

PVS Policy:

Maintain Confidentiality

At the heart of PVS visiting is the idea that the visit stands outside the everyday world of prison life. The visitor holds open a safe space for the prisoner. Our conversation partner comes to trust us enough to surrender something of his or her life to us as a friend who accepts them for who they are. The prisoner can talk about things openly and explore things they would not share with fellow prisoners or staff. To preserve this trust, we maintain the confidentiality of our visits.

PVS visitors tell prisoners that we are not part of the prison system and that we do not discuss our visits with prison staff. We follow protocols to protect the confidentiality of our conversations. But there are also limits to what can be held in confidence.

No discussion with staff

Escort staff may try to make conversation, or they may be curious about what is going on with a particular prisoner and ask how your visit went. Be friendly and polite and simply say: "We had a good visit." There is often no need to say more. If the question is pressed, you can explain that PVS visits are confidential and we do not discuss them.

No discussing prisoners with other prisoners

Prisoners can easily observe or know about others who are getting a visit. They may be good friends with the other prisoner, or they could be enemies. If a prisoner says something or asks about another prisoner, simply say: "Sorry, I cannot discuss other prisoners. I don't talk about you with him (or her), and I don't talk about him (or her) with you."

Sometimes prisoners may know that someone you visit has moved on and ask where he went. Do not discuss what you may know about a prisoner's new location. This is for everyone's safety.

In high security institutions, it is not unheard of for Visiting Room officers to come and tell a prisoner not to discuss another prisoner. In other words, conversations may be monitored in real time.

Be discreet in debriefing with other PVS visitors

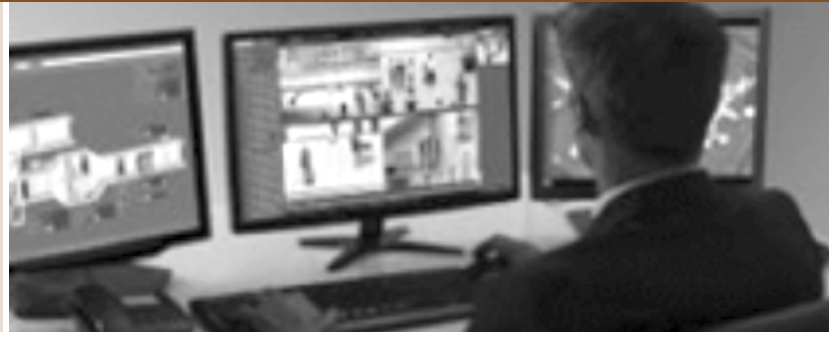
PVS visitors are encouraged to discuss concerns or questions about their visits with other experienced visitors. These conversations should not occur on prison grounds. If you discuss your visits with another visitor in a public location, such as a coffee shop, go away from the area of the prison and always look around to make sure you are not being overheard. Be discreet with any information that could identify a prisoner.

Be aware that all your visits are subject to recording



Visits may be captured on video. Look up, and you may see cameras like this one. Nothing is "private."

**Visits are
subject to
monitoring
and
recording**



Signs like this one may be posted in the visiting room. In high security situations, monitoring and recording are almost a certainty. Sometimes you might want to remind the prisoner of this fact if the subject is sensitive.

Some situations must always be reported

One exception applies to confidentiality: some situations must be reported immediately. Section 8 of this chapter provides guidelines for handling emergencies and other serious situations.

PVS Policy: _____ No Open Criticism of the Prison System

As PVS visitors and as an organization, we do not publicly express open criticism of the federal or military prison system and its operations, its institutions or its policies.

PVS can only function through its permitted access to prisoners. Any behavior or activity that threatens that privilege can risk suspension for an individual visitor and may also threaten the entire PVS program nationwide. Accordingly, all visitors need to avoid any public activity that could be deemed detrimental to maintaining our mission. While you are certainly entitled to whatever advocacy role you choose as an individual, do not let your identity as a PVS visitor be a factor when taking such a role. For example, demonstrating against the death penalty outside the prison where you might be recognized would violate this policy. When in doubt, contact the PVS national office prior to any such proposed activity.

PVS takes no position on issues

For the sake of maintaining our ability to visit, PVS has no opinion on outside issues and will not let itself to be drawn into public controversies. Our primary testimony, as an organization and as individual visitors, is to the inherent worth of each human being involved in the prison system, be they prisoner, family, staff or community.

Consider how things are perceived by outsiders

These days, no form of speech is completely private. Although we may have complex personal opinions about imprisonment, someone outside our web of deep empathy will likely misperceive any critical comment. And criticism of any aspect of the prison system, federal or not, could be misconstrued. Therefore, it is safer not to express any criticism of the prison system in public, to the press or on social media, as a PVS visitor. We can simply say we visit because the prisoners are there. It is our service. Anything more might jeopardize our program.