



Please Note: The information contained in this overview is not intended as legal advice in any individual's case. There are many exceptions and variations in the parole consideration process. If you have questions, please consult with an experienced parole attorney.

TOOLS FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION DURING YOUR PAROLE HEARING

Parole hearings can be a stressful, exhausting, and at times, traumatizing. Whether it is your first hearing or your tenth, it is perfectly normal to feel anxious going in front of the Board. While it may be hard to calm your nerves entirely, there are some tools to stay grounded, composed, and clear-headed during your hearing. Being able to emotionally regulate during your hearing allows all of the work you have done to shine through.

Sleep

It may be hard to stop your thoughts from racing the night before the hearing, but getting a good night's sleep will be much more helpful than trying to guess what will happen the next day. Do what you can to sleep through the night. This might include drinking hot water before bed, counting your breaths, or doing a meditation. One type of sleep meditation is called a "body scan." Imagine your toes are completely relaxed, then your feet, then your ankles, knees, etc. Slowly work your way up the rest of your body. You may be asleep by the time you reach the top of your head.

Move

Moving your body is an important tool for managing anxiety. The morning of your hearing, it may help you feel awake, alert, and relaxed to do some movement, if you are able. This could include jumping jacks, stretches, walking, yoga, or even a little dance move to get you feeling positive and energized for the hearing. During the hearing, it can help to curl and uncurl your toes if you are feeling anxious or frustrated—this way, you can release tension through movement without the Board even knowing.

Affirm

Before your hearing, write a supportive note to yourself that you can look at during the hearing. This can be a simple statement like "I've got this!" or even a small drawing of a smiley face. A positive mental attitude can help with resilience and the ability to share your story. Remember to root for yourself during the hearing, in whatever way helps you feel confident and supported.

Breathe

Breathing is one of the most important tools you have for staying relaxed and centered during your hearing. If you start to get nervous, focus on your breath, making breathing out last longer than breathing in. For example, breathe in for four seconds, and then

breathe out for six seconds. Breathing this way can calm your nervous system. During your hearing, let yourself take a deep breath before answering a question, especially if it is a question that feels triggering. This is *your* hearing, so give yourself the time you need to ground yourself before responding to the Commissioners.

Ask for Breaks

Hearings can be draining, so do not hesitate to ask for breaks when you need them. You can do this by asking your attorney to make the request or you can make the request yourself. There are moments in the hearing when asking for a break might not be possible (for example, immediately after being asked a difficult question); however, most of the time the Board will be willing to let you regain your composure and ask for a short break. It is your freedom you are fighting for, so you deserve to feel as refreshed and comfortable as possible throughout your hearing. Do not struggle through this process without a break if you need one.

Ask for Clarification

There will be times during the hearing when the questions from the Commissioners or District Attorney may feel confusing, challenging, or even combative. It can be very difficult to manage stress and anxiety at these times. Another tool to slow down the process and potentially get the questions reframed in a more respectful way can be to politely ask for clarification. For example, if a Commissioner keeps asking you a question that you believe you have already answered, you can say, “I am not sure if I am understanding your question. Would you mind rephrasing it in a different way?” If you are confused by the question or particular words that the Commissioners use, do not just guess; ask for clarification. That way you can feel confident that you are responding to what is being asked of you.

Focus on What You Can Control

The Commissioners, attorneys, victims, and others at the hearing may say things that are painful, aggressive, hurtful, or triggering. At the end of the day, what any of these other people say and do is not within your control. Try not to dwell on the actions of others and stay focused on what *you* have control over. For example, you control how you tell your personal story of transformation. You control how you respond to your feelings. You always have the power to reflect on all that you have done to make it to the hearing. Letting go of what others might say or do can free up space for you to focus on yourself.

Do What Works for You

Everybody takes care of themselves in a different way. You may already have practices for feeling calm, relaxed, and positive. Maybe you eat a sweet treat, listen to music, or close your eyes and breathe. This is *your* hearing, so do whatever helps *you* feel your best.

The Board might even appreciate your ability to use those skills to stay grounded and calm in a tense and stressful environment. Using these skills in the moment shows the Board not only that you developed coping skills, but that you know how to use them.

Remember, You Are Not Alone

While you may not be able to bring your supporters to your hearing, there are people keeping you in their hearts and minds. Bring them into the hearing with you by thinking of them too. And remember that we at UnCommon Law are rooting for you!