

Submission 30. Name Withheld

- Returning to the Aboriginal Community.

A transition toolkit (reference R1) on how to assist family members who are soon to be released from prison; and who may be feeling anxious about what happens when their family member returns home.

The toolkit does not have all the answers nor the solutions. It has been designed to help start the hard conversations.

A successful transition depends on everyone being aware of what some of the barriers to achieving success might be and then planning how these barriers might be reduced or removed. It was also designed to assist people to begin to think about what they have felt while their family member has been in prison, and more importantly what the issues/barriers might be for everyone when their family member has been released.

- Returning to the Family

Each Aboriginal family is different from the next Aboriginal family. There are different expectations in the family hierarchy and the work 'family' means something different to every person.

We can only assume that the family who work together using the toolkit are the people who are there for each other when things get tough and are generally the ones who put up with each other when no-one else will.

There needs to be conversations held between the younger generations of the family and their respected Elders as sometimes the younger generations see the released family member as someone who has been glorified to a degree and see's their antics as something 'cool' or someone to "look up to". While in jail they may have had power and status, however, when they are on the outside, they find it very difficult to find their place in society.

Being the person in the family who wants the family member to succeed will take 100% honesty and hard work and will require commitment and cooperation from family members.

At the end of the day, you will need to remember that is NOT your responsibility to keep that family member out of prison!

You can give all the love in the world, support and security and help them on their way back into society. If worst comes to worst, if they return to prison, it is because they have made certain decisions - it is NOT your fault!!

- Now is the time to talk!!

These questions could be used as ice breakers – just remember to speak openly and honestly with respect and to listen to what is being said. A mentor or mediator from the Aboriginal Community may be the best person here to assist.

1. What was your life like before incarceration? What do you want from your relationship now and is it different.

2. Has time in prison harmed your relationship with your family? Is the unresolved anger or resentment that needs to be worked through together? How can this be done in a safe environment?

3. Is it clear what you both really expect from each other?

4. Do you really talk to each other about your problems? Are you able to talk honestly and listen to each other respectfully with the goal of resolving everyone's concerns?

5. Even if you don't agree with each other, are you each willing to accept another person's suggestion if this is what the rest of the family wants? Are you able to agree to disagree?

6. Does the family feel their needs are being listened to and met?

7. When was the last time you said "Sorry" to your family member/s and really meant it? Is openness an issue?

8. Is abuse or violence part of your family communication? Do arguments end with swearing or abusive words, slaps or physical violence?

HOW CAN WE END THIS?