

Since you will have to pass through a metal detector, avoid wearing items that might set it off. Women should not wear an underwire bra as it will set off the metal detector. (Sports bras are a good alternative.) Jewelry, buckles, and shoes with built-in metal components are also frequent offenders. If you set off the alarm, you will have to remove the suspect item and go back through until you do not set off the alarm. You may also be wanded. As noted earlier, if you have any metal prosthetic parts, you need to advise the officer and should have some documentation to present.

### **In summary, bring only:**

- A government-issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license) and your car key
- A copy of your request or the official memo for entry (if you have one)
- Note paper and pen or pencil, if allowed
- A clear plastic bag with money as allowed

## **A checklist for your visit ...**

- For any new prisoners who have never had a PVS visitor, send an introductory postcard or letter.  
The PVS local coordinator, or whoever is fulfilling this role, must provide the monthly visit schedule to the prison's Reentry Affairs Coordinator (or designee) and request an official memo. This needs to be done 2 weeks before the intended visit. Clarify who is responsible for this. Confirm with PVS local coordinator or whoever is handling your request to visit that the request for an official memo has been submitted.
- Send prisoners postcards to let them know on what date you plan to visit and approximately when you expect them to be called to the visiting room.
- Ensure that both prisoners and the prison are notified if you must change the date.
- Address any unique needs, such as needing permission to take medications into the visiting room or documentation verifying the existence of metal prosthetics.
- Check your prison's guidance for visitors and dress accordingly: <https://www.bop.gov/locations/list.jsp>
- Bring only: government-issued ID (e.g., driver's license) and your car key, a copy of your letter or memo for entry, and a clear plastic bag with money, note paper, and pen or pencil.
- Plan to arrive early.
- Relax!

## The entry process

When you enter the prison lobby, you can announce yourself to the Lobby Officer at the desk, "Hi, I'm here with PVS for visiting. There should be a memo for my visit."

The following paragraphs describe the standard set of steps that all visitors must complete to gain admission to the Visiting Room. But the arrangement or order for doing them may vary from one lobby to another. Follow the cues. You will soon get used to the pattern at your prison. The Lobby Officer is in charge of maintaining an orderly process. If the officer seems uncertain of some steps, you can discreetly suggest what is usually done to process a PVS visit.

**Fill out a Notification to Visitor Form (BP-A0224).** Usually you will need to fill out multiple forms, one for each prisoner on your list. (Depending on the prison, you may only need to fill out one form.) In some lobbies, these forms may be located at a different counter to be completed before approaching the desk. Some prisons will allow the visitor to complete the form in advance and simply sign it at the desk. The form gives your consent to being searched. Because it asks about contraband items, it is also sometimes called a contraband form. The form identifies whom you wish to visit, declares that you are not bringing in any contraband items, and identifies you and your vehicle in the parking lot. If you need to bring in any medication, there is a place to list that on the form.

**Present your ID with the forms to the Officer. Follow whatever identification control protocol your prison requires.** The officer will check your ID against the memo. Your driver's license or government ID may be returned to you or it may be kept as security for giving you a locker key, it may be kept by staff who accompany you, or it

may be given to the control station to keep track of the fact that you are inside the prison. PVS visitors may need to wear volunteer badges. If you have a badge, you can remind the desk officer that you have a badge. Sometimes the badge may be kept in the control booth. Badges tell the prison staff that you require an escort inside the prison and eliminate the need for the front desk to take a photo of you. If the officer searches the computer to see if you are on a prisoner's visiting list, you can suggest that PVS visitors are usually not entered on that list as your visit is covered by the memo. Whatever the protocol, follow the instructions of staff. It is their job to follow security procedures.

**Sign the log book.** Ask the desk officer if you need to enter information for each prisoner you intend to visit or can sign it just once. If there are different logbooks on the counter, ask which one you should sign.

**Pass through the metal detector.** See the description of this process in the earlier section on "what to wear."

**Get stamped.** An officer will stamp the back of your hand or the underside of your wrist with invisible ink and a coded marking. This stamp will usually be checked at a control booth before entering, and will definitely be checked on exit. Do not wash the area of the stamp while you are inside to avoid any security issues on your exit.

**Drug testing.** Entry officers may at random select a visitor for drug screening by an ion spectrometry machine. The officer will take the visitor aside and pass a small wand with a sample pad over the visitor's body. The sample pad is then inserted in the machine for analysis. Rarely is there any false positive issue with the current testing system. If this does occur, comply with instructions and report the event to PVS.

As a precaution, it is generally advisable to avoid wearing heavy perfume or using lotions, which could conceivably cause a problem. If you should fill your car with gas on your trip, wash your hands afterwards. Paper money sometimes retains traces of drugs. Be cautious and wash your hands if you handle money.

No memo at the front desk? An official entry memo, the internal product of your submitted request to visit, should be available to the lobby officer at the front desk, but sometimes problems happen, or the officer is unfamiliar with the process. If this occurs, follow these procedures.

First, if you have a copy of the official memo, you can show it to the officer. The memo will list the names of authorized PVS visitors on a particular date and the names of the prisoners they are visiting. It is unusual for a visitor to receive a copy of the official memo, however. If you have your copy of your request to visit, you can show that to the officer, but remember, it is not the official memo.

If you did not receive a copy of the official memo, which is common, you can politely suggest that some other station may have a copy of the official memo, for example, the visiting room or control room. If that does not help, you can suggest that the officer contact the Lieutenant or even an Associate Warden. On weekends, executive functions are handled by the Duty Officer, so you can suggest calling the Duty Officer. Step back and politely let the officer do his or her job of following procedures without pressure or interference. Basically, the officer is trying to resolve the issue and satisfy procedural requirements by looking for someone to authorize your entry.

Should the officer inform you that you will not be allowed to enter, politely review the escalation steps once again, saying that there should be a memo for PVS visits somewhere, but that anyone from the executive staff can authorize your entry without the memo. Executive staff tend to be more familiar with the PVS program and can accommodate your entry. If that is unsuccessful, you can return to your car and call the PVS national office.

Leave a message if no one is in the office; staff are notified when there is a voice mail and someone should respond soon. PVS staff will review the situation with you. Note that the staff may not be able to reach anyone to resolve the issue on the spot, but will follow up with the institution to identify the problem and correct it for the future. It is helpful if you take note of the names of officers you dealt with. (This is one reason we carry pen and note paper.) If the problem cannot be resolved promptly, you will need to leave prison property.

## During the visit

**Be escorted to the visiting room.** An officer will escort a small group of visitors to the visiting room. Depending on the prison, this may involve stopping at a control point to verify identity credentials and check your handstamp. You will pass through one or more gates, locked doors, or "sally ports" (a double-gated system, also called a "mantrap"). Follow instructions.

**Negotiate your visit plan.** Present your visiting forms to the Visiting Room Officer at the desk inside the visiting room (VR). (Sometimes the escort officer or the front desk may retain control of your papers.) Identify yourself to the VR Officer as being with PVS and explain that you want to call out your prisoners one at a time for about an hour each. Advise the officer of your

desired order for the callouts and discuss with the officer how he or she would like you to coordinate the callouts. Sometimes the officer will keep your papers or ask you to present them one at a time to make the next call out.

Generally, it is your responsibility to manage the timing of the visits. If possible, position yourself so you can see the clock in the visiting room. If there is no clock, then you will need to ask for the officer's assistance in keeping track of time so that you can see everyone on your list. If the officer wants you to notify him or her when it is time to call the next prisoner, make your request some twenty minutes beforehand to allow time for the next prisoner to arrive. Note that if a prisoner arrives early, you may need to end a visit already in progress earlier than you had planned unless the officer allows both prisoners to remain. In that case, let the new prisoner know you'll visit with him/her in a few minutes.

If you are visiting on a weekend and have to work around the morning count, a practical routine is to call for your first prisoner to visit over the count period, call the next when count clears, and then call subsequent prisoners about an hour each thereafter.

Ask the officer where he/she wants you to sit. Wait for your prisoner to appear. Relax. It may take some twenty minutes – or even longer – for the prisoner to arrive.

Do not drive yourself crazy trying to visit more prisoners than can be reasonably accommodated. Stay relaxed and let visits and callouts take their natural course. You will soon learn the rhythm and timing for making the best use of your visiting time and energy.

At some higher security institutions, it may be necessary to let staff determine the order in which they will bring out prisoners. If the VR Officer tells you that one or more of your prisoners is in the Special Housing Unit (SHU), this may affect your planned visiting order as escorted movement is required. Prisoners in SHU are generally kept separate from the open visiting room. Generally, they will be confined in a secure SHU booth in the VR or possibly in another location. Your visit will likely then be through glass and over a phone connection. Sometimes the visit must be conducted via a video connection.

PVS visitors are usually allowed to visit with prisoners in SHU or on other restrictions. If there is some objection to your visiting a prisoner in SHU, you can ask the VR Officer to refer the request to the Lieutenant or the Duty Officer. If you are denied the visit, accept the decision amicably but include this in your report to the PVS national office.

Typically, PVS visitors can keep visiting with one prisoner until the next arrives. However, this may not apply with SHU visits. If an officer tells you that your prisoner must leave before the next arrives, you can politely explain the usual practice. Remember, however, that you are not in charge and there may be issues you are not aware of. If you are not allowed to visit until the next prisoner arrives, note that in your after-visit report. A call to the prison from the PVS national office sometimes can clear up the issue.

**Delays and refusals.** If your prisoner does not arrive after 15-20 minutes, go back to the VR officer and ask how the callout is progressing. Depending on what the officer tells you, you can either decide to wait longer or to proceed

with calling out your next prisoner. The officer may inform you that your prisoner “refused.” Often the VR officer knows no reason, only that that is what he/she has been told. Refusals can be disconcerting. We do not immediately know what is meant by a refusal. We only know what we are told, nothing more. You may learn later that the prisoner was ill, grieving a loss, busy with some other activity, or did not hear or get the call. Move on to your next visit.

**If several prisoners are sent out.** The PVS program intends for us to visit with prisoners one-on-one. But sometimes several prisoners may come out at once and you have to figure out how to juggle the visit. If you decide not to visit with all the prisoners who were sent out, discuss how to handle the situation with the VR officer.

Group visits do not work well as they do not allow one-to-one privacy. You can try to visit with both together for a while and then negotiate how to proceed, suggesting that one wait while you visit with the other, then switch off. Try to arrange physical spacing so that your visit with each will be as private as possible. Crowded conditions in the VR, however, may make this difficult. Do the

best you can with the awkward situation. Afterwards, you can explain to the VR officer that you intended to have each one come out separately. Include this situation in your visit report.

**Beginning and ending a visit.** At the beginning and end of a visit, stand and offer the prisoner a handshake. Hugs and other forms of greeting are not appropriate.

If this is a first visit with a prisoner, there are several things that are important to establish at the outset so that the prisoner will know what to expect from a PVS visit. Explain that you are a volunteer visitor with PVS and that you will be able to visit for about an hour and that you will need to watch the time. You can explain that as a PVS visitor you have no agenda for the visit, that you will talk about whatever the prisoner wants to talk about. State that your visits are confidential and you do not discuss your visit with staff or with other prisoners. (However, all visits are monitored and may be recorded.) At some point during the visit you might mention that sometimes you may write yourself a brief note to jog your own memory. Finally, you can advise the prisoner that visiting in the visiting room is all we can do.

## Things to Cover on a First Visit

- > Time allowed for the visit
- > Frequency of visits
- > Visits are confidential unless their life or someone else’s is in danger
- > The prison is monitoring the conversation and possibly recording it
- > PVS visitors ONLY visit
- > What the prisoner hopes for and expects
- > PVS visitors have no agenda