

# Tips for Incarcerated Parents

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

1. **Write it down.** Document every effort, even “failed” attempts, write down day, time, who, what, and the outcome.
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 audio tapes.** 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 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 or feel like it is their fault.
7. Try to establish and maintain your family relationships, be ready to make amends and apologize to them. Keep in mind that if the relationship is unhealthy, having good boundaries is important.
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, and adult continuing education classes anything that betters yourself.

# Tips for Incarcerated Parents

14. Some prisons/jails allow you to purchase and make video or audiotapes. Use these to tell stories, read a book, 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.
17. Make a realistic plan and follow through, no matter how bad things get, when reconnecting with your children after you are released from prison/jail.
18. The most important relationship is with your kids. That is the best place to put your efforts. Eventually, you will want to consider, (even if your romantic relationship with her is over) establishing a working relationship with your children's mother(s). Do what you can to respectfully connect with her, for the best interest of your children.
19. While you are still incarcerated, research programs that might help you reach your goals once released. Seek out programs about parenting, housing, jobs, legal problems, or credit problems.
20. Work with other mothers in prison/jail trying to connect with their children from inside prison/jail.
21. Get some counseling from the appropriate staff (psychologist, chaplain, case manager, correctional counselor).
22. Think about how you want to be a parent and your future as a mother and make decisions about the future. Look at your own relationship with your mother to see what was learned, good and bad.
23. Go to the prison/jail library; take the time to read what you can to try to learn about being a better mom. Try to read as much as you can about mother/child relationships.
24. Write a list of "Things To-Do" and goals. Think about what you want and make a plan. Look at it often and keep it handy for your release it. If you're failing to plan, you are planning to fail.