
TIPS FROM A FATHER IN PRISON

The following is a list of suggestions that you can use to maintain the attachment to your children from inside a prison.

1. Even if your relationship with the mother of your children is over, you need to establish and maintain a positive relationship with her. For the sake of your children, try to find ways to connect with her respectfully.
2. Do not expect big changes right away from your family members. Take your time.
3. Find out about policies regarding how you can connect with your child—visitation, letters, telephone calls, and audiotapes. Ask your prison chaplain, counselor, or other staff.
4. Develop a plan and follow it on how often you will connect with your child.
5. When explaining to your children why you are not living with them, be honest but respect their ability to understand it according to their age.
6. When telling your children how important they are to you, do not be surprised if they do not respond the way you want them to. Children are often angry that you did something wrong that prevents you from being with them.
7. To establish and maintain your family relationships, be ready to make amends and apologize to them.
8. Find ways to support your children emotionally, financially, and spiritually as much as possible.
9. Your family and children need to be able to rely on you if you say you will call or write regularly, so be consistent in your approach and contact schedule.
10. Be realistic about goals and expectations. Do not expect too much, too soon from them.
11. Remember family celebrations, special occasions, and cultural events. If you have a hobby or crafts at prison, make gifts or draw pictures and make them into a coloring book.
12. If at all possible, purchase small items for your children through the commissary or mail order catalogs.
13. Use your time constructively. Get your GED, or take parenting classes, anger management, adult continuing education classes, anything that better yourself.
14. Some prisons allow you to purchase and make video or audiotapes. Use these to tell stories, share memories, and bedtime stories. Have your children listen to it when they miss you.
15. Before your release date, clear up any legal problems that may be pending such as your driving record, credit problems, or child support.
16. Your children might not know how to say exactly what they are feeling and thinking, so be patient with them.

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17. Make a realistic plan and follow through, no matter how bad things get, when re-connecting with your children after you are released from jail.
 18. While you are still in prison, research programs that might help you reach your goals once released. Seek out programs about parenting, housing, jobs, legal problems, or credit problems.
 19. Work with other prison fathers trying to connect with their children from inside prison.
 20. Get some counseling from the appropriate staff (psychologist, chaplain, case manager, correctional counselor).
 21. Think about how you want to be a parent and your future as a dad and make decisions about that future. Look at your own relationship with your dad to see what was learned, good and bad.
 22. Go to the prison library, take the time to read what you can to try to learn about being a better dad. Try to read as much as you can about father/child relationships.
 23. Check out some of the other resources in the Incarcerated Fathers Library.

For more help for incarcerated parents and their families, please visit the *Family and Corrections Network* at <http://www.fcnetwork.org>.

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