

GUIDELINES FOR JAIL AND PRISON MINISTRY WORKERS

By Buck Griffith & Ron Goodman

Rules and regulations differ from state to state and from one institution to the next. Volunteer training prior to being approved includes this information and should be studied carefully. However, the new volunteer may suffer from information *overload* and need a “refresher” later. Many institutions require annual training. In addition to this training, the ministry (or event leaders) should take responsibility to provide proper orientation. “Special permission” may be given for those who do not come in regularly.

The following list of “rules” range from the most basic to some that may appear extreme. Play it safe. *Take the more restrictive approach.* If in doubt – don’t!

Always be on time. Arrive early. If unable to come, notify the facility immediately.

Properly park your vehicle. Don’t get a ticket at prison. Your vehicle is subject to being searched. Always be cooperative. DO NOT carry weapons, ammunition, fireworks or explosive materials or devices. In some cases, even garden tools have been confiscated. Know what is in your vehicle before entering prison property. Upon entering the facility be sure that you have locked your vehicle and windows are up.

Avoid clothing of a color that resembles inmate attire. Do not wear blue jeans or pants that look like blue jeans. Do not wear tennis shoes, sandals or open-toed shoes.

Dress modestly (no shorts, short skirts, T-shirts, V-neck garments, etc.). Avoid wearing expensive or excessive jewelry. It is best to wear no jewelry.

It should go without saying but do not take in pocketknives, fingernail clippers, or other sharp objects.

Do not chew gum or carry it with you. Do not carry medication in unless essential, disclose it upon entering, take it in its container, and take in only the dose required in that time period.

Do not carry paper money in and only coins under \$2. Leave billfolds, purses, make-up and credit cards in your vehicle (out of sight).

Respect correctional personnel, especially the chaplain. The chaplain can let you in, stand in your way or lock you out. He can also escort you out after you get in if you given an excuse. Do not criticize other religious groups. Study only what the Bible teaches – not what it does not teach.

Use clear plastic bags/containers to transport materials in and out. If you bring in 25 pencils, take 25 out with you.

Let officers know if some are in services that obviously do not want to study. They can be elsewhere.

Don’t send money, stamps, envelopes or stationery to inmates without prior approval. Do not put money into a prisoner’s trust fund or commissary account.

If you are an approved volunteer teaching a class or conducting worship services in a facility, do not be put on the “visitor’s list” of an individual prisoner.

Do not *give* any item to prisoners without advance approval from authorities. Do not *take* any items from prisoners without prior approval. This includes letters or even Bible lessons to be graded.

Do not give gifts to or accept gifts from inmates.

Don’t announce when you will return. You may *intend* to start a class or be back at a certain time but you do not run the prison. Leave announcements to the Chaplain or others in charge.

Never give out your home address, home/cell phone numbers or business cards. No church bulletins or photos. Do not reveal personal information about family members. Limit contact to the assigned function of the ministry.

Be cautious of body contact. Do not touch or embrace prisoners inappropriately. Handshakes are best. Hugs should be limited to the shoulders and above. When possible, take another worker with you to witness what is said and done. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Keep every promise you make. Write down what you promise. This will insure you recall and keep the promise later.

If you see an offender with whom you have had an earlier relationship, disclose it immediately (no matter how distant – socially or professionally).

Ideally, male volunteers work with male offenders and females with females. Exceptions: husbands and wives working together or a *team* of workers that come and go as a group. If you sense a physical *attraction* to a prisoner, distance yourself immediately.

Write prisoners cautiously. Know policies in regard to correspondence at the facility. Be aware that your letters may be read by: (1) The prisoner (2) Security (3) Chaplaincy (4) Other prisoners (5) Spouse/family members of the offender (6) Unknown others. Be *thankful* rather than *resentful* of possible violations of privacy. Realize you have an opportunity to write one letter that may reach a lot of different people! Do not write a *sentence* that you do not want to be read by any and all of the above. If writing to a member of the opposite sex, be *super* careful in the use of terms of endearment.

In the event of violence, do not try to get between combatants. Move away from the center of action. Do not raise your voice. Prisoners do not generally have a grievance against volunteers. They do not want you to be hurt. When officers enter the room or area, lie flat on the floor.

If you are an ex-offender, beware of resurrected “convict” thinking. If you are a recovering addict or alcoholic, beware of *stinking thinking* that can easily slip back into conversations and behaviors.

Steer clear of contact with family members of offenders. If they need assistance, refer them to non-prison-approved volunteers or have them contact the church or ministry office for help.

Do not tell free-world persons anything *personal* about those in prison. You do not know when they may know the person (or even be related to him/her).

We do not arrest or release people. We teach God’s Word – *wherever* souls are found! We do not *recommend* that persons be released or remain in prison longer.

Avail yourself of training opportunities to become a more effective volunteer. Do what you can to support the prison ministry leaders and their families. They also experience crises in their lives.

A word of encouragement . . . **NEVER GIVE UP!** If you become discouraged with authorities or prisoners and quit, souls will be lost. You will rob yourself of satisfying labor for the Lord. Refuse to decide to permanently leave the work while feeling *down* or discouraged.

Permissible Items **EMPLOYEES, VISITORS & APPROVED VOLUNTEERS**

[Texas Department of Criminal Justice, SM-02.02 (rev. 1), Attachment A, page 12]

- \$25 cash
- Binders/Books/Folders (Must be work related)
- Bottled beverage (Must be unopened, clear plastic and not more than 32 ounces)
- Briefcase (Must be on authorized briefcase list or authorized through SM-02.01)
- Candy bar (Must be removed from wrapper and placed in clear Ziploc® type bag unless original wrapper is clear)
- Clear purse/bag (Available in unit commissaries or Ziploc® Type)
- Coffee/Coffee creamer (Must be in clear Ziploc® type bag)

- Comb/Brush
- Contact lens drops/Cleaner/Eye drops (Travel size)
- Diabetic testing supplies/Glucometer
- Empty cup (No larger than 32 ounces)
- Empty thermos type bottle/Insulated cup (No larger than one quart)
- Facial tissue (Must be removed from original packaging and placed in clear Ziploc® type bag unless original packaging is clear)
- Fast food (Must be able to inspect and pass through metal detector)
- Feminine hygiene products
- Fix-a-dent (Trial size)
- Flash/Jump drive (Must be approved by the Warden, with the exception of medical staff who may bring in a thumb drive without the Warden's approval)
- Gum/Candy/Cough drops (Must be able to inspect)
- Fruits/Vegetables
- Hand lotion (Trial size)
- Hand sanitizer (Trial size)
- Handkerchief
- Lip balm
- Lip stick
- Non-prescription medication (Must be in original packaging)
- One form of authorized identification
- Palm Pilot with medical notes and no internet service (Must be approved by the Warden)
- Paper pocket type calendar
- Pens/Pencils
- Prescription medication (Must follow PD-17)
- Raincoats/slickers
- Search gloves
- Small notepad
- Spook/Fork (Plastic only)
- State owned/State approved/State issued cell phone
- Sunglasses
- T.V. type dinner with clear wrap (Must pass through metal detector)
- Tupperware type container (Must be clear plastic and no larger than one gallon)
- Umbrella (Must be left at designated area at the front of the unit)
- Wash cloth size rag
- Wipes (Must be removed from original packaging and placed in clear Ziploc® type bag unless original packaging is clear)