

PRISON STAFF TOOLKIT

Stoicare.com

Andy Small





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Focus on what you can control

- As Prison Staff we are often held accountable for things which are outside of our control, like the behaviour of Prisoners or meeting targets.
- Remember, we don't *actually* control the Prisoners in our care. However, you can still be a really good role model and you can focus on what *is* under your control.
 - Budget cuts, changes to the regime and other staff are outside of your control, so you can only focus on your own thoughts, intentions, the words you speak and most importantly your actions.
- The Stoics encourage us to visualize circles around us.
 - The first circle is around ourselves: we must sort out our own issues first before we can effectively help others. Focus on your own perceptions, effectively sorting events into "can control" and "can't control."
 - Then focus on other circles such as family, friends, colleagues, and prisoners in our care.
- Working with Prisoners can be incredibly rewarding. We have the power to prevent many future victims in our communities. We will be most effective by focusing *exclusively* on what we think, say, our behaviour and the goals we set.

Be a good role model

- We are in a powerful position as Prison Staff. We have a chance to be a good role model to Prisoners and other staff. Marcus Aurelius spent a lot of time in the *Meditations* reminding himself about all the people who have been teachers and mentors to him.
- Even if a Prisoner has no other good role model in their life, and although your time with them is short, you could still make the difference to them being able to live a good life.
- Look for your own role models. Did you have a particular Prison Officer who made the difference to you? If you need inspiration, read Book 1 of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.
- Stoics strive to be excellent people: wise, fair, kind, courageous, and self-controlled.
 - Think about how you can demonstrate these virtues whilst on duty.
 - Look for "teachable moments" when you can help Prisoners to reflect on the virtues.
- It is so important to show Prisoners how you reflect and improve on your own behaviour. If you make it ok to make mistakes and to learn from them, Prisoners will be given permission to do that too!
 - Try to show the Prisoners how you work on your emotional regulation, e.g. *'I used to get really upset about getting a bad result because I was thinking that results were all that mattered. In the end I realized that someone could get great results and still not be living a good life.'* Spending time in Prison may have been the most important thing someone ever did, if they reflect on their life and make changes.

Build a good relationship

- Try to establish a culture of it being ok to make mistakes, that through overcoming challenges we grow and become more resilient. When I make a mistake at work, I try to deliberately share this with colleagues so that I am modelling that it is ok to be wrong. What matters is that we are aiming to learn, not that we need to start with all the answers.
- Encourage Prisoners to become mentors themselves. Can they teach a friend or the whole class something they have learned? Can they teach you? Openly discuss how wisdom, self-control, courage and justice make a good person. Can they apply these values when they are in the role of mentor?
- Remember you will need courage to have authority on the landings. It takes strength of character to be able to say no to a Prisoner, and to deal with them not 'liking' you. If you act with respect and self-control, having clear rules can help make the Wing a fun and safe place to be.
- Remember that humour is really important on the Wing when used wisely. It can help us come together as a community and can remind us about what is important when we are feeling stressed. Being able to joke about things going wrong can create stronger bonds and give us all permission to admit we are not perfect!

Applying the 4 Cs of Stoicism

Remember the 4 Cs of Stoicism from Stoicare.com? Let's apply them specifically to being a worker in a custodial setting:

- **Character**
 - When things are challenging in the Prison, can you remind yourself that what is important is behaving with wisdom? Could you take a moment to breathe and then respond in a way that shows courage, kindness, and self-control?
- **Cosmos**
 - Think about all the colleagues in all the Prisons around the world at this moment, struggling with Prisoners with their multitude of issues. Feel your connection with them, they are your brothers and sisters. If things are challenging, consider whether it will matter in a week or a month or a year? Can you bring a plant or other natural materials into your wing office to remind you of your connection with nature?
- **Control**
 - Remember to that although you can aim at helping all the Prisoners in your care, you are not in control of their choices. They are independent of you and you are only one of many influencing factors in their eventual results. Therefore, focus on what you can control and do not be unkind to yourself when Prisoners fail despite your best efforts.
- **Choice**
 - Remember you always have a choice about how to respond in any situation. Make a choice that reflects your true character!

Resources

For Prison Staff

- *The Epictetus Club* by Jeff Traylor
- *The Daily Stoic* by Ryan Holiday
- *Lessons in Stoicism* by John Sellars
- *A Guide to the Good Life* by William B. Irvine
- *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* by Donald Robertson



Inspiration

- “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.” - Winston Churchill
- “I never lose, I win or I learn.” - Nelson Mandela
- “If you’re going through Hell, keep on going.” - Winston Churchill
- “What we face may look unsurmountable but what I’ve learned is that we are always stronger than we know.” - Arnold Schwarzenegger
- “You control your own life. Your own will is extremely powerful.”
- J.K. Rowling

