



# Reentry Resource Guide

This guide was created by the Center for Employment Opportunities to accompany the Villanova University Reentry Video Learning Series. It is designed to provide individuals with immediate and ongoing access to key resources and information.



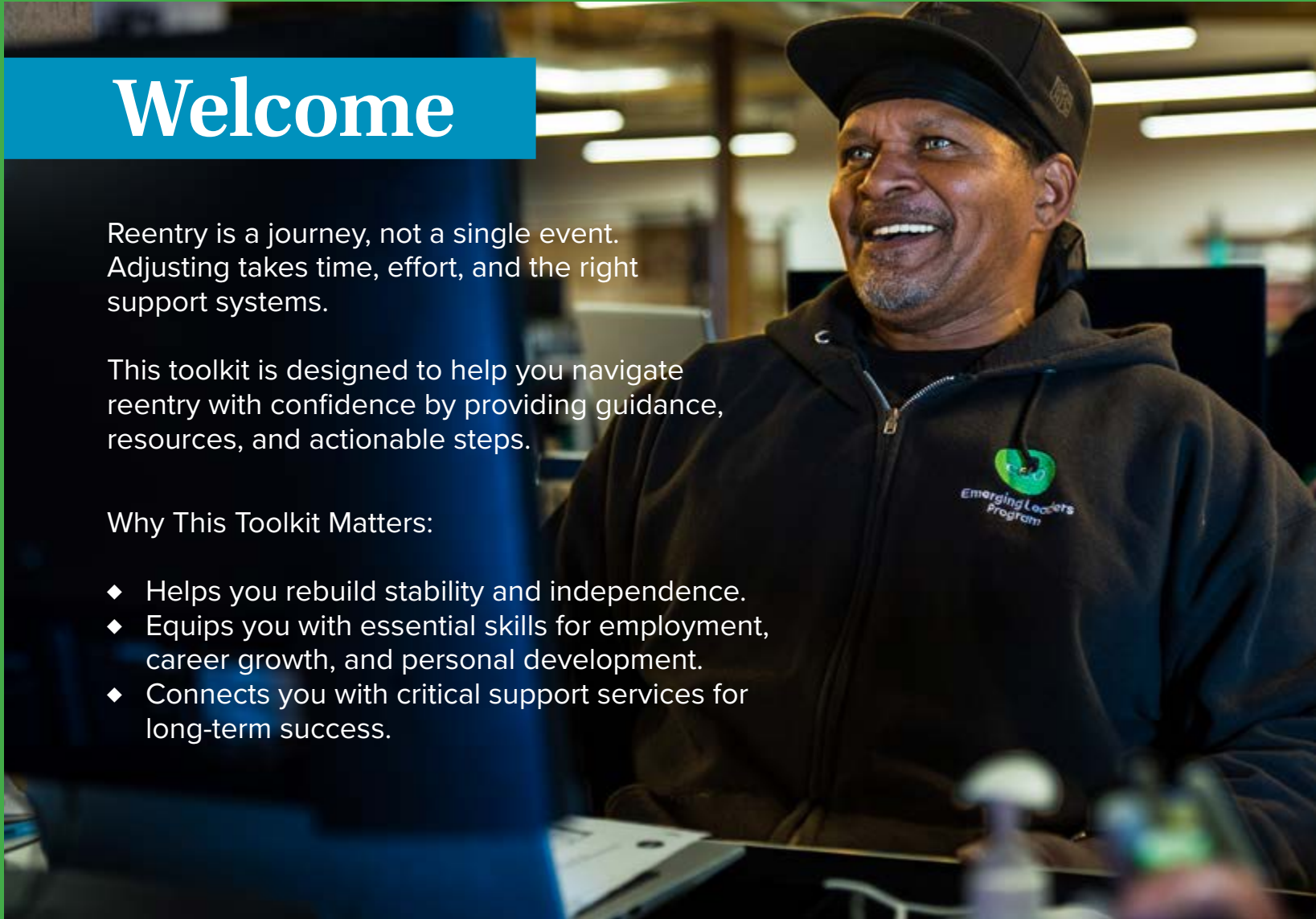
**Center for  
Employment  
Opportunities**

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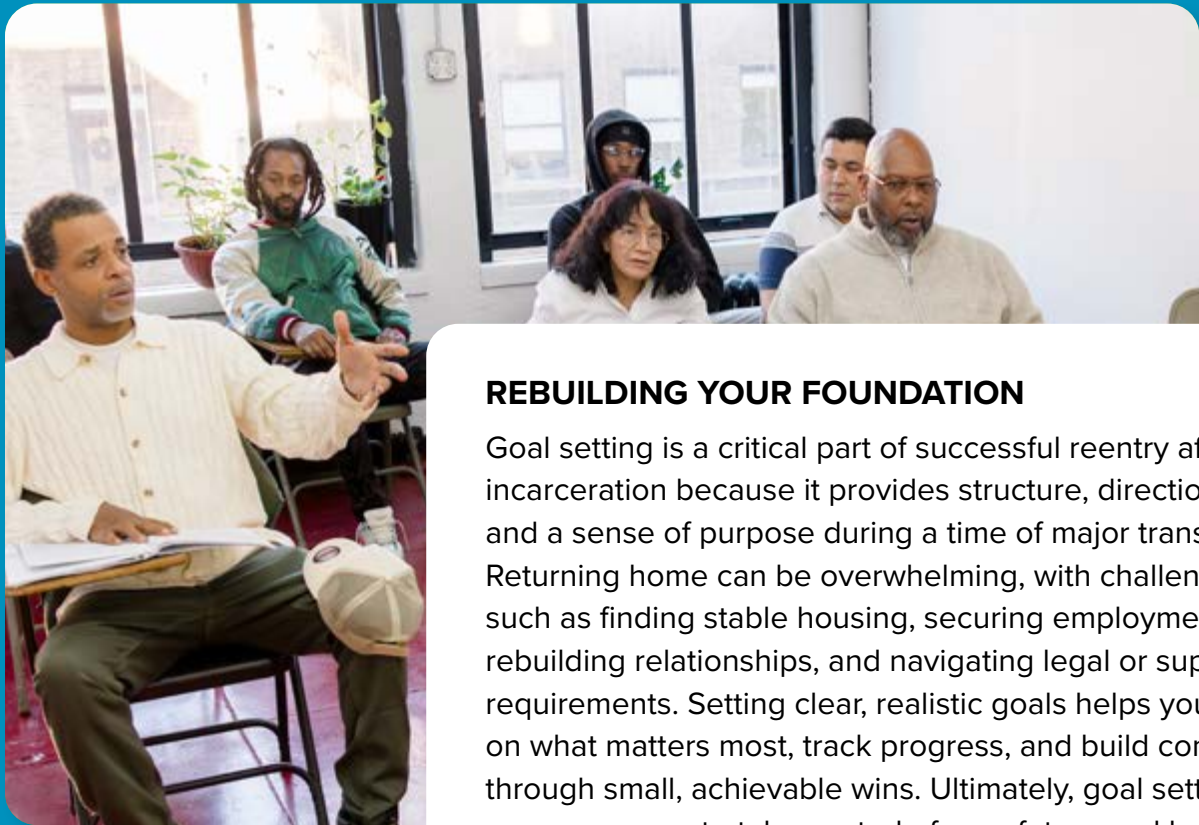
*“ The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. ”*

- Nelson Mandela





# Module 1: Foundations for Reentry



## REBUILDING YOUR FOUNDATION

Goal setting is a critical part of successful reentry after incarceration because it provides structure, direction, and a sense of purpose during a time of major transition. Returning home can be overwhelming, with challenges such as finding stable housing, securing employment, rebuilding relationships, and navigating legal or supervision requirements. Setting clear, realistic goals helps you focus on what matters most, track progress, and build confidence through small, achievable wins. Ultimately, goal setting empowers you to take control of your future and lay the foundation for long-term stability and personal growth.

## SMART Goals

### Step 1: Reflect

Take a few minutes to think about one area of your life that is most important to focus on right now. This could be employment, housing, health, education, or reconnecting with family.  
*Example Focus Area: Employment*

### Step 2: Use the SMART Framework

Complete each section below to develop your SMART goal.

#### S - Specific

What exactly do you want to accomplish?  
*Example: I want to get a full-time job in construction.*

#### M - Measurable

How will you track your progress or know when you've reached your goal?  
*Example: I will apply to 3 jobs per week and track applications in a notebook.*

#### A - Achievable

Is this goal realistic given your current situation? What support do you need?  
*Example: Yes. I have previous experience, and I'll work with my reentry coach to prepare my resume.*

#### R - Relevant

Why is this goal important to you? How does it fit with your long-term plans?  
*Example: I need steady income to support myself and stay on track.*

#### T - Time-bound

What is your deadline for reaching this goal?  
*Example: I want to be employed within the next 60 days.*

# Confidence and Mindset

## Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you’re not good enough or don’t deserve success, even when you’ve worked hard for it, a common experience for people returning from incarceration. It can show up as self-doubt, fear of judgment, or the belief that your past overshadows your future. The activity below helps challenge those thoughts by guiding you to identify your real strengths, reframe negative self-talk, and create positive affirmations. By focusing on what you’ve overcome and the value you bring, this activity supports a mindset shift from feeling unworthy to recognizing that you belong, you’re capable, and your past does not define your future.

### ACTIVITY

## Recognizing Your Strengths

List 3-5 strengths you’ve gained from your life experiences, even the hard ones.

Examples:

- ◆ *I am resilient*
- ◆ *I stay calm under pressure*
- ◆ *I help others*

## My Strengths

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



# Digital Literacy Skills Training

## Understanding the Digital World

Learning digital literacy is an essential skill for success in today’s world, especially if you have been incarcerated and missed out on recent technology changes. Digital literacy means understanding how to use computers, smartphones, email, the internet, and common applications to complete everyday tasks like job searching, accessing services, and staying connected. Building these skills boosts your confidence, opens up employment opportunities, and helps you navigate modern life more independently. Whether it’s creating a resume online, applying for housing, or using virtual tools for communication, digital literacy is a key part of rebuilding and moving forward.

## Digital Training Resources

### Basic Computer Components

These resources provide an overview of basic computer parts and their use.

➤ [Basic Parts of a Computer](#)

### Creating and Using an Email Account

The following resources provide guidance on setting up and using an email account. Setting up an email account is a crucial step in reentry, as it allows you to apply for jobs, communicate with support services, and receive important updates. It also helps you stay organized and connected in today’s digital world.

➤ [Creating a Gmail Account](#)

➤ [Create a Microsoft Account](#)

➤ [Send an Email Using Microsoft](#)

➤ [Send an Email Using Gmail](#)

## Navigating smartphones for job searches and communication

Smartphones are essential tools for reentry, helping you stay connected, apply for jobs, navigate to appointments, and access important services. Learning how to use basic features like email, maps, and apps can make daily life easier and support your success.

## Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is technology that can think, learn, and make decisions, like a smart assistant. For you, the community, AI can be a powerful tool to support success. It can help you create resumes, practice interview questions, learn new skills online, find jobs that match your experience, and stay organized with reminders and calendars. When used wisely, AI can make daily tasks easier and give you more control over your future and your success.

➤ [Basics of Using an Android](#)

➤ [Basics of Using an Iphone](#)





# Understanding Fair Chance Hiring

The [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC) and the [Fair Credit Reporting Act](#) (FCRA) offer additional guidance on fair chance hiring. The EEOC cautions employers that use an individual's criminal conviction to withhold a job offer as it may result in discrimination based upon the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## Ban the Box Policies

“[Ban the box](#)” refers to laws or policies that prohibit employers from asking a job applicant about their criminal history early in the hiring process, typically before a conditional offer of employment.



In 2017, Pennsylvania instituted a Ban the Box policy that removed the criminal history checkbox from all public sector job applications. Certain cities, including York and Philadelphia, instituted tougher versions of this policy. If you are applying for a job in Pennsylvania, particularly in Philadelphia, you may not need to disclose your criminal history.


Philadelphia is particularly strict. Employers here may not ask you about your criminal history on an application or during an interview. They may run a criminal background check, but only after they make you a conditional offer of employment.



Learn more about [Ban the Box Laws in Pennsylvania](#).

## What is Fair Chance Hiring?

Fair Chance Hiring means an employer considers a candidate's qualifications and skills before their criminal history when making hiring decisions. Fair Chance policies help reduce barriers for those with criminal histories when searching for a job.

 **Pro Tip:** When searching resources and support look for keywords like fair chance, second chance, reentry, justice involved, justice impacted, or system impacted.



# Module 2: Career Readiness

## Preparing for the Hiring Process

### Identifying Transferable Skills

Identifying transferable skills is important because it helps you recognize the valuable abilities you’ve gained through life, work, or personal experiences ,even if they weren’t in a traditional job. These skills, like communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, can be applied to new opportunities such as employment, education, or volunteering.

### Step 1: Reflect on Past Experiences

Think about any roles or tasks you’ve done, inside or outside of work. Check all that apply:

- ☐ Worked in a prison job (e.g., kitchen, laundry, maintenance)
- ☐ Took classes or completed a program
- ☐ Helped others (mentoring, tutoring, caregiving)
- ☐ Managed a schedule or group activity
- ☐ Solved problems under pressure
- ☐ Stayed disciplined and followed rules
- ☐ Communicated with different types of people
- ☐ Set personal goals and followed through

### Step 2: List Your Transferable Skills

Now, write down 3–5 skills from those experiences that could be useful in a job or in daily life.

*Examples: Time Management, Teamwork, Communication, Problem-solving, Leadership, Organization, Adaptability*

### My Transferable Skills

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

### Step 3: Put It Into Practice

Choose one of your skills and write a sentence about how you used it and how it can help you now.

*Example: I used teamwork while working in the kitchen with others to prepare meals on a deadline. This shows I can work well in fast-paced environments.*

### My Sentence




### Resume Building

Identifying transferable skills is important because it helps you recognize the valuable abilities you’ve gained through life, work, or personal experiences, even if they weren’t in a traditional job. These skills, like communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, can be applied to new opportunities such as employment, education, or volunteering.

- ◆ Chronological Resume: emphasizes your career progression
- ◆ Functional Resume: spotlights your skills

If you do not have a lot of traditional work experience, it may be best to use a functional resume.

 **Pro Tip: Most job applications these days are submitted electronically and use an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) to manage the application. These ATS systems don’t always recognize images or graphics, so it is best to use a resume with just text and bullet points.**

#### Resume Resources

- ◆ [Chronological Resume Template](#)
- ◆ [Functional Resume Template](#)
- ◆ [How to Make a Comprehensive Resume](#)
- ◆ [O\\*Net Code Connector](#): Assists in developing resume bullet points for common occupations.
- ◆ [Using Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) ChatGPT to Write a Resume](#)

#### Job Searching Resources

- ◆ [Indeed](#)  
[Setting Up a Profile](#)  
[Job Searching on Indeed](#)
- ◆ [LinkedIn](#)  
[Setting Up a Profile](#)  
[Job Searching on LinkedIn](#)

### Job Search Strategies

**Online Job Searching:** Job searching online is a key part of finding work today. Some employers may still allow you to walk in and fill a job application, but those instances are becoming rare. Many employers post job openings on websites like [Indeed](#), [LinkedIn](#), or local job boards, and most applications are submitted electronically. Knowing how to search, create an online profile, and apply can open up more opportunities and help you find jobs that match your skills and interests. It’s a fast and convenient way to connect with employers and take charge of your job search.

**Job Search Support:** Joining reentry organizations or workforce agencies can be a powerful step in your job search. These organizations understand the unique challenges of reentry and offer support like job training, resume help, interview preparation, and direct connections to employers who are open to hiring people with past convictions. They can also help with transportation, clothing for interviews, and referrals to other services you may need. Being part of these programs not only boosts your chances of finding work, it also gives you a supportive network to help you stay focused and motivated.



#### Tips for Applying to Jobs Online Effectively

- ◆ Employers that hire employees with past convictions often call themselves a “Fair Chance Employer” or a “Second Chance Employer.” These same employers call job seekers with past convictions “fair chance employees” or “second chance employees.” If you are looking for a job, do not only search by using the term “felony friendly” also include “fair chance” or “second chance.”
- ◆ Indeed and LinkedIn have a “fair chance filter”- once you select the filter, only jobs that accept people with past convictions will appear as part of your search results.
- ◆ Keep in mind that it takes some time to submit your resume and application online. It’s best to take time to complete the application.
- ◆ Ensure that your resume is optimized to be read through an [Applicant Tracking System](#) (ATS).

### Preparing for an Interview

Once you land an interview, it’s important to prepare. Preparation will help you feel confident, make a good impression, and clearly show why you’re a strong fit for the job. Practicing your answers, learning about the company, and thinking about how to talk about your skills and experiences, including your past, can help you stay calm and focused. Preparation also shows employers that you’re serious, professional, and ready to move forward. The better prepared you are, the more likely you are to stand out and succeed. You can easily prepare by writing responses to [common interview questions](#).



**Answering the Conviction Question**

During the hiring process you may be asked about your conviction. The best way to address this question is to focus on the rehabilitation efforts you have made since your conviction.

ACTIVITY

Answering the Conviction Question

Note down what you might talk about for each part of your answer to the conviction question. Then use the lines on the next page to write out how you might answer the conviction question when asked.

The Past

**“There was a time...”**  
*Example: Bad decisions, substance abuse, gangs, neighborhood pressures, family problems*

The Consequences

**“It cost me...”**  
*Example: Family, friends, finances, freedom, time, relationships with children/parents, schooling*

Steps Taken

**“Since then...”**  
*Example: Treatment, sobriety, family, support groups, faith, CEO*

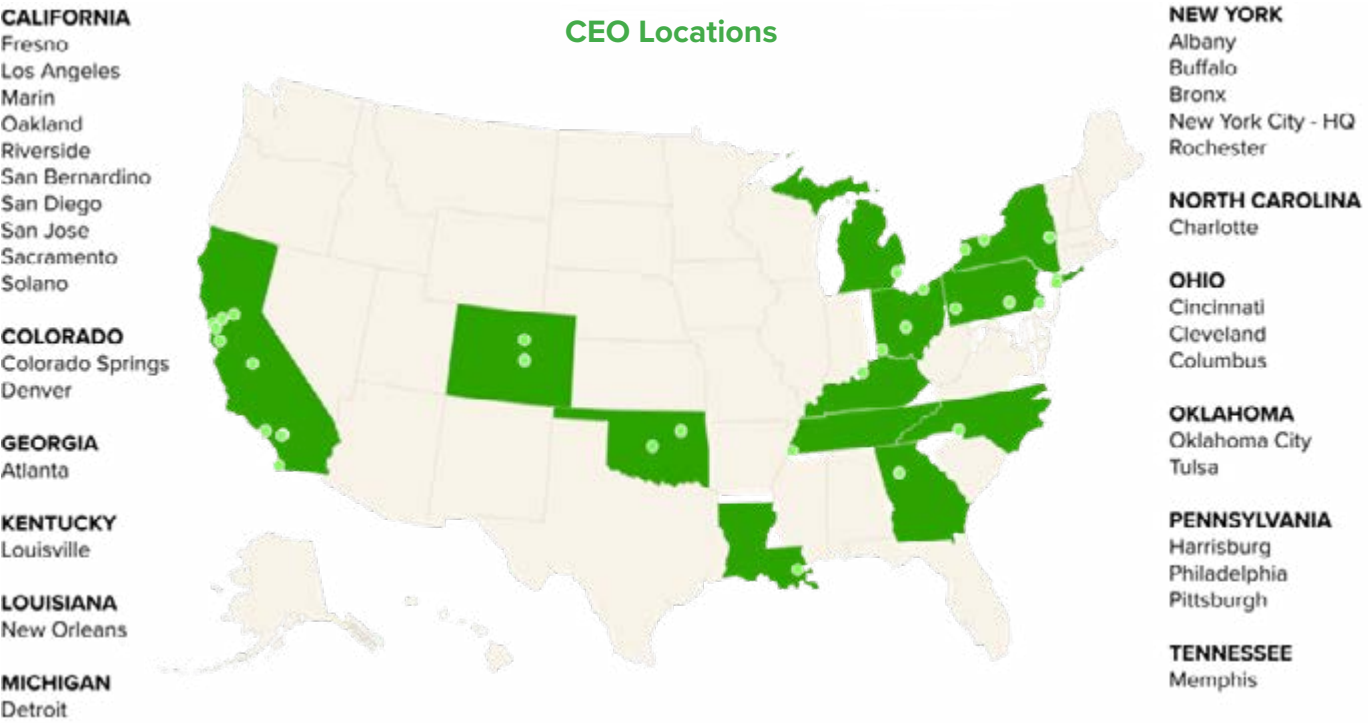
The Future

**“Going forward...”**  
*Example: Full time employment, independence, honest living, education*

My Response to the Conviction Question:

Reentry Organizations

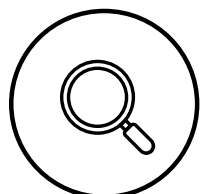
- ◆ Pennsylvania
    - [Center for Employment Opportunities](#)
    - [Urban League of Philadelphia](#)
    - [Pennsylvania Career Link](#)
  - ◆ New Jersey, New York, Ohio
    - [NJ Reentry](#) (NJ)
    - [Legal Action Center](#) (NY)
    - [Community Justice Reentry Network](#) (NY)
    - [CASES](#) (NY)
    - [Hamilton County](#) (OH)
- ◆ National
    - [Center for Employment Opportunities](#)
    - ▶ All locations are listed on the map
    - [The National Reentry Network For Returning Citizens](#)
    - [Prison Fellowship](#)
    - [Career One Stop](#)
    - [Defy Ventures](#)
    - [Formerly Incarcerated Graduate Network \(FICGN\)](#)





# Module 3: Career Navigation

## Starting a New Job & Workplace Etiquette



### What to Expect During Onboarding

Onboarding is the process of getting started in a new job, and it's an important step in helping you succeed in your role. It usually includes filling out paperwork, learning company policies, meeting your team, and getting trained on your job duties. Good onboarding helps you feel welcomed, understand what's expected, and build confidence in your new workplace. Taking this time seriously shows your employer that you're committed and ready to do well.



### Onboarding Checklist

Use the checklist below to make sure you stay on track for the onboarding process.

### Before Your First Day:

- Confirm your start date, time, and location
- Ask about dress code or uniform
- Gather necessary documents (ID, Social Security card, work permit, etc.)
- Arrange reliable transportation

### First Week:

- Arrive early or on time
- Bring required documents and materials
- Meet your supervisor and team
- Take notes during orientation or training
- Ask questions if you're unsure about something
- Learn workplace rules, schedule, and expectations



### Additional Tips

- ◆ Be dependable—show up on time and ready to work
- ◆ Communicate respectfully with coworkers and supervisors
- ◆ Take initiative and ask how you can help
- ◆ Keep learning and improving your skills
- ◆ Reach out for support if challenges come up



## Professional Behavior & Communication

Professional communication is how you interact with others in the workplace, through your words, tone, body language, and even your emails or texts. Good communication builds trust, shows respect, and helps you succeed on the job. Professional etiquette means following workplace norms, like being polite, listening carefully, and showing up on time. It's about making a good impression and working well with others, no matter what your role is.

### Tips for Professional Communication and Etiquette

**Be respectful:** Use polite language like “please” and “thank you.” Avoid offensive language.

**Listen actively:** Pay attention when someone is speaking. Don't interrupt.

**Speak clearly and calmly:** Think before you speak and keep your tone friendly and respectful.

**Use proper body language:** Make eye contact, don't cross your arms, and nod to show you're listening.

**Be mindful with texts and emails:** Use complete sentences, check spelling, and avoid using all caps (it looks like yelling).

**Respect personal space and boundaries:** Give others room and be aware of what's appropriate in the workplace.

**Ask questions when you're unsure:** It's better to ask than to guess and make a mistake.

**Be on time:** Whether it's a shift, meeting, or call, punctuality shows you're reliable and respectful.



### Workplace Conflicts

Handling conflicts in the workplace is important for maintaining a positive and professional environment. When disagreements or misunderstandings happen, it's best to stay calm, listen to the other person's point of view, and communicate respectfully. Avoid yelling, blaming, or reacting out of anger. Instead, focus on finding a solution that works for both sides. If the issue can't be resolved directly, it's okay to ask a supervisor or HR for help. Learning to handle conflict in a mature and respectful way shows responsibility and helps build trust on the job.

### Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is a key part of growing on the job. When giving feedback, it's important to be respectful, specific, and focus on the behavior, not the person. When receiving feedback, try to listen without getting defensive and see it as a chance to learn and improve. Even if the feedback is hard to hear, staying open and asking questions shows that you're committed to doing better. Feedback helps build stronger working relationships and helps everyone succeed as part of a team.

### Professional Growth

Continuing education is an important way to keep learning and growing, both personally and professionally. Whether it's earning a certification, taking a class, or learning a trade, continuing your education can open new doors and increase your chances of getting a better job. It also builds confidence, keeps your mind sharp, and shows employers that you're serious about your future. Education doesn't stop after school. It's a lifelong tool for success, especially during reentry.

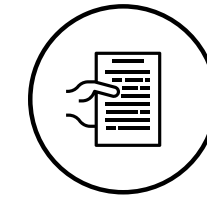
### Education & Training Resources

- > [Udemy](#)
- > [Coursera](#)
- > [freeCodeCamp](#)
- > [Villanova College of Professional Studies](#)
- > [Educause](#)
- > [Edx](#)
- > [LinkedIn Learning](#)

### Resources

- > [5 Strategies for Conflict Resolution](#)
- > [How to Give \(& Receive\) Critical Feedback](#)

## Module 4: Personal Development



### Financial Literacy

Financial literacy means understanding how to manage your money wisely, including budgeting, saving, building credit, and avoiding debt. It's an important skill for gaining stability and independence during reentry. When you know how to track your income and expenses, plan for the future, and make informed financial choices, you're more likely to stay on track and reach your goals. Building financial literacy helps you take control of your money.

### Resources & Information on Common Financial Topics

#### Credit Rebuilding Strategies

- [How to Rebuild Your Credit](#)
- [Free Annual Credit Report](#)

#### Budgeting, Financial Planning & Taxes

- [Creating a Personal Budget](#)
- [Best Budgeting Apps](#)
- [Understanding the Basics](#)

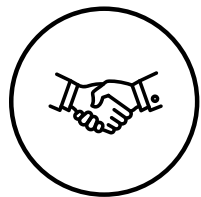
#### Avoiding Predatory Loans & Scams

- [Predatory Lending: What You Need to Protect Yourself](#)
- [How to Avoid a Scam](#)

#### Local Financial Tools & Resources

- [Financial Empowerment Centers in Philadelphia](#)
- [Free Tax Preparation](#)
- [Clarifi](#)





### Building Healthy Relationships

Building healthy relationships during reentry is essential for emotional support, stability, and personal growth. Positive connections with family, friends, mentors, or support groups can help you stay motivated, make better choices, and feel less alone in your journey. Healthy relationships are built on trust, respect, and communication, and they require effort from both sides. Surrounding yourself with people who encourage your progress and understand your goals can make a big difference in your reentry success.



### Community Engagement & Giving Back

You can play a powerful role in supporting others who are also navigating reentry. By sharing your experiences, offering guidance, and providing encouragement, you can help others feel seen, understood, and less alone. Your journey can serve as proof that change is possible, inspiring hope and motivation. Whether through mentoring, peer support, or simply being someone who listens without judgment, you have a unique ability to uplift others and build stronger, more connected communities.

Ways to support and advocate for justice-impacted individuals.

- ◆ [Philadelphia Reentry Coalition](#)
- ◆ [Uplift: Behind the Walls Initiative](#)

### Resources and Information

- ◆ Creating a supportive social network  
[Developing Your Support System](#)
- ◆ Setting and maintaining personal boundaries  
[Create Healthy Boundaries](#)  
[A Guide to Setting Better Boundaries](#)
- ◆ Local Financial Tools and Resources  
[Free and Low Cost Mental Health Services](#)  
[Healthy Minds Philly](#)

# Essential Resources

## Housing Assistance

- ◆ [Philadelphia Housing Authority](#)
- ◆ [Liberty Resources Housing](#)
- ◆ [PA Housing Finance Agency](#)
- ◆ [HUD](#)
- ◆ [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)

## Food Support Programs

- ◆ [Philabundance](#)
- ◆ [Feast of Justice](#)
- ◆ [BenePhilly](#)
- ◆ [Food and Nutrition Service](#)
- ◆ [Feeding America](#)

## Affordable Cell Phone and Technology

- ◆ [Safelink Wireless](#)
- ◆ [PCs for People](#)

## Financial Services

- ◆ [Free Tax Preparation](#)
- ◆ [Clarifi](#)
- ◆ [Local Initiatives Support Coalition \(LISC\)](#)
- ◆ [Low Income Investment Fund](#)
- ◆ [Operation Hope](#)

## Obtaining Personal Documents

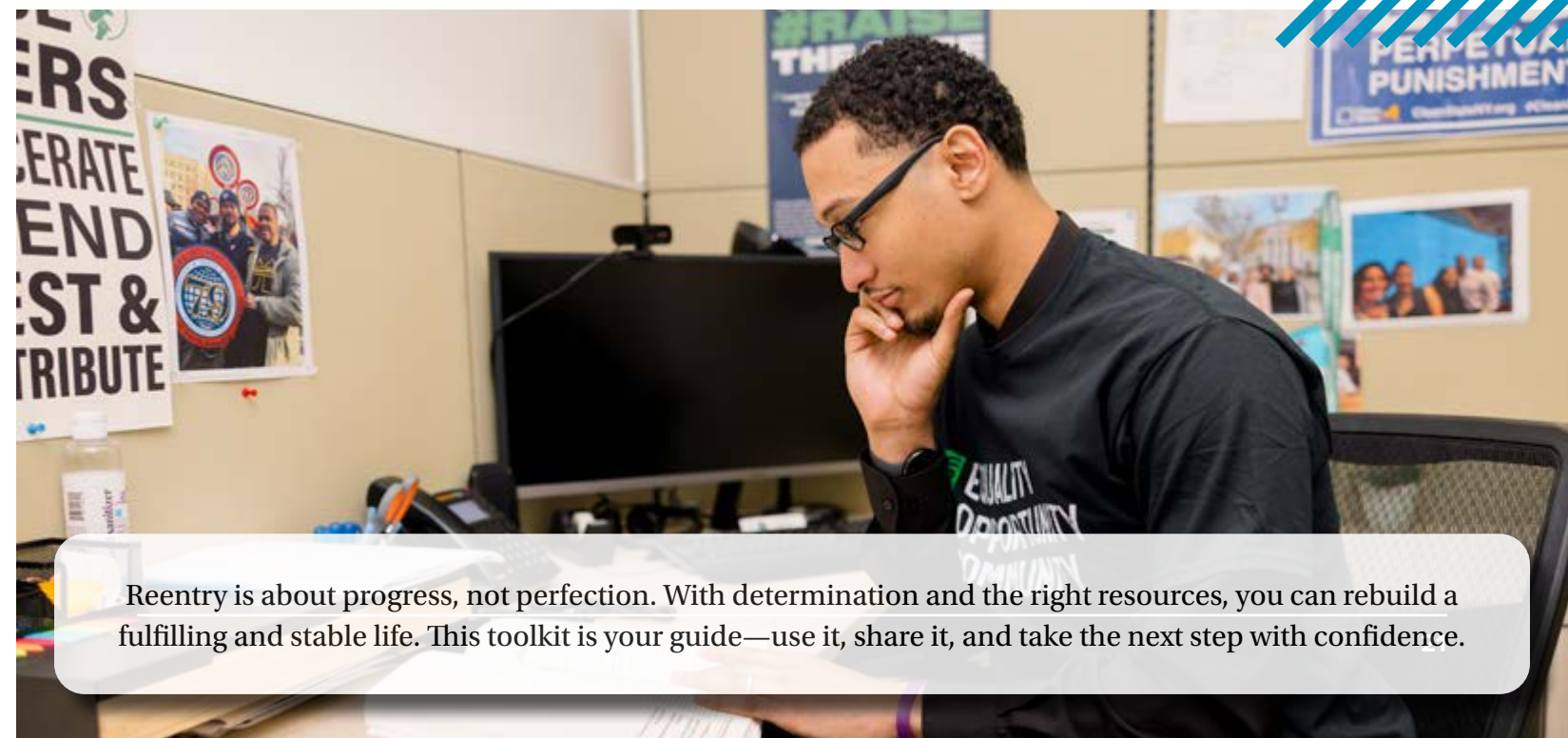
- ◆ [Driver's license Or ID](#)
- ◆ [Birth Certificate](#)
- ◆ [Social Security Card](#)
- ◆ [Map Research](#)

## Mental Health & Wellness Resources

- ◆ [Free and Low Cost Mental Health Services](#)
- ◆ [Healthy Minds Philly](#)
- ◆ [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- ◆ [Mental Health First Aid](#)

## Legal Rights & Advocacy

- ◆ [Community Legal Services](#)
- ◆ [Philadelphia Legal Assistance](#)
- ◆ [Philadelphia Bar Association](#)
- ◆ [Temple Legal Aid](#)
- ◆ [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- ◆ [National Legal Aid and Defender Association](#)
- ◆ [Legal Action Center](#)
- ◆ [National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers](#)
- ◆ [Civil Rights Project UCLA](#)



Reentry is about progress, not perfection. With determination and the right resources, you can rebuild a fulfilling and stable life. This toolkit is your guide—use it, share it, and take the next step with confidence.



**Content of this Toolkit developed by:**  
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