

When a Parent or Loved One is in Prison



Grades 1st-5th



Many children all around the world have a parent or other loved one in prison. You might hear adults say someone is incarcerated. That is another way of saying they are in prison.

Sometimes kids have lots of questions when someone they love is in prison or incarcerated.

You may wonder:

Why are you in prison?

Is it scary there?

When will you come home?

Do you miss us?

Is it my fault?

Why did you leave us?

Do you still love me?



What questions do you have?

If you do not have personal experience with someone you love being in prison, can you imagine what it might feel like for children who do have this experience?

Trying to understand someone else's experience or feelings is called empathy.

Visiting someone in prison may seem a little scary or strange. If you are going to visit with a loved one, here are some things to think about or talk about with someone you trust before you go:

- Your loved one may have a different hairstyle and be wearing different clothes.



- You may have to ride in a bus or a van to get to the prison.



- You may have to wait in a line for visitation.



- There may be special rules about touching or hugging.



- Saying goodbye at the end of a visit can be hard.



Sometimes kids feel nervous or shy when they go to visit someone in prison and that's okay. It's a good idea to think about things you want to tell your parent or loved one, and even practice saying them to someone else before you visit.

When a parent or loved one is incarcerated, it can affect children and other family members in different ways.

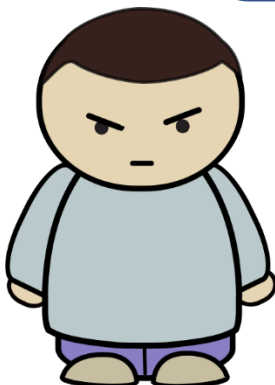
Since Jordan's mom went to prison, Jordan hasn't been doing good in school. She just doesn't feel like doing her work.



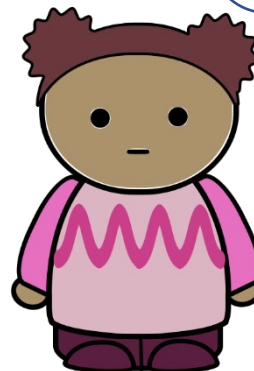
Chris has been having trouble sleeping since his dad went to jail. This sometimes makes him late for school.



Since Sean's mom went to prison again, he's been getting into fights at school



Erica is getting into trouble at school since her older brother went to prison. Some kids have been saying mean things about him.

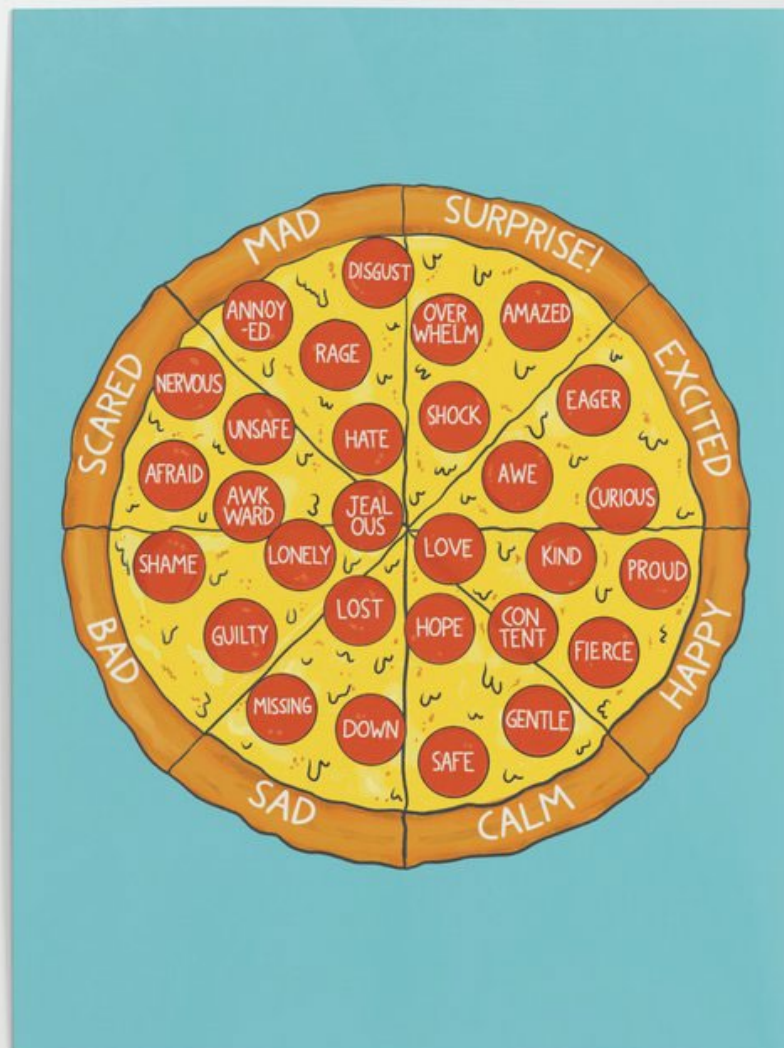


How Are You Feeling?



Kids can have all kinds of feelings when someone they love is in prison. Sometimes they may feel lots of feelings all at once or one BIG feeling by itself. It is perfectly normal to experience these feelings.

Here are some words that may help you better express yourself when you're having a tough time.



Even though it's hard when someone you love is in prison or whenever you are just having a hard time, here are things you can do to feel better:

- Talk to someone you trust about how you feel
- Write a letter to the person
- Sing a song or do a dance
- Watch funny animal videos
- Play with a friend or your pet
- Hug the grown-up that takes care of you
- Cry for a little while to get out the sad
- Draw a picture to send to your person
- Take some deep breaths to calm down



Painting, drawing, coloring, and creating art can really help to show how you feel about someone you love or the changes you and your family are going through. Sometimes people in prison use art to express their feelings too. Many people use art for expression and to feel better.

Here is some space to write down or draw a picture about how you are feeling right now.

The art that you see today at the "Changing the Course" Art Exhibit was created by people who have been in prison or who are in prison now. They use art to express their feelings about themselves, their families and their experiences. Their artwork gives them and us hope for the future.



Creating a story or art can give you hope, too.

Books for Young Children:

Far Apart, Close In Heart: Being A Family When a Loved One is Incarcerated by Becky Birtha

Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson

Mama Loves Me From Away by Pat Brisson

The Night Dad Went to Jail: What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail by Melissa Higgins

Books for 7-12 Years:

When Andy's Father Went to Prison by Martha Whitmore Hickman

Clarissa's Disappointment: And Resources for Families, Teachers and Counselors of Children of Incarcerated Parents by Megan Sullivan

What Do I Say About That? By Julia Cook and Anita DuFalla

Books for Teens:

An Inmate's Daughter by Jan Walker

Wish You Were Here: Teens Write about Parents in Prison by Autumn Spanne

Harbor Me by Jacqueline Woodson

Additional Resources for Grown Ups:

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/>

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents>

<https://nicic.gov/projects/children-of-incarcerated-parents>

<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hidden-consequences-impact-incarceration-dependent-children>

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/supporting/support-services/incarceration/>

<https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/family/ministry-basics/faqs-about-children-of-prisoners/>



Booklet created by

Jamie Hill, M.Ed, LPC, ECMH-E®

With contributions by:

Angela Hayes, LPC, NCC, ECMH-E®

Jane Duer, M.Ed., IECMH- E®

Sarah-Ellen Thompson, M.A.

Office of Infant/Early Childhood Special Programs

Alabama Department of Mental Health