



*Please Note: The information contained in this Guide 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.*

## PAROLE PREPARATION QUESTIONS

At a parole hearing, the Board of Parole Hearings commissioners are seeking to understand whether the parole candidate has an adequate understanding of who they were prior to their commitment offense, how their life prior to the commitment offense impacted their choice(s) to commit harm, why they committed the commitment offense, and how they have addressed those factors during their incarceration. The Board wants to hear a story of transformation that explains who the parole candidate used to be, how they came to be that way, and how they have since changed, such that they no longer pose a current risk to public safety. The following Parole Preparation Questions are intended to guide parole applicants in beginning to tell that story of change. By the time of the parole hearing, the parole candidate should be ready and able to answer each of the following questions.

1. What causative factors in your childhood/upbringing contributed to your crime? Specify how those factors contributed.
  - A **causative factor** is an “external event” or experience that contributes to who a person is at any given point in time. Potential causative factors include: substance abuse, gang membership, criminal thinking, anger leading to violence, domestic violence, unhealthy relationships, and codependency. These sometimes develop in response to traumatic events like: abandonment, rejection, abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), or issues in relationships with parents or siblings.

2. What character defects or negative personality traits contributed to your crime and how did they contribute?
  - A **character defect or negative character trait** is a way of being that can cause conflict, harmful or criminal behavior, or violence. People often develop negative character traits in response to an unmet need or trauma from their past, usually from their childhood. The negative character trait develops as a way to cope with those unmet needs or traumas. For example, a child who is abused a lot may end up becoming very aggressive and violent as a teenager to avoid being victimized again. Even though this character trait is negative and unhealthy, it is something that helps the person feel safer in the world. At the same time, this trait causes harm to the person and the people around them. At the hearing, it is important to explain (1) how and why the negative character trait developed, (2) how it showed up during the life crime and any prison discipline, and (3) what tools a person has developed to overcome this negative character trait. A list of common character defects and negative character traits is enclosed at the end of this Guide.
3. Have any of those same character traits contributed to misconduct in prison (including things you were never caught for)? If so, how?
4. What do you understand about the impact your actions had on the victim(s) of your crime or the victims of other misconduct, and how have you attempted to make amends to them?
5. How have you addressed the childhood/upbringing factors and character traits that contributed to your violence and crime since you have been in prison?
6. What tools or coping mechanisms do you have now that you didn't have at the time of the crime (or at the time of prison misconduct),

and are there specific programs that you credit for gaining those coping mechanisms?

- **Coping mechanisms** are the healthy tools that you use to deal with stressful situations or triggers in order to prevent a relapse into a target behavior such as substance use, criminal thinking, or anger leading to violence. Coping mechanisms are the specific actions that you take – and will continue to take – when you experience an internal or external trigger. Healthy coping mechanisms help you to manage stressful events while maintaining your emotional health and well-being. Examples of healthy coping mechanisms are exercising, journaling, meditating, engaging in breathing exercises, reaching out to someone for support, or staying connected to spiritual practices.

7. What challenges do you anticipate upon being paroled?

8. How will your parole plans and support system help you address those challenges?

- **Parole plans** are detailed plans in which parole applicants outline what their lives will look after being released. The Board expects individuals to have realistic, detailed, well thought-out plans that include where the individual will live, how they will support themselves financially, and how they will guarantee that they will not relapse into the target behaviors that led them to prison. In an individual's parole plans, the Board puts particular focus on a person's living arrangements, employment opportunities, continued programming upon release, and support network.

9. What specific patterns of behavior do you need to prevent relapse to, and how will you prevent relapsing? Include specific warning signs or triggers, as well as your coping mechanisms in response to

those warning signs or triggers. Identify which of those triggers or warning signs are about people, places and things (external) and which ones are about your own thoughts, feelings and character traits (internal).

- **External triggers** are situations or circumstances that might result in a relapse to a target behavior. Sometimes, external triggers are environments, people, or places that remind you of the target behavior. Common external triggers like this are: people you used to engage in your target behavior with, environments you used to engage in your target behavior in, situations that cause you to think about/want to engage in your target behavior, or things associated with a target behavior. For example, the smell of cannabis may remind someone with a substance use disorder of their former cannabis use, making them want to use again. External triggers can also be associated with trauma or external situations in which your internal triggers may arise. For example, someone who's parent would yell at them before physically abusing them may grow up to associate being yelled at with shame, anger, and or/powerlessness, and therefore may be more likely to react to being yelled at with physical violence.
- **Internal triggers** are thoughts and feelings that become so overwhelming they cause a person to resort to their target behavior in order to cope. Internal triggers are often very painful feelings that someone experienced in childhood that made them unable to cope in a healthy or positive way. One way to think about internal triggers it that they are the difficult feelings that caused you to develop the target behavior in the first place. Common internal triggers are feelings of: shame, insecurity, abandonment, rejection, grief, and lack of control.

## **COMMON CHARACTER DEFECTS & NEGATIVE CHARACTER TRAITS**

As discussed above, the Board uses the terms **character defect or negative personality trait** as a way to describe a personal way of being that can cause conflict, criminality, or violence. These traits often arise in response to an unmet need or a negative experience, but once developed, can result harm to the person who has the negative trait and others. In reading the below list, please take care and know that UnCommon Law sees you for more than the traits listed below. That said, this Guide is intended to help you understand the concepts and words with which the Board expects you to have familiarity.

1. Anger
2. Antagonistic
3. Appearances, preoccupied or obsessed with
4. Argumentative
5. Arrogance
6. Beauty, obsession or preoccupation with
7. Bigotry
8. Boastful
9. Boundaries, lack of
10. Choosing easy prey
11. Closed-mindedness
12. Co-dependence
13. Cold-heartedness
14. Communication, avoiding or poor
15. Compassion, lack of
16. Competitive, excessively
17. Conceit
18. Confrontational
19. Controlling
20. Cowardice
21. Critical
22. Crude
23. Deceptive, deceiving
24. Destructive
25. Devious
26. Dishonesty
27. Dishonesty by omission
28. Disorganized
29. Egotistical
30. Envious
31. Faith, lack of faith in God
32. Fanatical
33. Fantasizing
34. Fearful
35. Financially insecure
36. Follow through, failing to
37. Frustration
38. Gluttony
39. Greed
40. Guilt
41. Hatred of others
42. Hatred of self

43. Health, irresponsibility  
with or neglect of
44. Help, refusing/not asking  
for
45. Hopelessness
46. Ignorant, Ignorance
47. Ill wishes toward others
48. Impatience
49. Inadequacy, sense of
50. Inconsiderate
51. Indifferent
52. Insecure
53. Insensitive
54. Irresponsible
55. Isolating
56. Jealous
57. Judgmental
58. Knowing it all
59. Laziness
60. Lustful
61. Lying
62. Manipulative
63. Measuring self against  
others
64. Negative body image
65. Negative thinking
66. Neglectful
67. Opinionated
68. Overcompensating for  
weaknesses
69. Perfectionism
70. Pessimism
71. Physical appearance,  
obsession or preoccupation
72. Physical health, neglect of
73. Playing God
74. Positives, not looking at
75. Possessive
76. Pride
77. Reckless
78. Resentment
79. Revenge, vengeful
80. Rude
81. Secretive
82. Seeking attention
83. Self-absorbed, self-  
centered
84. Self-hatred
85. Self-importance
86. Self-indulgence
87. Self-loathing
88. Self-pity
89. Selfishness, selfish
90. Thoughtless
91. Thrill-seeking
92. Uncompassionate
93. Undependable
94. Undisciplined
95. Unfaithful
96. Ungrateful
97. Unjust
98. Unreliable
99. Untrustworthy
100. Vengeful