](#).
- Find a [Community Resource Coordination Group](#) in your area. These are groups of community members that work to coordinate health and basic needs services and support including mental health.
- **Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI)** provides services for individuals with a diagnosis of a serious mental illness (major depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder), intellectual disabilities, a terminal or serious medical condition, a physical disability, or to elderly individuals. Individuals are typically referred to the program prior to release, but referrals to the program can be made by a parole or probation officer. For more information about the program, ask your parole/probation officer or call (936) 437-5016.
- Call **2-1-1** option 8 to find mental health services in your area.
- The [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) of North Texas provides education and resources including local and virtual support groups.
- Your doctor may be able to connect you to a mental health consultant located in your clinic so ask if one is available.



Phone Apps. There are several phone applications that might be helpful when managing your stress and other mental health challenges including the following:

- Breathe2Relax
- Self-help Anxiety Management
- Virtual Hope Box

Who Provides Services? There are different mental health professionals who can make a diagnosis and provide treatment.

- **Counselors, social workers, and family therapists** offer assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health issues through talk therapy or counseling.
- **Clinical psychologists** diagnose and treat mental health issues through talk therapy. They also can also offer testing of behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. This testing can be helpful for making a diagnosis.
- **Psychiatrists or psychiatric nurse practitioners** also assess, diagnose, and treat mental health issues, but they take a medical approach and can prescribe medications.

Most mental health professionals have different specialties. If you are able, find someone who has training and experience working with the problems you face.

Types of Treatment

Mental health professionals offer many types of treatment. Often, it's helpful to combine different types of treatment, like therapy and medication.

The most important part of treatment is not the type of treatment you choose but the relationship you have with your mental health provider. Make sure that you feel safe and connected to your provider so that you can benefit from treatment. If you do not feel safe and connected, seek out alternative care.

Individual therapy or counseling. Talk therapy involves working one-on-one with a mental health professional. Therapy can help you heal, grow, and move toward a more productive and healthy life. A therapist will help you learn to live your best life with mental health issues.

Group therapy or counseling. This is similar to individual treatment, but you will do therapy with other people. These are not self-help groups. A mental health professional will lead the group. You will likely attend weekly sessions. The power of group treatment comes from the group members. It can be really helpful to have a support network of others who have similar challenges. Many groups target a specific problem, but some may be more general.

Family therapy or counseling. The goal of family therapy is to improve relationships and resolve conflicts. It can include your romantic partner, children, and other family members. It is often used with other types of treatments.

Medication. Just as medication can treat heart disease and diabetes, medication can treat mental health issues. Medications are not always needed, but most people with moderate to severe mental health issues benefit from medication.

Some mental health issues are significant enough to require medication. Bipolar disorder and schizophrenia symptoms cannot be managed without the help of medication. If you have these disorders, make sure you take your medication every day. Don't skip doses. If you have severe anxiety or depression, you will also likely benefit

from medication. Taking medication can help relieve symptoms so that you feel better. Combined with talk therapy, medication can help you lead a healthy and productive life.

Medications are prescribed by a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner after an evaluation. The evaluation will last between 30 and 60 minutes. After that, appointments will be brief (about 15 minutes). Your psychiatrist will monitor your medications and side effects. It takes time for your body to adjust to medications. It also takes time for your provider to find what works best for you. Many medications have side effects, especially when you first take them. Don't give up if the first medication isn't for you. It may take a couple of tries to find the right medicine and dosage.

Warning: Don't quit taking medication once you start feeling better. Feeling good may be a sign that the medication is working, not that you don't need it anymore! Always consult with a psychiatric practitioner before stopping your medications. Stopping medications all at once can be very dangerous. Your psychiatrist can help you decide if it's ok to stop. They can help you stop gradually and safely.

Paying for Treatment. Medicaid will cover mental health treatment. If you need to apply for Medicaid, the Health chapter tells you how you can apply for Medicaid. Not all mental health treatment programs accept Medicaid. Make sure to ask if the program accepts Medicaid when you call to make your first appointment. Some programs will also offer services on a "sliding fee scale" so you can pay what you can afford if you do not have insurance. Keep in mind that most programs that do accept Medicaid may have long waiting lists, so plan ahead. If possible, make your appointments before your release.

If you are enrolling in private insurance, make sure to select a plan that includes mental health treatment. When you make an appointment, ask if they accept your insurance. You may be able to see a mental health professional in private practice. This may decrease your waiting time for an appointment.

Attitudes About Mental Health

Some people feel embarrassed or ashamed of having mental health issues. These attitudes may have come from your family, your community, or from the media. These attitudes can make it hard for you to get better.

Everyone has a role to fight against these negative attitudes! The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers some suggestions about what you can do to help:

- Compare physical and mental illness. Lots of people have mental health issues, just as lots of people have physical health issues like diabetes and heart disease. Getting treatment is a positive thing.
- Talk openly about mental health. Share your experience with people you trust.
- Educate yourself and others. Respond to negative comments by sharing facts and experiences.
- Be conscious of language. Remind people that words matter. Try to avoid words like crazy, or maddening that are all too common in our daily language.
- Show compassion for those with mental health issues, including yourself.
- Be honest about treatment. Getting mental health treatment is normal, just like other health care treatment.
- Choose empowerment over shame.



Common Mental Health Disorders

Several mental health disorders are common in people who spend time in prison. We describe them here so that you can know what they are and when you may need to get help. If you think you might have one of these health disorders, talk to a health professional who can evaluate you and provide a diagnosis.

Major depressive disorder. Everyone feels sad once in a while, but not everyone feels depressed. Symptoms include:

- Feeling sad or uninterested in things most of the time
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Feeling low energy and having a hard time focusing
- Feeling tearful, empty, hopeless, or angry and irritable
- Feeling pretty miserable but not understanding why
- Some people have chronic pain or digestive issues

Do these symptoms last for at least two weeks? Do they get in the way of your everyday life? You may be depressed. Talk therapy or medicine can help.

If you are **severely depressed**, you may also have thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself or die (this is a big concern for women who are recently released). Severe depression may also cause you to hear or see things that are not there. If you have these severe symptoms, go to the nearest emergency room right away or call the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

Bipolar disorder. Most people have changes in mood at times. If you're stressed, you might feel angry or scared. If you lost someone you love, you might feel sad. Hormone changes can also affect moods.

If you have intense mood swings that last for several days, you may have bipolar disorder. People with bipolar disorder have extreme shifts in mood, energy, and ability to function. These mood shifts include episodes of depression (above) and mania.

Signs of mania are:

- Increased self-esteem and feeling like you are on top of the world
- Less need for sleep
- Talking a lot and often fast
- Having so many thoughts that you cannot keep up with them
- Being distracted easily
- Feeling restless. You might pace the room or bounce your leg.
- Doing things that are risky and can cause harm: spending a lot of money, having unprotected sex with various partners, and using drugs or alcohol.

For some people, manic and depressive episodes can be very extreme. Symptoms can include seeing and hearing things that are not there. This can really impact your ability to function. If your symptoms are severe, get help right away. Less severe episodes of mania (known as hypomania) and depression may not impact your life as much.

Managing bipolar disorder requires help from medicine and talk therapy. Keep a record of your mood changes so that you know if you need to seek help.

Generalized anxiety disorder. Feeling anxious or stressed once in a while is a normal part of life. If your anxiety feels out of control, you might have an anxiety disorder.

Generalized anxiety disorder is when you worry a lot and are nervous about everyday things, even things that you have no control over, for no apparent reason. You might feel like something really bad is going to happen. Anxiety leaves you feeling restless, tired, irritable, and tense. It can impact your ability to focus and sleep.

If these problems do not go away and begin to impact your relationships and responsibilities, get help. Talk therapy can help. Medication can help when symptoms are severe.

Schizophrenia. Some people can have a distorted sense of reality. This is known as schizophrenia. It is a severe mental health condition that requires medication to manage. Talk therapy can help you build life skills to cope. Schizophrenia involves a range of problems with thinking, behavior, and emotions. Signs of schizophrenia can vary, but it usually involves:

- Problems with thinking (having a hard time organizing your thoughts, forgetting things, not being able to focus, struggling to make decisions)
- Delusions (false beliefs that are not based in reality)
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't really there)
- Disorganized speech (not being able to put words or sentences together)
- Lacking skills that people usually have (the ability to express emotion, be part of activities, and engage with others)

These symptoms can have a big impact on your life. If these symptoms are present for at least a month, get help.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some traumatic events are so shocking, scary, or dangerous that they can change the way we think and feel long after the event has passed. It's natural to feel scared, nervous, or depressed after something bad has happened. If these feelings last for over a month, you may have post-traumatic stress disorder. Common symptoms of PTSD include:

- Having nightmares or flashbacks
- Avoiding people or situations that remind you of the event
- Feeling on edge and anxious a lot
- Feeling depressed
- Trouble remembering things
- Feeling emotionally detached

Medications and talk therapy can be useful in working through these symptoms.

Personality disorders. Your personality is who you are: the thoughts, patterns, feelings, and behaviors that define you. Sometimes people can develop personality disorders - patterns and traits that are harmful to themselves and others. For people in prison, the two most common personality disorders are:

- *Borderline personality disorder:* Having unstable moods, behavior, and relationships. Feeling emotionally unstable, worthless, insecure, or impulsive. These feelings or behaviors can hurt your relationships with others.

- *Antisocial personality disorder*: Acting in ways that show a lack of care about other people. For example, lying, breaking laws, or acting impulsively. Not caring about their own safety or the safety of others.

Since personality traits are pretty stable over our lifetime, these disorders can be hard to treat. It is not impossible though. Often treatment includes long-term therapy. Medications tend to not work as well for these disorders.

Multiple disorders: Mental health, substance use, and personality disorders. Many people who are in prison have more than one mental health disorder. People who have depression are more likely to have anxiety, too. Many people who have a mental health disorder also have a substance use problem. Some people have a mental health disorder, a personality disorder, and a substance use disorder.

If you have more than one of these disorders, let your providers know about everything you are struggling with. If you address one problem and not the other, you may find it difficult to fully recover.

*“It’s all right to show your emotions. It’s a natural thing to vent, to cry.” –
Anonymous*

Substance Use Disorders

Do you have difficulty controlling your use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or medications? If so, this is one of the most important chapters you will read. As you know, drug and alcohol problems can make it much harder to get a job, form healthy relationships, find housing, and stay out of prison.

We urge you to get help. Your reentry success depends upon it! As you begin to recover, your mind will clear, and you will be better able to rebuild your life.

For many, prison is a time to get clean from drugs or alcohol. But just because you were clean in prison doesn't mean that you are fully recovered. Many people find that problems with drugs or alcohol return then they are released.

Reentry can be a time of stress, anxiety, and fear. You're trying to rebuild your life while also dealing with the trauma of being locked up for years. Perhaps you have used drugs and alcohol to cope with difficult feelings in the past. Recognize that this puts you at greater risk of relapse.

There is hope. Know that many people recover from substance use disorders and you can too! We honor your efforts. Recovery isn't easy and you may have setbacks. We believe in YOU and your ability to recover.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Where to get help
- Safer drug use
- Treatment programs
- Finding a peer support group
- The road to recovery

“What ends up happening is you get out and you realize your issues don’t end. Now you have to deal with other issues. You get hit with all this stuff. You start to get into bad habits again, revert to old coping mechanisms. You have alcohol available, you have drugs. The bottle becomes more available than the gym.” –Anonymous

Where to Get Help

Let’s be honest. The first few days, weeks, and months after release are really challenging. This is why it’s a good idea to make plans to get help before you are released.

It’s best if you can set up a time to meet with a treatment provider within 2-3 days of release. Join a support group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, right away or make an appointment to see a counselor. Don’t wait to get help.

Here are a few places you can start:

- Call 911 if you have overdosed and need immediate help.
- [Search for your local Substance Use Outreach Screening Assessment Referral Center](#). These services are a great starting point for people who want help accessing substance use services and are unsure where to begin.
- **To find substance use services in your area, visit National Helpline:** Call (800) 662-4357 for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) national helpline. The helpline provides support 24/7 and provides confidential free help to find substance use treatment and information. You can also find treatment [by visiting their website](#).
- **Alcohol Abuse Hotline:** Call 877-232-9895 24/7 to get more information about support for alcohol use.
- [National sober house directory](#).
- **Peer support groups.** Find a local Alcoholics Anonymous support group by calling 855-977-9213 or going to <https://aa.org>. Find a Narcotics Anonymous

support group by calling 1-818-773-9999 or going to <https://na.org>. [There are also non-religious support group options such as SMART Recovery.](#)

- **Recovery support services.** Peer support specialists have lived experience with substance use and help individuals find counseling, sober housing, transportation, and medications. Peers provide support before, during, and after treatment. To find recovery support services near you visit [the Texas Health and Human Services website](#).

Safer Drug Use

Many substance use treatment programs focus on getting clean or sobering up. You may need to pass drug tests as a condition of your parole. Many jobs require drug testing.

Some people find that quitting completely is the only thing that works for them. If they start drinking a little, this quickly turns back into drinking a lot. Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous encourage quitting completely and provide peer support to reach this goal.

Quitting isn't easy. Many people are able to quit for a while, but then return to drug use on and off. If this is your experience, there are things you can do to reduce the harm of drug use in your life. There are ways to manage your drug use so that it doesn't take over your life. Moderating your use of drugs or alcohol is also a worthy goal. Work with a counselor or program that offers substance use management.

Here are a few safety tips:

- [Learn how to inject safely and care for your veins to avoid getting HIV or another disease.](#)
- [Texas Harm Reduction Alliance:](#) Provides information about safer drug use and access to injectable naloxone, a drug that reverses opiate overdose.

Warning: *Did you know that people who have recently returned from prison are at greater risk for overdose? If you stopped using drugs or alcohol while in prison, you may have a reduced tolerance for these drugs. This means that your body can't handle the same amount of drugs that you took before. This can lead to overdose or even death.*

Signs of an Overdose:

- Unresponsive or unconscious
- Slow or stopped breathing
- Snoring or gurgling sounds
- Cold, clammy skin
- Blue lips, discolored fingernails

What to do: Try to wake the person up. Call 911 if you can't wake them. Start CPR if their breathing is slow or they have stopped breathing. Provide Naloxone (NARCAN®) if available.

Self-Assessment

Has alcohol or substance use caused problems in your life? This self-assessment is designed to help you identify how an addiction or substance abuse can influence your life. Take this honestly and with an open mind. The results are for your own self-reflection and are not intended to replace the results of any assessment performed by a licensed clinician.

1. Do you ever use for something other than a medical reason?
2. When you use, do you use more than one substance at a time?
3. Do you use more than once per week?
4. Have you ever abused prescription medication?
5. Have you ever tried to stop using but couldn't stay stopped?
6. Do you ever feel ashamed or guilty after use?
7. Has your relationships with friends and family become distant?
8. Do you spend less time with your family and more time with friends who use?
9. Has your family or friends talked to you about your use?
10. Do your family members or friends ever complain about your use?
11. While under the influence, have you gotten into fights with other people?
12. Have you ever lost a job due to coming in late, mistakes, or poor performance due to your use?
13. Has your use caused problems or gotten you into trouble at work?
14. Have you been arrested for a drug-related or alcohol-related offense?
15. Do you participate in illegal activities in order to continue using?
16. When you stop use, do you experience any withdrawal symptoms or feel sick?
17. Has your use ever resulted in blackouts?
18. Have you ever had any medical problems such as memory loss, convulsions, bleeding, etc., as a result of your use?
19. Have you ever looked for or received help for your use?
20. Have you participated or been in any type of treatment for your use?

If you answerd yes to more than five of the questions on the self-assessment, you may want to consider making changes in your life.

What is your plan for recovery immediately after being released?

You may use our resource directory to find potential resources in the community you will be released to.

There are many different kinds of treatment programs. You may need to enroll in an inpatient intensive treatment program or live in a recovery home. If your disorder is less severe, you may be able to receive outpatient services, therapy, or join a support group. Treatment should last long enough to change behaviors and thought patterns. For those with severe drug problems, at least three months of intensive treatment is recommended. After that, follow-up support can be helpful for months and even years.

There are three main types of treatment. Often, treatment programs combine all three.

- *Cognitive-behavioral therapy.* Meet with a therapist to learn how to manage stress and triggers that have led to drug use in the past. The therapist can help you find ways to motivate yourself.
- *Medication-assisted treatment.* Some medications can reduce your cravings and help you stop using. Doctors can prescribe medications such as methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone to help you overcome an addiction.
- *Peer support.* Many people find that a peer support group can help. Alcoholics Anonymous (aa.org) or Narcotics Anonymous (na.org) are two of the most common. Peer support (recovery) specialists also can provide one-on-one peer support to navigate treatment services.

A good treatment program should also:

- *Empower you.* It should build upon your strengths. It shouldn't shame you. It should help you take an active role in your recovery.
- *Provide mental health treatment.* Many people who have substance use disorders also have mental health problems. It is essential to treat both mental health issues and substance use issues together.
- *Address past trauma.* Many people use drugs to cope with past trauma. A good treatment program will help you develop effective coping strategies and recover from the effects of trauma and violence.
- *Provide support services.* Recovery is about more than getting clean. Good treatment programs offer services to help you rebuild your life.

Are you Pregnant? Do you have children you are caring for? Many women are afraid their children will be taken away if their substance use becomes known. But continuing to use drugs or alcohol also puts you and your children at great risk.

As you are surely aware, society is not kind to mothers with substance use problems. You have likely sensed how harshly people judge you. You may have intense feelings of guilt and shame. We recommend that you seek out a treatment program that can help with the unique challenges women and mothers face.

Always let your doctor know if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant before starting medical treatment for a substance use disorder. Some medications are not safe to take while pregnant or nursing.

Paying for Treatment. Medicaid covers the cost of many substance use treatment services, such as counseling, therapy, medication management, social work services, and peer support. Our Health chapter explains how to apply for Medicaid. Not all treatment programs accept Medicaid. Before starting services, ask if they accept Medicaid.

If you are enrolling in a private insurance plan, choose a plan that covers substance use treatment. When making an appointment with a service provider or clinic, check that they accept your insurance.

Even if you do not yet have insurance, there are affordable clinics and programs that you can go to for help. Ask the provider if they offer “sliding scale” services where you pay reduced fees depending on your income.

Finding a Peer Support Group

If you are struggling with drug or alcohol use, join a support group to get help and encouragement from others. These groups are usually free.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are the largest peer recovery organizations and have chapters throughout the state. Visit aa.org or na.org to find a meeting or online group. AA and NA use a religious approach, though they are not tied to a specific religion. Their 12-step process begins by asking members to admit that they no longer have control over their drug or alcohol use. Members are asked to turn themselves over to a higher power to find the strength to change. Celebrate Recovery is another faith-based recovery peer support group that has a large presence in Texas. [To find a meeting visit the Celebrate Recovery website.](#)

There are non-religious support group options, too. These options focus on helping people find motivation within themselves. People learn to control themselves instead of looking to a higher power for help. Here are a few popular options, with in person and online meetings throughout the US:

- *Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART)* peer support groups help participants resolve problems with any addiction. Go to <https://smartrecovery.org> or call 440-951-5357 to find an in-person or online meeting.
- *Women for Sobriety* is a peer-support program for women overcoming substance use disorders. Go to <https://womenforsobriety.org> or call 215-536-8026 to find an in-person or online meeting.
- *Secular Organizations for Sobriety* is a network of peer groups to help people maintain sobriety/abstinence from alcohol and drug addictions, food addiction and more. [Go to https://sossobriety.org](https://sossobriety.org) or call 314-353-3532 to find a meeting.

- *LifeRing Secular Recovery* is an organization of people who share practical experiences and sobriety support. They focus on empowering you to overcome your addiction. Go to <https://lifering.org> or call 800-811-4142 to find a meeting.

Ask your primary care provider for recommendations. Many community centers and churches also sponsor support groups or can direct you to others.

Approach your first meeting with an open mind and try to find out all you can. You may need to attend several meetings before you feel things are “clicking.” If you don’t feel you have found “your” group, keep trying. Chapters can be very different and members come and go. Look for:

- Regularly scheduled meetings
- Warmth and friendliness
- Some focus and structure to meetings
- Some time to mingle informally



The Road to Recovery

The road to recovery can be a long one. Don't be too discouraged if you relapse. A relapse doesn't always mean that the treatment isn't working. Give it another chance. Recognize that if you stopped using once, you can again. You have developed skills that will help you next time. Ask if there is a different treatment that may work better for you. Sometimes multiple periods of treatment are needed.



Recovery isn't just about stopping using. It's about change. It's about improving your overall health and wellness. It's about living up to your full potential. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) lists four main aspects of recovery:

1. *Health*: Overcome or manage one's disease or symptoms
2. *Home*: Find a stable and safe place to live
3. *Purpose*: Take part in meaningful daily activities (job, school, family caretaking, etc.)
4. *Community*: Build relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope

Voting

If you can vote, you should! Your vote matters. Less than half of the people in the US vote. This means that only a small number of people choose the people who make the laws that apply to all of us. Your vote can make a difference, especially at the local and state levels.

US federal elections (for US President, US Senators, and US Congress Representatives) happen every two or four years, on the first Tuesday in November. State and local elections can take place in any year, at any time. During any federal, state or local elections, you may be voting for state leaders, county state attorneys, local officials, and sometimes judges. There may be other important offices and issues on the ballot.

Step 1: Register to Vote.

Each state makes its own voting and election rules, including when and how to register. Learn more at <https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote>, or call (866) OUR-VOTE.

In Texas, you are eligible to vote if you are a U.S. citizen, a resident of the county where you submit the application, 18 years or older on election day, and if you have not been declared by a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be either totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote. Individuals convicted of a felony offense are eligible to vote once you have completed your sentence, probation, or parole.

Here are a few common ways to register:

- Register online. In 42 states, plus D.C., you can register at vote.gov. For Texas voter registration, go to this website: <https://vrapp.sos.state.tx.us/index.asp>
- Register by mail. [Download the National Mail Voter Registration Form and mail it in.](#)
- Register in person. [Visit your county's Voter Registrar office.](#)

What do I need to bring to register? You will need to write down your name, mailing address, date of birth, telephone number. They will also ask for your ID number (state ID, driver's license number, or the last four digits of your social security number) but if you do not have any of those, you need to state that fact. Be prepared. Call (866) OUR-VOTE if you have questions.

When should you register? You can register at any time, but if you want to vote in an upcoming election, your county's voter registrar must receive your application at least 30 days before the election.

Step 2: Learn about the Candidates and Issues.

This guide cannot tell you how to vote. But you can learn about candidates and issues by listening to the news, talking with people you trust, and looking up candidates and issues online. You can also find voter guides and ratings for judges online.

Step 3: Vote!

Under Texas law, you must present one of the following forms of photo ID to vote in-person:

- Texas Driver's License (issued by DPS)
- Texas Election Identification Certificate (issued by DPS)
- Texas Personal Identification Card (issued by DPS)
- Texas Handgun License (issued by DPS)
- US Military Identification Card, containing your photograph
- US Citizenship Certificate, containing your photograph
- US Passport (book or card)

Please note with the exception of the citizenship certificate, for voters aged 18-69, the acceptable form of photo identification may be expired no more than four years before being presented for voter qualification at the polling place. For voters aged 70 or older, the acceptable form of photo identification may be expired for any length of time if the identification is otherwise valid.

If you do not possess and cannot reasonably obtain one of these forms, you may complete a Reasonable Impediment Declaration (RID) at the polls and present an alternative ID, such as a utility bill, bank statement, government check, or voter registration certificate. [For more information, see this website.](#)

Normally, there are two ways that you can vote:

- In person, on election day or during an early voting period. [Check out this website to find your polling place.](#)
- By mail-in ballot. Contact your election authority or (866) OUR-VOTE if you need help requesting a mail-in ballot.

You can take notes, voting guides, and this voter information into the voting booth. It's a good idea to do this, because there can be a lot to remember.

Take your time. Do not let anyone rush you. If you need help, ask a poll worker. They cannot tell you who or what to vote for, but they can answer questions about the process. They can help you mark a ballot if you have difficulty reading or if your English is limited. You can also request a ballot in other languages.

Call (866) OUR-VOTE if you run into any problems while voting.



Deportation

If you were born outside the US and do not have documentation, you may be subject to deportation after your release from prison. This can be true even if you were a child when you were brought over or had a legal permanent resident status before incarceration. Having a felony conviction may mean that status was stripped from you.

An immigration lawyer or non-profit that works to defend the rights of immigrants may be able to help you figure out your current status. There may still be options for you to fight the removal proceedings if ICE intends to deport you.

The consulate of your country may also be able to help. In many prisons, representatives of the consulates of various countries like Mexico visit regularly. Ask if you can schedule an appointment with them if you think they can help. It's your right to speak to your country's consulate.

If you are taken into ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) custody after you are released you can ask a family member or trusted friend [to look you up on ICE's Detainee Locator System](#). They can see where you are detained and visit you there, bringing a bag that you can take with you as you are deported. If you know your "Alien registration number" this will help to locate you.

There is much more to know about your rights as an immigrant, what to expect with deportation and reentry in your home country. There are several resources that you might find helpful on this topic.

- The [Texas State Law Library](#) has information regarding immigration law in Texas.
- The **Education Justice Project** publishes a guide on this topic called *A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation*, available in Spanish as well. You can access a free online copy at reentryillinois.net or write to the address below to request a free copy:

Education Justice Project
1001 S. Wright St.
Champaign, IL 61820

Other Helpful Reentry Resources

There are a number of other reentry resources that are available online for you to access. Here are a few resources that have more information on topics that were covered in our guide:

TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division

- <https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/rid/index.html>
- Reentry Hotline Number (877) 887-6151
- TDCJ Reentry Guide:
https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/documents/rid/RID_Reentry_Resource_Guide.pdf

Locked Out: A Texas Legal Guide to Reentry, 4th Edition. Beacon Law

- https://texaslawhelp.org/sites/default/files/legal_guide_to_reentry_-_4th_edition_-_2019_final.pdf

Texas State Law Library Reentry Resources:

- <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/reentry-resources>

The Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative:

- <https://medc-tori.org/services/>

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition's County resource guide:

- <http://countyresources.texascjc.org/>

Tarrant County Reentry Coalition:

- <https://www.tcreentry.org/>

Northern District of Texas Reentry Resources:

- <https://www.txnp.uscourts.gov/content/reentry-resourcesinformation>

Bureau of Prisons Resource List:

- https://www.bop.gov/resources/former_inmate_resources.jsp



Education Justice Project