Building Your Parole *and* Relapse Prevention Plan



Tips to help you create you own, personalized parole and relapse prevention plan prior to your hearing.





Now's the time to plan and prepare.

A year before your initial (first) parole hearing is not too soon to begin sketching out your parole plans. And you **will** need a plan. Don't expect success at the board if you aren't prepared, and the BPH will expect you to create your parole and relapse prevention plan, not depend on either the commissioners or DAPO (Division of Adult Parole Operations, your parole agent) to take care of you. Taking responsibility for yourself and your actions is a basic tenet of parole suitability and that includes not just being responsible for your past actions, but for how you will live your life going forward.

If you've already been to a hearing, especially if lack of adequate parole plans was one of the reasons cited for denial of parole, this is your chance to right that wrong, build a solid and realistic parole plan and show the next parole panel you're serious about your success on parole. Use these tips and insights to build a plan unique to your needs and your situation. And don't forget the importance of letting the clinician from the Forensic Assessment Division, who will be interviewing you for your Comprehensive Risk Assessment (CRA or psych eval) know that you're actively engaged in finalizing your plans.

If you have questions, please feel free to write to Life Support Alliance (LSA) and we'll do our best to find an answer—but we won't write the plan for you. That's why this booklet was created, to provide YOU with the roadmap you need for YOUR situation.

Life Support Alliance

PO Box 277

Rancho Cordova, CA 95741

Your friends and family can reach us at: staff@lifesupportalliance.org



YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE A PLAN

One of the many factors parole panels examine and consider in determining parole suitability is the appropriateness and realistic nature of any parole plan offered by the potential parolee. It behooves any lifer going to the board to give thought to his/her parole plans, not just go to the hearing and assume you'll figure it out after you're granted—there's a real chance you won't be granted if your parole plans aren't complete. Having solid plans is part of being suitable, and lack of adequate parole plans is often cited as one factor the board found wanting when a denial is made, and by the Governor if he decides to revoke the parole grant.

Adequate parole plans don't have to be complicated or presented in an elaborate manner, but they do need to be comprehensive, covering the areas the board is concerned about, and providing a realistic and verifiable plan of action. The board is concerned with the basics:

- 1. WHERE will you live?
- 2. WHAT will you do (legally) to support yourself?
- 3. WHO will be your support network when you're released?

A simple summary, with supporting documentation (letters of acceptance from transitional housing, a list of your vocations, possible companies where you might seek employment, support letters) is sufficient. It's less about the presentation than about the facts: what's real here, that the parole panel can reasonably believe will happen and what could be pie-in-the-sky wishful and aggrandized thinking on your part.

- Transitional housing (preferred by the board)
- With family (also possible)
- Is the proposed location acceptable to your likely parole conditions (if you have a 290 or 5B, there are restrictions)?
- Do you have verification of that residence (a letter of support or acceptance from a transitional facility or family confirming you are welcome there and have a bed)?

Transitional housing is preferred by the board, and for good reasons. Lifers who have been incarcerated for decades have a lot of adjusting to do, and the best mentors in those areas are other former lifers, who know what you'll need to know before you do. In your first months after release, you don't know what you don't know, and your family doesn't know either.

You may have questions about things that 'everybody knows;' everybody but a lifer who's been down 20+ years. How to use a debit card; how to get and use a public transportation pass (no cash); apply for a job using only the internet; Uber, Lyft, cell phones (no public telephones anymore), possibly even learning a totally new city. Your family could get overwhelmed with your questions, but the other residents of transitional living have just been through what you're facing; they know what you need to know and how best to help you through those first few confusing days. Plus, they speak "lifer."

Transitional housing also gives your family a chance to adjust their own lives to your return and re-inclusion in the family. Another person to include, plan for, consider, and, frankly, someone they're getting reacquainted with. It's a new world for them, too, and everyone will need their space from time to time.

And if you don't have family who can house you right away, transitional housing is a supportive launch pad for the next phase of your life. Most lifers plan to spend 3-12 months in transitional housing, using that time to get acclimated to the new trappings of society, finding employment, start saving some money and becoming comfortable outside the wire. From there many move on to living with family or friends. All of those steps require approval from your parole officer.

If transitional housing is your goal, your parole plan should include 2-3 specific facilities named and with letters of acceptance from those facilities included in the information you give to the board. There are numerous transitional facilities, most accept state funding. Get to know the programs of a few options (are they faith based, do they provide job training skills, help with acquiring driver's licenses and social security cards) and choose the one(s) that best fit your needs and goals.

Write to them, about a year before your hearing, introduce yourself, give them a tentative timeline and ask if they would accept you into their program. When you get those acceptance letters, place them in your parole packet, but be ready to discuss your choices with the parole panel and tell them which of the 2 or 3 would be your first choice.

If the board orders you to transitional housing the state will pay the costs, so be sure the ones you choose accept state funding—one of the things you should ask them in your letter. If you don't select a facility the board, via DAPO, will likely select one for you.

Once you've spent your time in transitional housing, the usual move is to family/friends. Again, you should let the board know who those individuals will likely be, as they will be a big part of your support network. When planning on family housing, either before or after transitional, there are some points to consider:

- Is the proposed location acceptable to your likely parole conditions (if you have a 290, what are the restrictions and does the home meet those points)?
- Do support letters from your family verify this arrangement?
- Is the proposed location in an area that isn't likely to be one of your external triggers?
- Are the other residents of the home willing to help you abide by parole conditions (the most common are no alcohol, drugs, or weapons in the house? Even if the aforementioned items aren't yours and are legal for most, if you have access to them, DAPO can't be sure you won't be indulging. And that could lead to drama you don't need.)



2. WHAT WILL YOU DO TO SUPPORT YOURSELF?

Do you have a marketable skill, a trade, perhaps something you either learned or honed your ability to do while in prison? Many lifers have more than one vocational certificate, so while you may have options, the board is going to want to know which field you want to pursue.

While it is <u>not</u> necessary to have a firm job offer to be granted parole, it helps if you can let the parole panel know you have a plan and some idea where to market yourself. If you have tentative job offers, even from family members, great; those will do for a start.

You can also include in your plan lists of businesses that hire those with felony records (the list gets longer every year), unions that will assist you in employment searches and other employment or educational opportunities. If you have family/friends who have pledged to help you financially until you're on your feet, that's helpful, but the board will want some indication that you intend to support yourself, not depend on the largess of others. Do you have sufficient funds and/or promise of financial support to live for the first 6-12 months after your release?

You are showing the board you understand that you're responsible for yourself, and that means providing for your living expenses, long term. If you're entitled to a pension or other similar payments, include that fact as part of your financial plans.

You may have plans to start your own business, and while that's an admirable goal, be aware that such plans do not bear financial fruit right away, often for some time. You are not going to be paroled and in 6 months build a profitable business from nothing. Don't give up your dreams, but be realistic and have a fallback plan, something that is verifiable and more dependable than a brand-new business.



3.WHO WILL BE IN YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK?

Who will you be hanging with now? What support letters do you have from friends and family, real people who actually know you and can attest both to your life-change and their willingness to be part of your support network?

Certainly, your family can write support letters that are meaningful, as can friends who have known you in the past and can speak to the old vs. the new you. Also, those who might have a job for you, can help you with transportation, and who will be there to help you adjust to life on the outside. You don't need a letter from anyone you've ever met, just those who you plan to associate with, who are pro-social and stable individuals, the kind of folks who stay inside the law and will help you adjust (AA, NA, CR, a church).

This is a situation of quality vs. quantity, as it works more in your favor to have a few good, verifiable letters from those who really are friends and family and will be there to support you, than to have dozens of letters and/or petitions signed by folks who've never heard of you before someone asked them to sign a petition they never read, about a man or woman they don't know and certainly won't be there to provide transportation, a few bucks in a pinch or even a shoulder to lean on.

Another section of this course offers suggestions you can pass along to your letter writers on how to write an effective support letter. But here are a couple of important points to remember: the board can and often does check on the authenticity of support letters, recessing a hearing to call up the writer for verification. And bogus support letters can cost you a grant, either immediately at the hearing, or through recission of a grant after the fact, if a deception is discovered.



IF YOU HAVE AN ICE HOLD

If you have an ICE hold and will likely be deported on release from the California prison system, make plans for both California (in case you aren't deported, or the determination takes some time) as well as your home country. As the board won't assume you will or won't be deported. The same 3 points, where, what and who, apply.

Even if it isn't a certainty that you will be deported, consider making basic parole plans in your home country as well as plans for California. In the past the chances of being deported from the US depended greatly on the extradition treaty status between that

nation and the United States, but in recent months some lifers with uninvoked ICE holds at the time of release are finding that sometimes, even years later, even after parole discharge, ICE initiates the deportation process, and they have found themselves fighting deportation while still others have been deported.

When you appear at your hearing with an ICE hold your parole plans should include a plan for parole in California and another plan for possible deportation. The latter set need not be as definitive and specific as those for in-state, but should cover the same ground: home, job, support.

Keep in mind, the BPH, even CDCR have no say in the deportation process; that's strictly the venue of the feds. Once released from prison you will likely be surrendered to federal custody, to be held until your deportation status is determined. If you aren't deported, your parole in California will then begin, but you should receive credit for the time (weeks, months) spent in limbo in federal custody.



WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO?

It's good to have short and long-term goals, but as in many things, moderation is the key to success. Many lifers create a list of goals that presents them moving at a frantic pace in the first 90-120 days of release, listing all the things they hope to accomplish—getting a Driver's License, Social Security card, finding a job, re-establishing contact with family, finding a sponsor, 90 AA/NA meetings in 90 days.....all without taking a breath.

So, while it's good to set goals, it's also good not to put more pressure on yourself than release and reentry will already provide. And stress and pressure will certainly be in evidence in your first months out. Even the exhilaration of freedom provides a certain level of stress. Don't set yourself up—give yourself time to process all the things you'll be experiencing and immersed in during those early days.

Yes, set goals for yourself in the first few months, but don't be fanatical. 90 meetings in 90 days—OK, but if you only make 80 or 85, don't count that as a failure. And you may find it takes some time to get that Driver's License and Social Security card—more on that later. As for re-establishing all those contacts with your family and finding a sponsor—human relations take time. You can't force that or put a deadline on it.

Your goals should be realistic—you aren't going to be able to support yourself right away in a business you start after release, so have a contingency plan. What support groups can you realistically plan to attend, what pro-social activities do you hope to be involved in?

Finding AA/NA and similar meetings that fit your needs, perhaps acquiring a sponsor are realistic and positive goals for your first 90 days out. Would counseling help? Don't forget to use the resources of your local parole office, where counseling is freely available to all parolees—use that as a resource in your parole and relapse prevention plan.

And understand, you will never recapture the years lost to incarceration, most certainly not in the first 90 days. The friends and family you left when you entered the tender care of the CDCR have changed, grown, and matured, as have you. The re-introduction and assimilation not only into society, but into family, doesn't happen overnight. Be patient, be gracious, be resilient.



PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The Board is looking for something that's quick and easy to read, complete, and realistic. They don't need a fancy cover, typewritten pages, or illustrations. In fact, an excess of such window-dressing may get in the way of signaling to the parole panel that you've given your parole plan serious thought and aren't just trying to dazzle them with the shiny stuff.

They don't need pictures of your prospective home, vehicle or family members, financial statements from you (projected) or your supporters or a copy of your resume. Lofty and grandiose business plan projections of the business you'll start and fantastically succeed in, deadlines or details of how you'll secure the documents you need (DL, SS card) and your vow to devote every weekend to at-risk youth and church are less material than the central question of, do you have a realistic outlook on what you need to re-start your life?

Certainly, your presentation should be neat and organized, with all information on potential housing options together and the same with possible job opportunities and support letters. Keep relevant information together, but try to avoid having extraneous pages between, say, your housing possibilities and acceptance letters that proclaims, "Exhibit A"; a hearing isn't a court room, your plans aren't legal documents and don't have to be braced with 'exhibits.' Just include housing acceptance letters after the list of possible housing options you're presenting and follow the same simple formula for the rest of your plan.

Neatly handwritten or printed plans are completely acceptable and check the flowery language—commissioners read literally thousands of pages of documents in preparation for a hearing and long ago learned to skim for the important stuff. Ideally, you'll have your plan complete and submit it to your counselor in time for it to be included in the packet that goes out to the commissioner and the District Attorneys, prior to your hearing. And you should take whatever plans you have, even if not finalized to your CRA interview, as the clinician preparing that report will also be interested in those plans.



TIPS ON WRITING SUPPORT LETTERS

This information is provided as a primer for friends and family of those headed to parole hearings, to assist them in writing the most impactful support letter possible.

- Always include the name and CDCR number of the inmate, as well as your name and complete contact information.
- Always sign the letter with your signature—personal details matter.
- Be brief and to the point—try to keep the letter at 1 page, certainly no more than 2 pages.
- Don't list all the classes, certifications, or vocations the prisoner has—the board already has all that information.
- Support letters should be current—if you did one for an inmate at his/her last hearing, one or more years ago, do a fresh letter, even if nothing has changed. The board looks at the date on letters and is less likely to consider 'stale' documents.
- Be specific in the support you can offer: if money, how much, how often and for long; if housing, for how long, if a job, how much the pay will be, full time or part time; if you can help with transportation and/or getting to and from job searches or self-help (AA, etc.) meetings.
- Speak to the growth and change in mind-set you have seen in the prisoner; the maturity and good decision making now being evidenced.
- Don't appeal to emotions: "Please let Johnny come home, I know he'll never do anything bad again" is a useless letter.
- Briefly explain how you met the inmate; the board wants to be sure you know this
 person and aren't just writing a letter because someone asked you to.
 Commissioners can and do stop hearings to go call the person who wrote a support
 letter, to be sure it came from them, that's why your contact information on the
 letter is important, as it adds authenticity to the letter.
- Don't discuss the victims; you can say you've seen the great remorse the prisoner now has for what his actions did, but don't say you know how the victims must feel or that they should forgive.
- And don't minimize the inmate's crime; if he can face what he did, and he must, to be found suitable, you can face it as well.
- Don't say "s/he has done enough time;" it's up to the parole board to make that decision. Likewise, don't second-guess the sentence; that ship has sailed.

- It's the quality of the support letters that matters, not the number. Don't ask
 everyone you know to write a support letter unless they can truly speak to the
 change in the inmate and have something to offer. A few good letters are better
 than numerous vague and unsubstantiated ones. And don't do petitions—those
 are meaningless to the board and appear manipulative, which can be counterproductive.
- If the letter is in Spanish or a language other than English, try to provide a translation also—most of the board members are not fluent in Spanish and certainly not in other languages.
- If you're writing a letter for a prisoner under SB 261, the Youthful Offender Parole Hearings, and you knew the person at the time of the crime, speak to your knowledge of what was going on in their life at the time of the crime, and how this affected their young decision-making process.
- Above all, don't reach out, even innocently or with good intentions, to the victim(s) or family members of the prisoner's victim; to do so could be misinterpreted and cause serious, if unintended consequences for the person seeking parole.



WHERE TO SEND SUPPORT LETTERS

The Board of Parole Hearings recommends those writing support letters mail those letters to the Board at the address below. The BPH has an entire unit dedicated to preparing files for parole commissioners on each prisoner seeking parole; they are, frankly, much more dependable than the staff at individual prisons.

We also recommend that you send copies (originals should go to BPH) to the person up for parole and to their attorney, if known. These are insurance policies; in case something does go wrong, and your letter(s) somehow don't make it into the file. The board will accept them at the time of the hearing, if necessary. And you should keep a copy for yourself.

Try to send your support letters 2-3 months before the parole hearing date and be sure to write the prisoner's name and CDCR number on the outside of the envelope, and on the letter. Mail your support letters to:

Board of Parole Hearings

PO Box 4036

Sacramento, CA, 95812-4036



WHO NEEDS A RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN?

Short answer: everyone. While those who have been subject to substance abuse issues know and understand the importance of a relapse plan, with steps to acknowledge triggers plus methods and contacts for dealing with those triggers, the same criteria can be applied to any situation of concern, anger, violence, domestic violence, for instance.

Parole commissioners often query those before them about their 'internal' and 'external' triggers and how they'll deal with the situations and individuals that pull those triggers. That self-knowledge, for substances or behaviors, is the basis of a relapse prevention plan and is the same for any past behavioral issue—anger, violence, criminogenic behaviors, domestic violence, basically any sort of anti-social concern.

Know the difference between external and internal triggers and put that information in your relapse prevention plan. You'll find some hints about external and internal triggers at the end of this section. Know your first responses to those triggers; for instance, where are AA meetings in your area? When do they meet and how will you get there? Do you have a friend or mentor who can be your first contact and assist you in getting the advice and counsel you need?

What are your coping strategies to deal with anger—breathing exercises, "I" statements, time out? Do you know the Cycle of Violence wheel, how to recognize domestic violence and how to extricate yourself from those triggering situations? Do you know where to get counseling if you feel the need? (Hint: it's available for all parolees at every parole office.)

For those lifers who may be in the psychotropic medications, this situation alone will not be the cause of a parole denial, but show intent to remain on that medication, know where to obtain those meds and who to reach out to for additional assistance. If your current protocol of treatment is working, the board wants to be sure you plan to stay on it and know how to make that happen.

Each relapse prevention plan, like each parole plan itself, must be personalized to fit the specific needs and factors of the individual involved. The structure, however, is the same: know your triggers, know how to manage them, be ready to discuss them and know where to get help in that management process and who you can ask for assistance.

While your family can help you gather that information and can be your first source of advice and support, it will take more than just reliance on family members to provide a complete and adequate relapse plan; it requires a support **network**. Nor should you simply plan on pushing through on your own; the challenges faced by lifers reentering the world are numerous, subtle, and complex. Don't leave yourself open to concern from commissioners that you may not have the support you need to be successful on parole. Give your relapse prevention plan as much thought as any part of your parole plans.



WHAT TRIGGERS YOU?

Internal triggers are primarily centered around emotions, thoughts, or memories, based mostly on old beliefs and habits:

Stress Insecurity Being Bullied Fear

Disrespect Tension Boredom Excitement

Loneliness Uncertainty Pessimism Sadness

Excitement Intimacy Depression Criticism

External triggers are places, people, things, and events that can become stressors:

Finances Life changes Smells, sounds Bars, liquor stores

Tastes Music Seasons, events Work

Pill bottles Parties Arguments New situations

Relationships Old friends Cash in hand Physical pain



WHAT YOU NEED, WHERE TO GET IT

There are a few important documents you will need to get on with your new life: Drivers' License, Social Security Card and Birth Certificate (certified copy). And often you need one or more to get the rest. Start with your birth certificate—and this means a certified copy. You or your family can write to the County Clerk in the county and state where you were born, ask what's needed to obtain a certified copy. There is usually a fee, and the process is sometimes slow—start now.

Once you're released you can obtain a Drivers' License (or learners' permit or ID card), usually with your prison ID as a proof of identity (but if you have your birth certificate, that helps too) and proof of California residency. Next is the Social Security card, and remember, you cannot be legally employed without a Social Security card. You are assigned one number for life, and the SS Administration will help you retrieve that number if you've forgotten, so long as you have proof of identity and age (DL and Birth Certificate).



THE PACKAGE

As we've already noted, parole packets and plans don't need to be presented in the form of legal briefs, with exhibits to prove the points; it's not about the packaging, but rather the content. However, that doesn't mean you should go in with a stack of loose papers in a jumble.

Most lifers find it helpful, both for themselves, their attorneys and the board, to have information available in an organized manner. When it comes to parole plans the logical and simple system is to present your plans in organized by category (housing, job offers or skills, support letters/network), followed by letters relating to those categories. For example, list your housing options starting with your preferred transitional facility first, then other options, and include your letters of acceptance from the various facilities behind you list of options. Same for job offers or possible employment opportunities and on to your support letters.

You can place everything in a simple folder, staple all together, even paper clips (if available work) but don't rely on tape or other Rube Goldberg ways of securing the pages to each other. You don't have to write an explanation of each section; the board members are savvy enough to figure it out.

If you can submit your plan to your counselor for inclusion in the informational packet the board members receive ahead of the hearing, great, it gives them time to absorb the information before your hearing begins. And don't forget to take what you have in the way of parole plans, even if not complete or well organized yet, to your CRA interview, as an affirmation to the clinician that you're working on this important part of your parole readiness.

If you don't have everything ready until the day of the hearing, or if letters come in after you've already submitted your plan, take those along also. While as rule of thumb the parole panels only accept 20 pages of new information (10 double sided or 20 single sided pages) on the day of the hearing, that isn't a rule, just a policy and board members can and do take more submissions if those presented documents are relevant and important to suitability and parole plans. Also, the 20-page 'rule' does not include support letters—you can submit any number of those, but remember, it's quality vs. quantity that's important.

Save those 20 pages for things that are really important and be aware that whatever you submit will be passed along by FAX, scanning or other means to the DA in your case.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING POSSIBILITIES

Please keep in mind this list is only a partial list and subject to change (constantly!), as we struggle to follow the bouncing ball. No promise or endorsement is made by CLN/LSA. We encourage you to write...touch base with the organizations to explore their programs and availability. Once you commit to a program it is difficult to change. Help is also available through the Community Transitions Program (CTP) at each prison-part of the Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO). Inmates can request, via their counselors, that provide them with information on transitional housing in their area of parole. STOP notations on this indicate these facilities are eligible to receive state funding for parolees accepted, no cost to parolee.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Francisco Homes, Sister Teresa Groth, P.O. Box 7190 Los Angeles, CA 90007

The Martin Home, Sister Mary Sean 2514 Crenshaw Los Angeles, CA 90016

PREP-Partnership for Reentry 1224 W. 40th Pl. Los Angeles, Ca. 90037

Human Potential Consultants 550 E. Carson Plaza Dr. Suite 127 Carson, CA 90746

Bradley's Assisted Living 1575 E. 46th St. Los Angeles, CA 90011 (GPS & 290 availability- have 5 houses)

Love Lifted Me PO Box 10966 Marina Del Rey, CA 90295 Delancey Street 400 N. Vermont Ave. Los Angeles, CA. 90004 (2 yr. program, no cost)

East Country Transitional Living Center 1527 East Main St. El Cajon, California 92021

Phoenix House 503 Oceanfront Walk Venice, Ca. 90291 (STOP)

Serenity Castle Ranch 18654 Cajon Blvd. San Bernadino, Ca. 92407

Victory Outreach 4160 Eagle Rock Los Angeles, Ca. 90065

Cache Creek 435 Aspen St. Woodland, CA 95824 (STOP)

Bible Tabernacle 16301 W. Sierra Highway Canyon Country, CA 9135 (Christian, no cost)

Timelist Group- Yusef Wiley 3808 Somerset Dr. Los Angeles, CA 90008 (created by former lifers)

The Lighthouse 542 14th ST. San Diego, Ca 92101 (STOP)

San Diego Parolee Stabilization Center 650 11th Avenue San Diego, California 92101 (Male, no cost, refer from PA)

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Freedom Through Education 3281 35th St. Sacramento, Ca. 95824

Men of Valor Academy 6118 International Blvd Oakland 94621

DeLancy Street 600 Embarcadero SF 94107 (2 yr. program, no cost) Hope, Help, Healing 11960 Heritage Oak Pl. Auburn, Ca. 95603

Visions of the Cross 3648 El Portal Reading, CA 96002 (Christian faith-based)

Empire 1237 California St. Redding, CA 96001

BAY AREA

Homeless Veterans Emergency Housing 795 Will Rd. Bldg. 323 B Menlo Park, CA. 94025

Swords to Plowshares 1060 Howard St. San Francisco, Ca. 94103 (veterans only)

WOMEN'S FACILITIES

Crossroads PO Box 15 Claremont, Ca. 91711 (no cost)

A New Way of Life PO Box 875288 Los Angeles, Ca. 90087 California Reentry Program PO Box 483 San Quentin, Ca. 94967 (San Quentin only)

CENTRAL VALLEY

Fresno First 2550 W. Clinton Ave Fresno 93750

Modesto Gospel Mission 1400 Yosemite Modesto 95354

Isaiah's Recovery Services 1904 Clarendon ST Bakersfield 93307 **FOTEP**

Programs in SF, LA, SD and Riverside (contact CDCR Offender and Community Reentry Services, no cost)

Amity, Healthright 360 and GEO also offer transitional housing, that is state funded.

Amity 3750 S. Grand Ave. Los Angeles, Ca. 90007

Healthright 360 2706 W 6th St. Los Angeles, Ca. 90057

GEO 520 Townsend San Francisco, CA. 94103