

## Letter to Families: Understanding PICS

Dear Family Member,

If your loved one has recently returned home from prison—or is preparing to—you may be noticing some changes that don't make sense. They might seem distant, defensive, overwhelmed, or emotionally shut down. You might feel like you're walking on eggshells or wondering why they aren't just happy to be home.

What you're seeing could be more than stress. It could be something called **Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS)**—a real psychological condition that affects many formerly incarcerated individuals. And the more you understand it, the more prepared you'll be to respond with clarity, compassion, and boundaries.

### ♦ What is Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS)?

PICS is a trauma-related condition caused by prolonged exposure to prison life. It's not just a 'bad attitude' or someone refusing to change. It's what happens after years of living in survival mode—where control, trust, and emotional safety were rare or dangerous.

Common signs include emotional numbness, hypervigilance, irritability, distrust, time distortion, and withdrawal from others. Many Justice-Impacted Individuals also carry unresolved grief, fear of failure, and shame they don't know how to talk about.

### ♦ Tips to Navigate Tough Moments

- Remember: What looks like anger may be fear, and what sounds like blame may be pain.
- Avoid pushing for deep conversations when your loved one is shutting down. Come back when the moment feels safer.
- Offer structure and consistency—but not control. Choices matter after prison.
- Don't take every reaction personally. Their behavior is often about their internal struggle, not you.
- Take care of yourself, too. Boundaries are an act of love—for both of you.

Healing takes time—for your loved one and for you. PICS doesn't mean your family is broken. It means your family is healing from something hard. You don't have to do it alone.

With understanding,  
The Wife After Prison™ Team