

# Women's transition

GETTING STARTED



9

# This is Booklet 9 in the Getting Started Series.

**Getting Started is a guide  
for people leaving prison.**

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This Booklet was last updated in September 2010. If any information has changed or you notice an error please contact Corrections Victoria on (03) 8684 6600 or email: [corrections@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:corrections@justice.vic.gov.au)

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## Getting Out & Getting Started

The information in this booklet is an addition to the general Getting Started series.

Women leaving prison deal with many of the same issues as men but they also face different challenges. This booklet recognises that difference.

This booklet lists a range of additional services designed to specifically meet the needs of women.

The transition from prison to the community isn't easy for anyone but there are ways to make it easier.

Try the following:

- Make a plan
- Talk to people you trust
- Talk to your family
- Call crisis support lines

Women often say that their first priority is to reconnect with family and loved ones. However, in the first few weeks out, it can be hard enough to look after yourself.

Caring for others can add to the stress.

Women leaving prison are more likely than men to be primary carers of children. Many women also look after older relatives. This can be difficult to return to.

You may find that you need extra support or some time out as you adjust to life on the outside.

### **Returning to family and friends**

Reconnecting with family, children and partners is an exciting part of leaving prison. It can also be stressful.

The best time to start talking to family about returning home is before you get out. Make a plan and talk to your family about what you need and what they need to make things work. Try to keep your expectations realistic.

*For more information see Getting Started 8: Returning to Family*

## Returning to Your Partner

Picking up where you left off in a relationship can be more difficult than you expect. While life might have seemed on-hold for you, it has continued on the outside for your loved ones.

## Relationship Counselling

If you can't communicate with your partner, or if things aren't working out as expected, relationship counselling might help.

You can go to relationship counselling alone or with your partner.

**Relationships Australia** and **Lifeworks** offer relationship counselling in most areas of Victoria. Both of these services charge according to your level of income.

Services include:

- Relationship counselling
- Family reunification support
- Individual counselling
- Men's behaviour change therapy
- Family dispute resolution

- Family violence prevention
- Post-separation parenting counselling
- Children's programs
- Gambling help

If you are referred by a GP you will be eligible for up to 18 sessions with a psychologist.

**Relationships Australia** 1300 364 277

**Life works** (03) 8650 6200

### Returning to difficult relationships

If your relationship was difficult before prison, it will probably be difficult when you get out.

Difficult relationships can involve physical, emotional and verbal abuse. Types of abuse include:

- Threats (to take children, harm others or get you in trouble)
- Forcing or bullying you to have sex
- Withholding money
- Stopping you seeing family or friends
- Damaging property

Any abuse is unhealthy. It can make you feel depressed, worthless, and anxious.

A bad relationship may impact on drug and alcohol use. It may also make it harder to comply with your Parole conditions.

*Remember that you have the right to live in a safe environment without fear or trauma.*

### **Violent Relationships**

Crisis Services and Women's Refuges can help you out in an emergency, particularly if you are unsafe and have nowhere else to go. They can also give you advice and make referrals at anytime.

A family violence outreach service can help you come up with a safety plan to suit your specific needs.

## Safety Plan

A safety plan can help you protect yourself when your partner gets violent.

It may include:

- Contacts for emergency services
- Keeping spare car keys, clothing, prescriptions and ID ready to take if you need to leave quickly
- A code word you can use with friends or family to let them know you need help and to call the police
- Making plans with children (e.g. they go to a neighbour's house, and ask them to call police)

For information or referrals call the

**Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service  
(WDVCS) 1800 015 188**

## Intervention Orders

An Intervention Order is an Order of the Magistrates' Court. It prevents a threatening or violent person from harassing you. If the person on an Intervention Order breaches the Order, they will be charged by police.

An Intervention Order can stop someone:

- Hurting or threatening you
- Coming to your house or calling
- Harassing or intimidating you
- Stalking you
- Damaging your property

You can get an Intervention Order even if you want to stay living with your partner.

## Applying for an Intervention Order

You can only apply for an Intervention Order when you leave prison. Go to a Magistrates' Court and ask to get the Intervention Order application form.

- 1 Call **(03) 9628 7777** to find your local Magistrates' court
- 2 Fill in the forms and give them to the Registrar
- 3 The Registrar will then interview you
- 4 They will give you a date to go before the Magistrate

*If you are unsafe, you can get an Interim Intervention Order on the same day.*

The Magistrate will decide what conditions will be put on the Order. You will need to tell the Court what is required to make you safe. Your partner has the right to dispute the Order and go to Court to give evidence.

If your partner breaches the Order within the specified time period (such as 6 months or 12 months) it will be a criminal offence.

Going through the process of applying for an Intervention Order can be stressful. You can take a friend or family member with you to the Magistrates' court for support.

A domestic violence outreach service can help you to fill out the Intervention Order application. They may also be able to support you on the day of your Court appearance.

### **Safety Notices, Intervention Orders and Police**

If police are involved in a violent incident between you and your partner they may take out an emergency order on your behalf. This Order is designed to protect you until the hearing at the Magistrates' Court takes place and is called either an Interim Intervention Order or a Safety Notice.

### **For free legal advice**

#### **Women's Legal Service**

**(03) 9642 0877** or **1800 133 302**

#### **Victoria Legal Aid**

**(03) 9269 0120** or **1800 677 402** (country callers)

## Women's Refuges

A violent relationship can leave you feeling trapped. Leaving your partner can be scary and you may feel that you have nowhere to go. If this applies to you, consider a women's refuge.

A women's refuge is a shared house for women and their children who are escaping violence. They are drug and alcohol free.

Refuges offer support and assistance to help you get back on your feet so that you can live a violence-free life.

Family Violence Outreach Services assist by:

- Assessing your level of risk
- Telling you about your rights and the services that are available
- Developing a safety plan
- Supporting you to go to Court to get an Intervention Order
- Advocating for you with police
- Helping you to organise care for pets

- Advocating for you with other agencies such as Centrelink, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, legal, material aid and other support services
- Setting you up in a safe place

### **Men's Referral Service 1800 065 973**

Women can call the Men's Referral Service for information and help for their male partner, husband, relative or friend.

### **Parenting after Prison**

Going home to be with your children could be the thing you most look forward to. Like everything else there can be challenges as everyone adjusts to a new living arrangement. Talk with your children so that everyone knows what to expect.

Planning for the return home can help things go smoothly and there are lots of people and services that can help.

*See Getting Started 8: Returning to Family for information and tips.*

Many mothers in prison need help dealing with child protection. The Melbourne Citymission family worker at DPFC can help you to negotiate with the child protection worker.

If you are having trouble balancing children and your Parole conditions talk to your CCO (Parole Officer) about it. VACRO's CCATS program may be able to cover some of the cost of childcare and transport. Call **VACRO** on **(03) 9605 1900**.

### Looking After Yourself

Often women leaving prison feel lonely and isolated. This can be particularly difficult for those who choose to stay away from old friends or networks. Building up a new friendship circle takes time but it can be done.

Stay on top of any mental or physical health conditions and ask for help when you need it

Some ways to keep busy and meet new people:

- VACRO's Women's Mentoring Program
- Part-time or full-time work

- Play Groups: If you have young children, ask your maternal child health nurse about play groups in your area. Play groups will help you to meet other young mums in your area, and provide your child with some social interaction
- Neighbourhood or community houses run programs either free or at a very low cost. These can be a good way to meet people, learn something new or start a hobby
- Join a sporting club or take part in an exercise program. Check out your local community sports and leisure centre
- Become a volunteer and spend some time assisting others. Volunteering is a great way to increase your sense of belonging and worth, while making a difference to other people's lives. It's also a great way to make new friends

Most agencies ask volunteers for a Police Record Check before they start. Don't let this put you off as it doesn't mean they won't take you on.

For more information go to:

**[www.volunteeringvictoria.com.au](http://www.volunteeringvictoria.com.au)**

## **Women's Transitional Services**

### **WISP: (Women's Integrated Services Program)**

WISP provides intensive support to women exiting prison. Support starts 8 weeks before release and can last for up to 12 months after.

Put in a referral through prison programs staff at least 3 months before you are due to get out. You will be assessed by the WISP workers at the prison to see if you are eligible. You will have to want and need support around more than one area of life after prison to be on the program.

#### **More Info:**

Program staff at the Prison

**WISP** General Enquiries to MCM on **(03) 9687 4997** (ask to speak to someone from WISP)

## **The Women's Mentoring Program (VACRO)**

This program matches volunteer mentors with women. The mentors provide social and practical support. A mentor can reduce feelings of isolation and help you get your life back on track.

The mentoring program is open to women exiting prison or on a Community Based Order. For a referral, or to find out more, ask staff at the prison or your CCO when you are on Parole.

## **CCATS (VACRO)**

CCATS (childcare and transport subsidy program) can assist if you need childcare or transport to help meet your parole conditions. Talk to your CCO or contact VACRO for more information.

## **Housing Services**

Finding a place to live is one of the hardest parts of leaving prison.

*For more information see Getting Started 2: Housing.*

There are some housing services that work specifically with women. Ask the prison staff to help with referrals:

### **Women's Housing Limited (03) 9412 6868**

Women's Housing Limited provides outreach assistance to women in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. They can assist by:

- Discussing housing options
- Advocating for you with housing providers
- Assessing public housing eligibility
- Assisting with applications
- Support you to start looking for rental accommodation

They can also provide some help when you get out with crisis accommodation and referrals.

### **Flat Out (03) 9372 6155**

Flat Out is a housing support service for women leaving prison. They can assist you to access housing or housing information.

## **Hanover Women's Services (03) 9699 4566**

Hanover provide short-term accommodation for women in Melbourne.

## **WISHIN (03) 9381 1333**

Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North (WISHIN) provides support to single women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the areas of Moreland and Darebin. WISHIN specialise in working with women who experience mental health issues.

## **General Information Services**

**WIRE** (Women's Information Service) is used by women from all walks of life. They provide information, support and referrals. They can help you over the phone or in person at their walk in centre. Common issues that women go to WIRE about are:

- Family life and relationships
- Domestic violence
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Health and well-being
- Intervention orders and family court

- Education and training
- Housing
- Finance

WIRE also have a job club, free info sessions and free computer classes.

Drop in centre **1300 134 130**

Ground Floor of the Queen Victoria Women's Building, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne (between Russell and Swanston Streets). Monday – Friday: 10:30am – 5pm.

## Health Information

### **The Women's Health Information Centre**

(WHIC) offers information, support and referral options on women's health issues. The service is free and confidential

Drop in centre, The Royal Women's Hospital.  
Open Monday–Friday: 9am–5pm.

Health Information Line: **(03) 8345 3045**  
or **1800 442 007** (Regional/Rural Callers)

## Royal Women's Hospital

The corner of Grattan Street and Flemington Road, Parkville.

### Drug and Alcohol Support

You can call **Directline** on **1800 888 236** or **(03) 9418 1011** for information about drug and alcohol misuse, and to be referred to local services.

*See Getting Stared 4: Alcohol and Other Drugs Booklet for more information.*

The Royal Women's Hospital provides care and support for pregnant women with ongoing drug and alcohol problems. You can access the **WADS** (Women's Alcohol and Drug) service. **(03) 8345 3931**

### Problem Gambling

If you need help with any gambling issues when you get out, contact the **Gambler's Helpline** **1800 858 858**.

## Information for Sex Workers

RhED (Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry) provide free, confidential information and referrals for people who are working in, or used to work in, the sex industry. Their services include:

- Support and debriefing
- Counselling by appointment
- Information, referral and advocacy
- Sexual health screening and information
- Education about sexually transmittable infections, HIV and blood borne viruses
- Supplies of condoms and lube

Telephone: **(03) 9534 8166**

Email: **[sexworker@sexworker.org.au](mailto:sexworker@sexworker.org.au)**

Drop in centre at: 10 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, 3182

RhED is open Tuesday to Thursday from 1pm to 5pm and on Fridays from 1pm to 11pm as a sex worker only space.

## Employment Assistance

### **Fitted for work (03) 9620 5533**

Fitted for Work can help out with business clothing to make it easier for women to get work. They also help with presentation and interview skills. Fitted for Work takes clients by referral only. Ask a worker to refer you by calling

## Legal Advice

For free legal advice call:

### **Women's Legal Service**

**(03) 9642 0877** or **1800 133 302**

### **Victoria Legal Aid**

**(03) 9269 0120** or **1800 677 402** (country callers)

## **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

The following services provide advice, support and referrals to women who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault:

### **Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service** **(03) 9322 3555** or **1800 015 188**

provides 24 hour crisis support and safe accommodation (refuges) for women and their children.

### **Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service** **(03) 8413 6800**

provides culturally sensitive information and other help for women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA)** **1800 806 292**

runs a 24 hour confidential telephone crisis counselling, information and support for people who have been sexually assaulted.

**Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria****(03) 9486 9866**

(Country callers can reverse the charges.)

provides information and referral to local services and support groups.

**[www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au)**



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