

MENTAL HEALTH

Not only is it important that you stay physically healthy in order to survive prison, but it is as equally important that you stay mentally healthy. The prison experience/environment can easily take its toll on the minds of its men, so if you wish to survive, you must learn to overcome the challenges you are sure to face. No matter how strong your body is, prison will eat you alive if your mind is weak.

Despite what people on the outside may or may not think, it is important for *you* to understand that prisons are *designed* to mentally break its prisoners (you!) down. Once a man is broken down mentally, he starts to break spiritually. And once he's spiritually broken, he's as good as dead....

Furthermore, a mentally broken man is easier to control, as being mentally broken is to be tired. When he is tired, it's harder for him to fight. When it's harder for him to fight, it's easier for "them" to win. It is obviously to "their" benefit that *you* are weak; therefore, "they" have intentionally designed "their" system to exhaust you, and it is up to *you* to fight against falling a victim to that. In addition to the above, your psychological battle is not only with the depressing predicament that you find yourself in or the mental roller coaster designed by prison to suck out your energy and steal your spirit, but with your fellow prisoners, as well. Prison is a bloody shark tank full of great whites, and your fellow prisoners wish to suppress you just as much as anyone else. As explained in the mental warfare section of this book, you must learn to spot mental attacks from your fellow prisoners as well as defend yourself from them; and, just as importantly, you must also learn to spot and defend yourself from the mental attacks/wars waged against you by prison itself.

Here are my tips to staying mentally healthy and strong while you are in prison.

Keep your cell light on:

For some reason, many prisoners like to keep their cell light off so that their cell remains dark all day. Why someone would want to live in the dark is beyond me, but it is an extremely common thing to do in prison.

Don't fall into this kind of program. Instead, keep your light on and *live*. Look at it like this: Light is life, and dark is death. When my celly wants to keep the light off all day I can *physically* feel a difference in my body. Too much darkness will bring upon depression. We are like plants: put us in sunlight, we will grow and live; put us in the dark, we will wither and die.

Don't sleep too much:

Another thing a lot of prisoners like to do is sleep all day. However, it's a mistake; don't do it. Sleeping too much will not only make you always feel sluggish and sleepy, but it, too, will bring upon depression.

Exercise:

Make sure you physically exercise at least a little bit each day. You have to keep yourself active. If you let a car sit too long without starting it, driving it around, etc., it's not going to run right. Well, the same thing goes for your body. A healthy body will help you keep a healthy mind, exercising will help you release tension and stress.

Don't dwell:

I know life isn't necessarily going your way right now. However, don't sit around and dwell on your situation all day. It won't change anything, it will only *add* to your misery.

Instead of dwelling, turn whatever injustice has been done to you into a reason to fight. Rather than dwell or get depressed, get angry and channel that energy into something positive and/or beneficial; let your situation fuel your fire. Rather than dwelling on your situation, change it.

Stay positive:

Despite your situation, you *must* remain positive. Too much negativity will kill you. Positivity (+) will *add* to your life; negativity (-) will take it away....

In addition to that, avoid negative people. They are like "energy vampires"; they will suck all the positive energy right out of you with their constant pessimism.

Have a sense of humor:

It's important and healthy to have a good sense of humor. No matter what your situation is, always try to look for the humor in things. Laughter heals.

Have a Focus:

Set goals for yourself and *focus* on them. Whether it's writing a book, studying something you're passionate about, or getting into something else that's time-consuming, escape prison by finding something positive and beneficial to do and *focus* on it. When you are focused on something, you will be too busy to dwell, stress, feel sorry for yourself, etc.

Read inspirational stories:

Another thing I think is a good idea is to read inspirational stories. Whether you're religious or not, I find that "Guideposts" (magazines) have a lot of stories that give me a good feeling each time I read them. The "Chicken Soup for the Soul" is a good series too. And they even have a "Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul."

Taking in good, positive, inspirational information is healthy. Whether it's reading books with these kinds of stories, or even watching TV shows like "Secret Millionaire" or "Home Makeover," intake as much positive and healthy information as you can.

Keep the faith; remain hopeful:

Despite what your reality is today, you *must* remain hopeful. You'd be amazed how far faith and hope will take you. You must *never* give up. As long as you remain hopeful and continue to fight, you *will* have a chance of succeeding. If you lose hope and stop fighting, you will for sure *not* have a chance of succeeding. It's kind of like the concept, "you can't win if you don't play."

Religion:

I cannot say that I am a real religious man. However, as I get older, I have a much clearer understanding of the essence and concept of religion. It now makes sense to me *why* people find so much strength in religion, and it all comes down to keeping faith and remaining hopeful.

If you have a religion, practice it. Religion is a *positive* intake. Therefore, it will help you stay on a positive path and remain faithful.

Mental relaxation:

Finding time to relax your mind is crucial. You should dedicate at least 15 minutes a day to practicing some kind of relaxation technique – meditation, etc. In prison's chaotic environment, it is very important that you maintain peace of mind.

Note: I find calmativ breathing to be a great, simply way to reduce anxiety, and it can be done anywhere, anytime. All you have to do is inhale through your nose, hold it for a count of four, and exhale *slowly* through pursed lips until you have expelled all of the air in your lungs. Try it; you will immediately feel more relaxed.