

Tips for Incarcerated Parents



You will always be a parent. Even though you are incarcerated, you can still play an important role in your child's life. Try these actions to assure your child that you still care about her and will always be her parent.

Answering difficult questions

Your child may have trouble understanding why you're gone. There are ways you can answer his questions truthfully and in ways that he can understand.

- **Where are you?**

"I'm in a place called prison [jail]. Grown-ups go to prison [jail] when they break a rule called a law. I'm not here because of anything you did. This is not your fault."

- **When will you be home?**

"I won't be home for a while. I'm waiting for more information and will let you know when I find out. I'd rather be home with you but know that wherever I am, I'm thinking about you."

- **Will I get to see you?**

If your child can visit: "You can visit me in prison once in a while. Your caregiver will let you know when. Between visits we can write letters and talk on the phone."

If your child cannot visit: "We may not be able to see each other often, but I want you to know that I'm always thinking of you."

Connecting through visits

Seeing you can assure your child that you are okay. Here are some things you can do:

- **Help your child feel comfortable**

Your child may feel nervous at first. Let her know you are happy to see her. Continue any rituals or customs you have together such as singing a song. Ask her questions about herself, such as: "What do you do with friends? What have you learned in school?"

- **Make the most of your time together**

Take turns describing something you see and asking her to guess it; making funny faces; or discussing favorite colors, music, or sports teams.

- **Make good-bye easier**

Saying good-bye is hard. Come up with a special phrase you both can say at bedtime or something you will both do at the same time each day even though you are apart.

Good communication is one way to help support your child.

Build a positive relationship with her caregiver so she experiences support and love from you both. Talk to your child's caregiver about visits, letters, and phone calls.