

# FACTSHEET

## Separation & loss – Coming to terms with deportation

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Although everybody who becomes a client of Prisoners Abroad is a British national, we do realise that many of you will be returning to the UK after having lived in another country for many years. You may well have no memories of living in Britain at all and are having to face leaving your family, friends and everything that is familiar behind. Because of these facts deportation can be very difficult and feelings very mixed. In this factsheet, we aim to raise some of the issues and feelings you may face throughout the deportation process and after.

### Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	What is grief? .....	2
3	Experiencing grief .....	2
4	Helping yourself through grief .....	3

### 1 Introduction

As one returned person told us “I was very frightened, not knowing what was going to happen to me. This whole thing is really scary“. We know that expressing your feelings in a prison can be very difficult and you need to protect yourself. However, it can be useful to take sometime to think about what you are going through and if possible, talk it through with someone you trust.

Being deported does mean you have the opportunity to make a new start, but before that can happen, you may need to come to terms with what you are losing. For example, you may not be able to see your friends and family for a long time and this may be difficult for you to deal with. A sudden separation followed by a period of feeling the loss of a person or persons can cause you to experience all kinds of thoughts and emotions; as a result you may go through a type of grieving process similar in some ways to when a relationship breaks down or possibly even to when a close friend or family member dies.

Being aware of this process before it happens will help; the trauma that people suffer when faced with any kind of loss can be much worse when the loss is something that they did not expect or felt that they could do nothing to prevent.

If you are unable to return to the country where you were in prison, you and your family may wish to think about other ways in which you can still be together. Prisoners Abroad has produced a separate factsheet, entitled ‘Moving Your Family to the UK’, which contains some practical ideas about how your family can join you in the UK temporarily, or on a more permanent basis.

## **2 What is grief?**

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Though we often expect to grieve over the death of a family member or friend, many other losses can trigger grief. Examples include:

- the end of a relationship; or
- a move to a new community; or
- a much anticipated opportunity is suddenly closed to us.

Grieving over these losses is important, and unless we do so effectively, we are likely to find moving on difficult and part of us remains tied to the past. Grieving is not forgetting, or drowning in tears. Healthy grieving lets us remember our loss but with a sense of peace, rather than searing pain.

## **3 Experiencing grief**

No two people will experience grief the same way. The way we think and feel, the way our body functions and the way we interact with others may all be affected. Some common experiences include:

- having difficulty concentrating;
- feeling anger at those responsible, at yourself, or at any handy target;
- feeling guilt, e.g. 'If only I had done...';
- withdrawal from others;
- disturbed sleep;
- sadness and tears;
- irritability;
- loneliness, or sense of being separate from others; or
- loss of appetite.

Sometimes our reactions are very changeable, intense or irrational so that we may feel we are going 'crazy'. Often grieving people are afraid to confront their grief for fear that they will be overwhelmed with tears or anger. This is very unlikely and if you are in a position to let others know how you are feeling, they can help you keep a balance.

Fortunately, much of the process of healthy grieving seems to be built into our genes. Coping with loss is such a natural process that a lot of it will happen without our direction but we do need to try and give up expectations of how we 'should' grieve and give up some of our need to be in control.

Healthy grieving is an active process; it is NOT true that, "You just need to give it time". One way of understanding how we can help ourselves is to think of grieving as a series of tasks we need to perform (not in any particular order):

- to accept the loss;
- to acknowledge and express the full range of feelings we experience as a result of loss;
- to adjust to a new life without the people or things we have lost; and
- to say goodbye and move on.

## **4 Helping yourself through grief**

Active healthy grieving requires some balance; balancing the time you spend alone, with the time you spend with others; balancing the time spent dealing with your grief with time spent on your day to day life.

Try to treat yourself with the same care and tolerance you would give to a valued friend in a similar situation. Here are some of the things others have found useful:

- go gently – take whatever time it needs, rather than giving yourself a deadline for when you should be ‘over it’;
- exercise moderately and regularly;
- accept support and help when offered;
- keep a diary;
- read helpful books, if you can get them;
- try to maintain regular eating and sleeping patterns;
- see a counsellor if one is available to you;
- set aside a private time to remember and experience whatever feelings arise with memories;
- plan for anniversaries. Feeling can be intense at these times;
- practice Yoga;
- vent your anger in healthy ways, rather than holding it in, e.g. exercise;
- if you practise a particular religion speak to a member of the clergy or similar representative;
- do something to help someone else; or
- write down what you have learned. Grieving will have much to teach you

Being in prison can obviously make dealing with things worse. Getting what you need to help you through the deportation process and all the feelings associated with it can be difficult. We hope that some of the information in this and our other factsheets has helped.

Please remember you are not alone in this process. Many people have successfully rebuilt their lives in Britain and manage to keep contact with their family via telephone and letter. Some families will reunite in the United Kingdom.

Try not to let your feelings of anger or distress at being deported stop you from doing some of the practical things to prepare for your release (e.g. organising your passport and ID). It will make things a little easier for you when you first arrive.

We know that this can be a very difficult time and we will do what we can to try to help you. Please write to us if you have any particular questions or if you just want to let us know how you are feeling about your release.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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