

# Dating After Prison

Recently, Antoine and Jack sat down with a few other men to talk about what dating might be like, now that they've been released from prison.

Antoine went to prison when he was 18 for a crime he didn't commit. He wasn't able to afford a good lawyer, and the court appointed one did a terrible job at defending him. Antoine had a couple of casual relationships in high school before coming to prison, but he's never had a serious sexual or romantic relationship. He is now 26 years old and eager to start dating.

Jack is 45 years old now. He was also 18 when he was convicted of murdering someone. Jack freely admits to committing the crime he was charged with, but feels like he is a completely different person now. He was young then and he didn't know himself; his tough childhood didn't leave him with a lot of coping mechanisms aside from alcohol. His sense of belonging came from a gang he was part of, which provided him with support, friendships, food, and a roof over his head. But it also got him in trouble. After 27 years in prison, over two decades of being sober, a lot of self-reflection, learning, therapy, and maturing, he doesn't even feel like he is the same person as the young Jack that committed that crime.

As Antoine and Jack sit down with some friends to talk about what life might be like after prison, dating quickly came up. While dating is difficult and confusing under any circumstances, dating for the formerly incarcerated has an extra layer of complexity. They both agree that it is important to be open to the people they date about the time they served. But when should they disclose this information? On a first date? That seems like the most honest approach, but it's unlikely to lead to a second date. Could they wait a bit? After all, nobody ever reveals that much on a first date; people rarely talk about having problems with addiction, financial difficulties, or mental health issues. And Antoine and Jack certainly don't consider their incarceration a defining part of their identities. So, could Antoine and Jack also wait to talk about the time they served in prison? If they wait, how long can they wait?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When should Antoine and Jack tell someone they are dating that they served time in prison?
2. Is there a moral difference between Antoine and Jack? If so, what might the difference be: their guilt/innocence, the type of crime they were incarcerated for, the amount of time served, the experience they've had dating, etc.?
3. If instead of dating we were discussing friendships, would your answer be different? Why or why not?
4. When do people have obligations to disclose other important information about themselves when to their dates (for example, mental health issues, difficulties with commitment, addictions, traumatic experiences, having children, or having financial difficulties)?

