

Imprisonment and Early Release

Governments consider prisons the main form of punishment available to the criminal justice system. But is the system as effective it is supposed to be?

One objectives of imprisonment is to rehabilitate offenders, to correct their attitudes and anti-social behaviour. The second important aspect is to provide public safety by isolating them. It also functions as a warning to the rest of the society to deter others from committing crimes.

On the one hand the system satisfies society and victims' need for retribution. On the other hand this leads to further problems because the victims are interested in longer prison terms. This makes prisons overcrowded and consumes more and more tax-payers' money.

Research carried out in America shows that prisoners serve only a fraction of their sentences

- Average sentence for murder was 15 years imprisonment, but the actually served was 5,5 years.
- The figures for rape were 8 years in prison and 3 years served.

To avoid prisons being overcrowded and to relieve the tax payers burden Great Britain introduced a system of electronic tagging. Apart from being expensive it also turned out to be ineffective as these figures show:

- 1,638 crimes have been committed by prisoners who would have otherwise been in jail since the tagging scheme began in 1999.
- The crime spree includes 229 violent offences, 6 sex crimes and more than 500 cases of theft and fraud.

Under the home detention curfew scheme, which was introduced to ease overcrowding in jails, about 3000 prisoners a year are allowed to serve out the last 3 months of their sentences at home under electronic surveillance. Many prisoners simply took off their tags and were 'unlawfully at large'.

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A Put the jumbled words into the five categories below.

steal	theft	burglar	minor	
confess	slammer	burgle	manslaughter	
battery	interrogate	abusive	arsonist	
assassin	penitentiary	rapist	detention centre	
prison	money laundering	jail	hijacker	
violent	hired	serious	fraud	batter

Crimes	Criminals	Custodial institutions	Crime related verbs	Crime related adjectives

B What is the difference between the following words?

1. prison jail
2. murder manslaughter assassination
3. murder homicide
4. burglary theft

C Discuss first in pairs and then as a class why all prisoners can't be released on parole.

D Discussion.

Work in two groups. One group prepares arguments in support of short time prison sentences. The other group prepares arguments for long term sentences.

When you are finished work in pairs with a partner from the other group. Take turns to present your group's arguments as your partner tries to interrupt you using the expressions below and vice versa.

Sorry, but...
Excuse me,...
If you don't mind, I would like to mention....
I see your point, but ...

May I explain my point ...
I totally disagree with you ...
With respect ...
You are completely mistaken ...

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Teacher's notes.

Procedure:

1. Ask Ss:

- If they have ever been in prison
- What they would lack most while in prison
- To describe a perfect cell,
- What would cause more discomfort while in prison- physical or mental environment
- What their attitude to prisons and sentencing is

2. Ss read the text. Discuss reactions to text.

3. Students do vocabulary exercise putting jumbled words into the five categories.

Key

- Crimes - battery, manslaughter, fraud, money laundering, theft
- Criminals - hijacker, rapist, burglar, assassin, arsonist
- Custodial institutions - prison, jail, detention centre, slammer, penitentiary
- Crime related verbs - interrogate, confess, steal, burgle, batter
- Crime related adjectives - hired, violent, abusive, minor, serious

4. Ask Ss to find the difference between the words.

Key

- Prison - an institution of maximum security
- Jail - an institution of medium security
- Murder - killing somebody intentionally
- Manslaughter - accidental killing
- Assassination - killing for political reasons or for money
- Murder - BrE
- Homicide - AmE
- Burglary - going into a building by force to steal
- Theft - taking somebody's property

5. Ask Ss to discuss first in pairs and then as a class why all prisoners can't be released on parole. As a support use the box on the worksheet.

6. Discussion

One group has to support short time prison sentences, while the other group supports long term sentences. Then divide Ss in pairs. One presents their team's arguments while their partner tries to interrupt him using the expressions from the worksheet.

7. Homework.

Ask the students to imagine themselves in the shoes of a prison director. Write a formal letter to the Ministry of Justice explaining the prison's needs and supporting them with arguments to get the money.

or

Ask the students to write a letter to the Minister of Justice complaining about short sentences and early release of prisoners.