

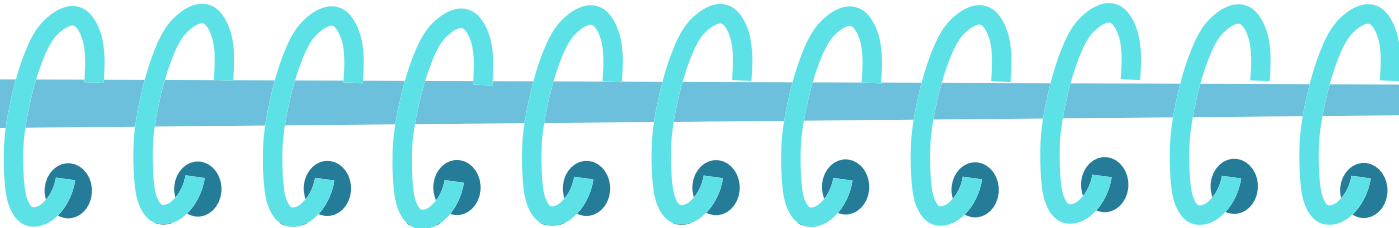
Supporting Incarcerated Survivors:

Providing Emotional Support via Written Correspondence

Letter-writing is a vital form of communication for people in detention. For incarcerated survivors, writing to an outside advocate can be the safest and most private way to share difficult experiences and feelings, and to receive help. Advocates can use letters to provide emotional support, offer validation, and respond to questions the survivor may have.

Letter-Writing Basics

- Avoid using a template. Each letter should be tailored to the survivor, responding to their needs. Introduce yourself and your agency in your opening letter, and personalize each response.
- Use simple, accessible language and, where appropriate, match the survivor's vocabulary level.
- Use a 14-point (at least), easy-to-read serif font printed on plain, white 8.5x11-inch paper. Do not use cardstock paper, staples, paperclips, stickers, or glitter. Check with the facility before including pre-stamped envelopes for survivors to write back to you.

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- Use the survivor's full legal name and booking or DOC number on the outside of the envelope. Use their preferred name inside your letter.
 - Explain what you can provide and any limitations — especially with regards to confidentiality and what you are required to report to the facility. In most facilities, staff may open the letter in front of the survivor to check for contraband — though they should be prohibited from reading its contents. Facilities increasingly are scanning all mail, so survivors may receive a photocopy or electronic scan of it, unless it is designated as attorney mail.
 - Only give referrals that are appropriate. Survivors often do not trust services (such as mental health) provided by the facility, and many outside service providers do not work with people in detention.

Other Considerations



- Take the time to review each letter you receive and identify what the core concerns of the survivor are so you can respond to each of those needs.
- Since incarcerated people are regularly transferred, check the survivor's location by searching the online "inmate locator" managed by the agency where they are being held. If they've been moved out of your service area, try to refer them to a local agency.
- Along with your letter, include brochures, articles about healing, or other materials, such as exercises aimed at coping.
- File all letters and keep good notes so that, if need be, another advocate can step in and continue providing support.