

# When a Parent Or Loved One Is Incarcerated



Grades 6-12



More than 2.7 million children in the United States have a parent or loved one who is incarcerated. About 10 million children have experienced a parent being locked up at some point in their lives.

Sometimes teens have lots of questions when a parent or loved one is incarcerated.

If you do not have personal experience with someone you love being incarcerated, can you imagine what it might feel like for a kid or teen who does have this experience?

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

If you do have a loved one in prison, you may have questions like:

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?

Visiting your loved one in jail or prison can feel a little strange. Here are some things to think about or talk about with someone you trust before you go.

- Your parent or 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.



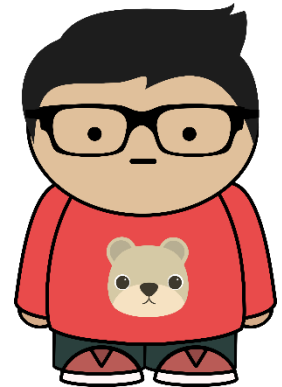
Sometimes kids feel embarrassed, nervous or shy when they go to visit someone in prison. It's a good idea to think about things you want to tell your parent or loved one and even practice saying them to someone else before you go.

When a parent or loved one is incarcerated, it affects everyone in some way.

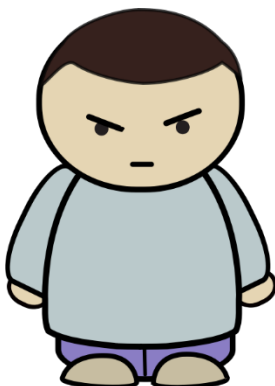
Since Jordan's mom went to prison, she hasn't been doing good in school. She just doesn't feel like doing her work.



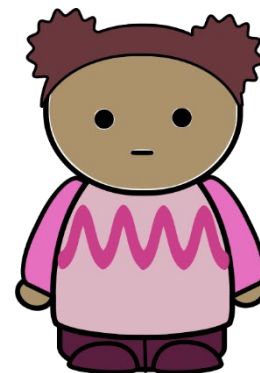
Chris has been having trouble sleeping since his dad went to jail. Its making him late for school some days



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



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





It's normal to feel sad, worried, angry, distracted and many other feelings. This may help you decipher which emotions you are feeling from moment to moment.

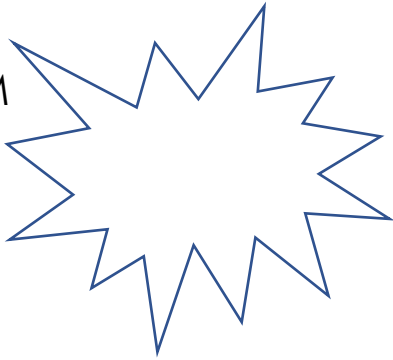


Even though it's hard when someone you love is in prison, there are things you can do to feel better. These are helpful to try even if you don't have someone in prison but are just feeling down:

- talk to someone you trust about how you feel
- write a letter to the person.
- sing a song or do a dance.
- watch funny videos that make you laugh.
- spend time with a friend or your pet
- go for a walk outside.
- cry for a little while
- make something good to eat
- take some slow, deep breaths to calm down
- listen to music
- take a nap
- stretch or do yoga
- play a sport with some friends
- create something new

Remember, no matter what is happening in your family, you are an important and valuable person. Can you write down some positive things about yourself? Are you brave? Are you smart? Are you friendly?

I AM



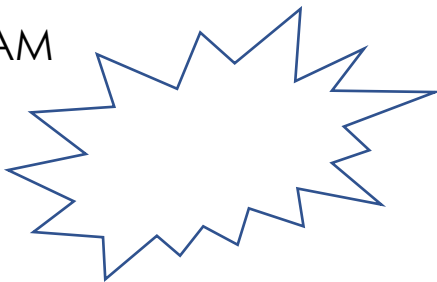
I know this because....

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I AM



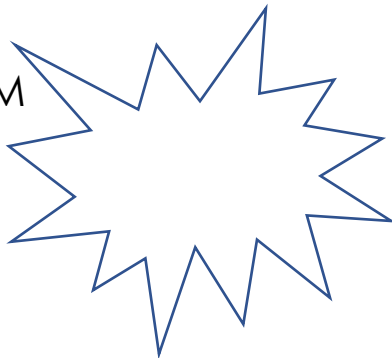
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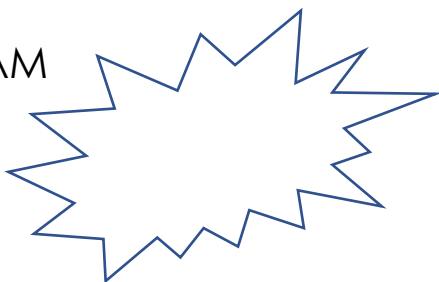
I know this because....

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I AM



I know this because....

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## Positive Self-Talk is Important

When it comes to your thoughts, you have a lot of control. Practice saying some, or all, of these things to yourself every day. It can really help when bad days happen.

Stop and breath, I can do this

Everyone makes mistakes

I have done this before, I can do this now

I don't have to be perfect, I just have to try

This feeling won't last forever

It's okay to feel this way, it's normal

This is tough, but so am I

Make  
Today  
Amazing



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.

**Create something below that expresses your feelings**

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/>



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