

CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS INITIATIVE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)



In the U.S., it is estimated that:

- 1 in 349 children have a parent deployed in the American military^{1,2}
- 1 in 191 children are in foster care³
- 1 in 28 children have a parent incarcerated⁴

Serving as a resource for Connecticut in the examination and development of evidence driven and outcome based policies.



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CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

FAQS

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CONNECTICUT POLICY AND CIP

Around the year 2000, Connecticut policymakers began reexamining the state's criminal justice strategy. Two convergent factors - the exponential rise of Connecticut's incarcerated population (and associated costs) and severe budget deficits - were the main factors influencing this reexamination. With the assistance of the Council of State Governments and the Connecticut General Assembly's Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee staff, in 2003 the legislature proposed a series of policy changes aimed at creating greater effectiveness and efficiency in the criminal justice system. The resulting policy initiative, entitled "justice reinvestment", was passed and implemented with the stated overall goals of generating annual savings for the state by limiting the growth of the state prison populations, while maintaining public safety and improving conditions in the handful of communities to which the majority of people released from prison return.

As a result of this policy initiative, Connecticut has been recognized around the country for being at the forefront of state efforts to reduce prison populations and manage prisoner re-entry. Continuing in the theme of "justice reinvestment", the reexamination of criminal justice policies has expanded to the "front-end" of the system: the juvenile population. Through the extensive gathering and assessment of information on this population, many factors emerged that, if properly addressed, would allow for more effective juvenile justice policy in Connecticut. One of these factors appears to be the support for youth with incarcerated parents.

Recognizing that children with an incarcerated parent tend to be faced with a number of unique challenges, policymakers began focusing their attention on this growing, yet largely overlooked population. As a result, in 2007 the legislature allocated resources to the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy to determine an outcome based approach to the state policy on children with incarcerated parents.

I. How to Prepare

How can I physically prepare?

If you have the means (i.e., health insurance or money), have a physical with a doctor. Tell him or her that you are about to go to prison and ask if there are any vaccines that the doctor can give you to prevent your contracting an infectious disease while incarcerated. If you take any prescribed medications, get a letter from your doctor, on letterhead, listing those current prescriptions to bring with you when you begin your sentence.

What do I do with my cell phone service and my phone itself?

This may depend on how long you think you will be in prison for. You will want a phone when you return home so if it is a short sentence, you may want to keep your service active and leave your phone with a trusted friend or relative (girlfriends/boyfriends are not necessarily the best option) for safekeeping. The downside of that is the monthly fee your service plan requires you to pay. Talk to your service carrier (Verizon, AT & T, Sprint, etc.) to see if they can put a temporary hold on your phone and your service to reduce or eliminate the cost while not violating your contract or losing your phone number.

What do I tell my landlord? What do I do about my lease?

It would be helpful for your return to have a home to return to. But what you tell them may depend on the relationship you have with your landlord. If you are able to, add another adult to the lease that can cover payments during your absence. If you have the capacity and are facing a short sentence, you can ask your landlord if they will allow you to pay your rent in advance for the months that you expect to be incarcerated. If you do not have the ability to set-up payments in your absence, and/or your sentence is not short, then it's important to leave your rental agreement on good terms so you can get a recommendation from the landlord now which can help you to secure a new lease when you return home.

¹ Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment. (2011). The White House. Retrieved from http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_initiative/strengthening_our_military_january_2011.pdf

² www.ChildStats.gov

³ <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

⁴ Child Trends. (2015). Parents Behind Bars: What Happens to Their Children? Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-42ParentsBehindBars.pdf>

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What should I tell my employer? Especially if it's a short sentence and I will be home soon?

It would be helpful for your return home to have a job to return to, as well. However, what you tell your employer may depend on the relationship that you have with your employer, the length of your employment, and anticipated length of your sentence. If you plan to leave with the hopes of returning to that job, then discuss with your employer a short-term leave of absence. If you plan to leave without the expectation of returning to that position, then you can resign from your job, leaving the job on good terms with the employer, so you can secure a letter of recommendation from your supervisor before your last day. This letter will be very helpful when seeking new employment upon your return.

What do I tell my family/friends/neighbors?

This is your decision. Your first reaction may be to protect your family and friends by not telling them or others the truth, or to tell them only part of the truth. Be aware, though, that people can find-out the truth because your conviction and incarceration are public record and can be easily located on the Internet at <http://www.jud.ct.gov/crim.htm>. People may also learn the truth from others – by overhearing a conversation or having someone else that does know decide to tell them. So every family must decide for themselves what the best thing to do is and this could depend on the relationships you have with those you are considering telling – the likelihood that they will find out on their own and the potential harm, or benefit, that may come from their knowing.

The benefit that you and your family can receive through the support of others during your incarceration, and then your reentry to the community, can be what gets you and your family through this time. However, the treatment some families receive from people who negatively judge criminal justice involved people, and those that love them, can add stress to the already difficult time, too. Because of this, it is important for those with personal experience with incarceration to support others during their incarceration experience.

It is a difficult decision to make. If you decide to tell family, friends and neighbors, your explanation could focus on strengths such as honesty, responsibility, and your desire/efforts for self-improvement.

What should I do with my vehicle and vehicle insurance?

This depends on the length of your sentence and your financial situation. You will likely want a vehicle when you return home, so if you are able to leave your car with a trusted friend or family member then that is great. You can also cancel your car insurance or ideally, reduce your insurance coverage to only include liability, which will significantly reduce the cost while still protecting your investment from unexpected damage. You may also want to consider selling your vehicle so you can use those funds for commissary, legal fees or to pay other bills while you are away.

What should I do with my identification?

Identification such as driver's license, non-driver ID, birth certificate and social security card can be left with trusted family members for safe-keeping. If this is not an option or you come to the facility with your identifications on you, all official forms of identification will be logged in Property and kept in a secured location at the facility. If you transfer from one facility to another, the property (including identification) will be sent to the new facility, as well. Upon discharge, the facility will return to you the identification that you came in with. If at discharge you do not receive the identification that you came in with, please contact Counselor Adam Mack at 860-692-7564 or Adam.Mack@ct.gov.

What should I do with my pets?

If you have a short sentence, make sure you have a plan for your pets; animal neglect is a criminal offense and your pets trust you to ensure that they are cared for. The best option for your pets is to leave them with trusted family or friends. If you will want your pet upon your return then make sure they understand your intent. If that is not an option, then your local no-kill shelter will accept and try to place your pets in a loving adoptive home. For a listing of no-kill shelters in Connecticut go here: <http://www.nokillnetwork.org/d/Connecticut/>.

What do I do with mail that I receive at home?

Prior to beginning your sentence, watch the mail that comes for you. Anything that is unnecessary, you should cancel. Magazine and newspaper subscriptions can be redirected to you in prison, but the facility you will be at (as well as your prison number if you have never been incarcerated before – if you have been incarcerated before then the number will be the same) will not be known in advance so you cannot change the mailing address yet. Ask a trusted loved one to change the mailing address for each magazine and newspaper for you once your mailing information (inmate number and facility) has been determined. If you are financially able to maintain the subscription, you will be grateful to receive magazines and newspapers!

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What should I do with the other bills that I pay – credit cards, student loans, vehicle payments, etc.?

This depends on your financial situation and expected length of your sentence. Ideally, you either pay bills in advance or leave money to a trusted friend or family member to pay those bills for you while you are away. If you have the financial means, than you may be able to hire a conservator, or attorney, to pay your bills in your absence.

Similar to your mail, review the bills you are responsible for before beginning your sentence. Any unnecessary bills (gym membership, utilities for your home if you live alone, etc.) consider canceling.

If you have student loan debt, contact your lender to ask if you will qualify for either deferment or forbearance during your incarceration.

It is important, when able, to not default on payments of debts. If you are able to not accrue additional debt, or default on repaying existing debt during your incarceration, than your credit could actually improve while you are serving your sentence. While incarcerated, any bad credit reports will be moving further back in your history and the longer you go without adding new bad debt the better your credit will be.

What happens to my benefits? (Disability, unemployment, food stamps, DSS benefits, Husky/Medicaid, subsidized housing, etc.)

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments generally are not payable for months that you are confined to a jail, prison or certain other public institutions for commission of a crime. You are also not automatically eligible for Social Security or SSI payments when you are released. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10133.pdf>.

What can I bring in with me and what am I not allowed to bring in?

- Money – Any cash will be taken from you and placed in your inmate account. It may then be used to purchase items from commissary. If you are able to, you will want to bring money for commissary. You will likely need to purchase clothing that fits (undergarments, uniforms, and shoe laces for the shoes you come in with), items for writing letters (envelopes, paper, pencils and stamps), a radio to hear the TV in the common room, toiletry/hygiene items, as well as any pleasure items such as food, a personal TV, additional clothing, specialty cards to send loved ones, etc. It will take time for the facility to offer you the option of making a purchase through commissary and then additional time for you to receive your purchases. To

prevent further delay, it will be helpful to have money in your account as soon as possible so that when the opportunity arises, you are able to submit your order.

- Clothing – The clothing you are wearing upon admission will be exchanged for a uniform. Underwear, bedding and towels will also be provided.
- Shoes – You may be able to keep the shoes you came in with if they are determined to be suitable. Sneakers or shoes must be black, white, or black and white. Shoes and boots can not contain any metal support structure. The laces of shoes will be taken by staff when you arrive so you will need to order laces from commissary once you are able to.
- Eyeglasses – You will be allowed to retain your eyeglasses if they meet safety and security requirements. People who wear contact lenses will be allowed to retain them until they can be seen by an Optometrist, who will determine if there is a medical need for the contacts, or if glasses can be ordered. Health services staff will provide cleaning/soaking solution and a container for prescribed contact lenses.
- Hygiene items – These will initially be provided for you and will continue to be provided if you are unable to purchase your own from commissary. Otherwise, you will be required to purchase them from commissary.
- Medication – Any medication in your possession will be taken upon your arrival. Upon admission, everyone receives a medical screening. Appropriate medication will then be provided. You may bring a letter from a doctor, on letterhead, listing any current prescriptions.

Please remember that all incoming property is subject to inspection and rejection.

For more information, please review DOC Administrative Directive 10.6 <http://www.ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad1006.pdf>.

What happens to my child support order while I am in prison?

If you have a child support order and will be going to prison, you can apply to have your order changed due to your inability to pay while incarcerated. However, if you do nothing, than you can end up owing a lot of money in unpaid child support. Call Connecticut Support Enforcement Services at 1-800-228-KIDS to ask for Review and Adjustment services to start the process for modification of your child support order amount. You should be aware, though, that in Connecticut, the court will not reduce a child support order for someone that is incarcerated for a crime against the child or the custodial parent. You are expected to pay your child support as soon as you begin earning money.

For more information, review this brochure from Connecticut Support Enforcement Services: <http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/pdf/childsupportinfo.pdf>

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Where am I going to go?

You will not know where you will be housed until you arrive, and even then, you can be moved to another facility at any time and usually without prior notice. You will be placed in facilities that are appropriate for the Security Level assigned to you by the DOC. The Security Level is determined through classification. Classification is a system to match the individual characteristics of a person that is incarcerated to the appropriate facility and programs, based on the person's assessed risk and treatment requirements, to ensure their safety and the safety of the public. It involves a review of many factors, including your treatment needs, criminal history, length of sentence, history of violence, escape history, pending court cases and gang affiliation.

Security Levels range from 1 to 5. The higher the number, the higher the Security Level. For example, Level 1 refers to community supervision (you might live at home but under the supervision of a Parole Officer, or living in a work release program – there are other forms of community supervision, too), Level 2 is minimum security while confined in a correctional facility, Level 3 is medium security, Level 4 is high security and Level 5 is maximum security. To see the security levels of different Connecticut facilities go to <https://www.cga.ct.gov/pri/archives/2000fireportchap2.htm> and <http://www.ct.gov/doc/cwp/view.asp?a=1502&q=265422> select the appropriate facility. Keep in mind, a facility may house people that share the Security Level of the facility as well as people assigned a Security Level lower than the one assigned to the facility. For example, you could be assigned a Security Level of 2, minimum security, and be placed at Brooklyn Correctional Institution, a level 3 facility. However, you could not be assigned a Security Level of 4 and be placed at Brooklyn.

Over time, most incarcerated people have the opportunity to have their levels lowered based on good behavior. A level reduction is not a guarantee, though. An incarcerated person can be denied a level reduction due to poor behavior while incarcerated, gang affiliation, criminal history, or other issues.

Those who are incarcerated meet regularly with their Classification Counselors and are given a date that they are eligible for a Security Level reduction. If you have displayed good behavior and engaged in suggested programming during your incarceration, then you may have a better chance for a level reduction. The lower the Security Level, the greater the privileges and opportunities for community release.

Correctional staff cannot discuss an incarcerated person's level. This information is confidential and private. You, however, can share this information if you choose to do so.

II. Legal Rights

What are my rights as a prisoner?

Yale Law School's Lillian Goldman Law Library has an entire section on prisoner's rights. To review the information, a PDF is available for download here: <http://library.law.yale.edu/prisoners-rights>.

III. While in Prison

How do I set up phone calls? Who am I allowed to put on my call list?

As you prepare to serve your sentence, begin memorizing important phone numbers! Especially the phone numbers for your child, their caregiver, your parents, siblings, your attorney, your DCF worker if you have one, and any other loved ones you may want to call during your sentence.

You will not be able to receive telephone calls; however, telephones are available to you to place outgoing collect calls or calls that are billed through Securus.

You will create a calling list that contains up to ten telephone numbers. Facility staff will review the numbers on the list to make sure that none are restricted.

Restricted phone numbers include, but are not limited to, the telephone numbers of victims of the crime you have been convicted of, or telephone numbers of any other individuals that have been prohibited by the Unit Administrator. To submit the phone list and receive a pin number to use to make telephone calls, you should write to your unit counselor.

You are allowed to request to change the phone numbers on your list once every 30 days. Each request will need to go through the same approval process.

Please be aware – credit card calls, billing to a third party, call forwarding, transfers or any other method which gets around collect call billing are prohibited.

For more information, please review DOC Administrative Directive 10.7 Inmate Communication: <http://www.ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad1007.pdf>.

For detailed information on the Securus system, please go here http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/pdf/securus_phone.pdf.

How soon can I make phone calls?

It will take some time so, if you are able to, let loved ones know that it may take several weeks before you can call them. Upon arrival, you will create a calling list that contains up to ten telephone numbers. Numbers on a phone list need to be approved by the facility before you can make any calls. At times, “courtesy calls” may be authorized for newly incarcerated persons by the facility warden. However, I would not rely on this; it is best to let loved ones know that you will try

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to call as soon as possible but that the process takes some time. This way if they don't hear from you, they won't necessarily assume it is because you are choosing not to call. This is especially important for children who may not understand that you do not have the choice to make calls whenever you want to while you are away. If children don't hear from you, they may assume it is because you don't want to speak with them, so I would explain this to them before you leave, when possible.

How many phone calls can I make?

You will submit a list of up to 10 phone numbers for approval. You will be allowed to change the list of phone numbers once every 30 days. The facility will review the numbers to ensure none are restricted. Once approved, you may make calls up to 15-minutes in length. The number of calls you are allowed to make each day depends on your Security Level. Each facility has its own call schedule. The calls may only be made between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. There shall be no time limit between allowable calls.

For more information, please review DOC Administrative Directive 10.7 Inmate Communication: <http://www.ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad1007.pdf>.

How can I set-up my visitor's list?

Within the first few weeks of your sentence, you will have Inmate Orientation. During orientation, information is provided by a Correctional Counselor including facility and departmental rules, behavioral expectations and the disciplinary process. You will be advised on how to access medical, mental health, addiction, religious and educational services and programs. You will also work with the counselor to establish a visiting and telephone list to communicate with family and friends. During orientation you will also receive an Inmate Handbook. These handbooks contain detailed information that you will need throughout your incarceration.

How can I set-up commissary?

"Commissary" is a term the DOC uses for the service from which incarcerated persons are allowed to purchase items. The ability to purchase items through commissary may be one of the most important things when you are in prison. If you are able, try to always have some money in your commissary account. In the beginning, you will need money to purchase basic necessities: toiletries, shoe laces, underwear, etc. In addition to necessities, you will want it for food and snacks, approved over-the-counter medications (like Tylenol and Ibuprofen), and some things to pass the time like writing materials, religious items, and various approved electronics like a radio for music and so you can hear the TV. Items may vary at each facility dependent on security level and gender of the inmate.

An order form is available in every housing unit for the incarcerated person to fill out, which lists all the items that can be ordered from Commissary. The forms are collected once per week by Commissary staff for processing. Orders are delivered the following week. It will be a few weeks before you can receive your first order; it will be easier for you to deal with that if you understand it when you go in.

You are allowed to spend up to \$75.00 a week in Commissary if you are in the general population. This amount does not include major items like televisions, radios, clothing, watches, other electronics, footwear, religious items, and cassettes or CDs. Please be aware that there are limitations on the number of electronic items (one of each) and footwear (two pairs) that each person can purchase and have in their possession at any given time. If you have too many, that could result in disciplinary action.

Under no circumstances is credit allowed for Commissary purchases. All funds must be in the person's account at the time their order is processed.

You are also not allowed to purchase items for other inmates. The practice of loaning, selling or bartering of Commissary items is a violation of departmental rules, which could result in disciplinary action.

Additional facility-specific information can be viewed in the Inmate Handbook (which you will receive at orientation during the first few weeks of your sentence). The Commissary form can be viewed at <http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/PDF/CommissaryOrderForm.pdf>.

What can I receive in prison?

- Letters
- Appropriate photos. Find out what the facility's limit is for the number of photographs you may keep with you. If you have too many it will be considered contraband result in disciplinary action.
- Newspaper clippings. For example, you could send an article you cut out of a newspaper if, of course, the article is appropriate.
- Newspapers, books and magazines can be sent to someone in prison if they are in new condition and are packaged and shipped by the book store, book club or publisher from which they are purchased. You could send books directly from Amazon or subscribe to a newspaper that will deliver the paper directly to your loved one. Printed news is cheap and a great way to keep your loved one aware of the events outside the prison, and receiving something new to read on a regularly basis can be a great way to relieve boredom.

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- Some CDs. Approved CD's are available for purchase through commissary. Outside CD's and tapes must be educational or religious in nature and not be available through commissary. They may be ordered by the person that is incarcerated or someone on the outside on their behalf. CDs must be ordered from a commercial distributor and be sent directly by the distributor. Incoming CD's are subject to review; please see Administrative Directive 10.7 for more information: <http://www.ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad1007.pdf>.

Remember that anything sent to a prison is subject to review by DOC staff. Page eight of Administrative Directive 10.7 Inmate Communications outlines the criteria by which printed material may be allowed or refused.

What can't I receive in prison?

You will not be allowed to receive paper, pencils, stamps, sexually suggestive photos or reading material, and of course any illegal items such as drugs and weapons.

Also, the Connecticut DOC does not allow family and friends to send in or drop off clothing packages for people in prison. Clothing is provided by the agency and additional items may be purchased from commissary.

Who can I send mail to?

You are allowed to write anyone except:

- a victim of any crime for which you been convicted or are charged with committing;
- any person under the age of 18 when that person's parent or guardian objects in writing to such correspondence;
- an inmate in another correctional facility, other than immediate family;
- a person on parole or in community confinement without the permission of your Unit Administrator and the person you're writing's supervisor (Parole Officer, or other community supervisor);
- any person you are not allowed to write by court order; or
- any other person that DOC believes your communication with them would jeopardize security, order or rehabilitation. (For more information, review DOC's Administrative Directive 10.7 Inmate Communication).

Should I keep in-touch with my kids while I am in prison?

In terms of communicating with your family, you and your family know what's best for the family and your family should decide together how much and what types of communication to maintain during your sentence. It will be helpful to have an understanding at the beginning, but as your family's needs may change, this decision may be reconsidered at-times. In most cases, children find it helpful

to be able to communicate with their incarcerated parent on a regular basis. Also, research does show that maintaining the child's relationship with their caregiver benefits both the child and the incarcerated parent. It improves the child's mental health, supports their attachment to that caregiver, and relieves the child's fears and anxieties over their parent's wellbeing. For the incarcerated parent, maintaining communication with family has been shown to reduce recidivism and support successful reentry when returning home. However, every family is different and the decision on whether to maintain communication, in what ways and how often, is one that each family should make together.

Should my kids visit me while I am in prison?

The decision of whether a child should visit a loved one in prison is difficult, and important. Each family is different and each child's needs are different (and may change over time); you and your family know what is best, and your family should decide together whether seeing each other during the parent's sentence is possible and in the family's best interest.

It will be helpful to have an understanding at the beginning, but as your family's needs may change, this decision may be reconsidered at-times. In most cases, children find it helpful to see their incarcerated parent on a regular basis. Also, research does show that the separation of a child from a caregiver that they are attached to can cause serious short and long-term harm to the child (for more information on potential health consequences of the separation, review these resources: Osborne Association's fact sheet on "Parental Incarceration's Impact on Children's Health" and Kristin Turney's research report on "Stress Proliferation across Generations? Examining the Relationship between Parental Incarceration and Childhood Health"). Studies also show that contact between a child and their incarcerated parent can improve the child's psychological well-being, ease their concerns over the parent's safety, and decrease the child's emotional distress and problematic behaviors. For a summary of information that may be helpful in making your decision, please review Osborne Association's fact sheet on "Parental Incarceration's Impact on Children's Health". For suggestions on making on the decision and how to prepare for a positive visiting experience, read this brief from the National Resource Center for Children and Families of the Incarcerated: <http://dept.camden.rutgers.edu/nrccfi/files/cipl105-visitingmomordad.pdf>.

Will I be able to have contact visits or are they through a partition?

Some facilities provide contact and non-contact visits. Others have only non-contact visits. You should contact the visitation officer at the facility to find out if your loved one is able to have contact visits.

IV. Ways to Support Yourself

How can I take care of myself mentally and emotionally while in prison?

As best as you are able, establish a routine, read, do puzzles, write letters and stories – keep yourself busy with positive things. It is hard to fight boredom in prison so trying to find a healthy activity like reading, doing puzzles, writing and art will help to calm and focus your mind. Also begin planning for your return home. Map-out your goals and strategies for achieving them, and alternate plans if your primary goals fall through. Having thoughtful and realistic plans may also help if you go before the Board of Pardons and Parole.

What if I am pregnant?

According to DOC, a urine analysis will be administered upon intake at York CI to determine whether a new inmate is pregnant. Once the positive result is received, DOC will appoint one of its staff to act as the liaison between DOC, Lawrence and Memorial Hospital, and DCF to arrange prenatal care for the inmate mother. DCF and social work staff from Lawrence and Memorial Hospital will work together to identify a guardian for the newborn upon their delivery. DOC will also begin to work with DCF to identify a guardian to care for the newborn upon their birth.

V. Ways to Support your Child's Caregiver

How can I support my child's caregiver during my incarceration?

Understand that regardless of the parental roles you established while you are home, the caregiver that will care for your child during your incarceration will have to take on additional parenting responsibilities in your absence and may need to adapt house rules and chores to better meet the new family dynamic. This is survival and must happen. In addition, depending upon the length of your incarceration and the developmental stage that your children are in, as well as how they are handling this separation, the remaining caregiver may need to further modify their parenting to meet these new needs.

Although it may be difficult, it is important to try to support the caregiver's parenting decisions during your absence. It is important for the caregiver and the child.

I. Supporting the Child

Should I tell my child the truth about their incarcerated loved one?

This is a difficult question that many people struggle with. However, we do know that truth is important; it is easier on kids than what they imagine. When a child does not know where their loved one is or why their family member left, they are likely to imagine a more negative scenario than the truth. In addition, not knowing or understanding what is going on leads to anxiety.

Children also need to trust the adults who take care of them. You build their trust when you tell the truth – even if it hurts.

How do I explain what is happening and why to my child?

Truth is important; it is easier on kids than what they imagine. When a child does not know where their loved one is or why their family member left, they are likely to imagine a more negative scenario than the truth. In addition, not knowing or understanding what is going on leads to anxiety.

So, what is the best thing to do? While every family must decide for themselves, here are some key things to keep in mind.

- Children need to trust the adults who take care of them. You build their trust when you tell the truth – even if it hurts.
- Children are smart. While you may believe that you can explain a loved one's absence with a vague answer (they are in the hospital, deployed in the military or away at school) children usually find out.
- If children aren't given an explanation that makes sense, they will tell themselves something to fill in the gap. That something may be worse than the truth. If you want them to come to you for information or comfort, you must demonstrate the “door is open” for honest communication. Be open and patient when they approach you and listen to how they are experiencing the separation.

It is important to allow the child to ask questions, feel comforted expressing their feelings and questions about the situation, and to receive age-appropriate and honest responses from a loving adult. The child will also likely need to have the same questions answered repeatedly, and over time; it can bring them comfort hearing the explanation again, and as they age they will process information differently and therefore can benefit from hearing the situation described again.

For more information on the questions children have and for tips on having the conversations, review the National Resource Center for Children and Families of the Incarcerated publication “Conversations: Questions Children Ask”.

Should kids visit their incarcerated parent in prison?

The decision of whether to bring a child to visit a loved one in prison is difficult, and important. Studies show that the separation of a child from a caregiver that they are attached to can cause serious short and long-term harm to the child (for more information on potential health consequences of the separation, review these resources: Osborne Association's fact sheet on "Parental Incarceration's Impact on Children's Health" and Kristin Turney's research report on "Stress Proliferation across Generations? Examining the Relationship between Parental Incarceration and Childhood Health"). Studies also show that contact between a child and their incarcerated parent can improve the child's psychological well-being, ease their concerns over the parent's safety, and decrease the child's emotional distress and problematic behaviors. For a summary of information that may be helpful in making your decision, please review Osborne Association's fact sheet on "Parental Incarceration's Impact on Children's Health". For suggestions on making on the decision and how to prepare for a positive visiting experience, read this brief from the National Resource Center for Children and Families of the Incarcerated, "Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective". <http://dept.camden.rutgers.edu/nrccfi/files/cipl105-visitingmomordad.pdf>.

I. My Parent

Why doesn't my parent write or call me?

There are many potential reasons. It may be best for you to ask the adult that you live with.

Some parents do not send letters or call because:

- Sending letters and making phone calls from prison can be very expensive.
- Some parents are embarrassed and sad that they are in prison.
- Some parents are not allowed to send their children letters or call. There are many potential reasons for this, as well.
- Some parents don't know that their children want to hear from them.
- Some parents believe that their children will be happier not hearing from the parent.
- If you have moved since your parent was incarcerated, they may not know your new address.

These are only a few potential reasons. Every situation is unique and the reason your parent is not writing or calling you may not be one of the reasons above. Again, you may want to ask the adult that you live with why you have not heard from your parent.

Why is my family member there?

Your family member is there because it was decided that they broke the law, or disobeyed a rule, and going to prison is part of their consequence.

What if I do something wrong? Will I go to jail too?

If you do something wrong you might have a consequence like a time-out or not riding your bike for three days.

Is my family member okay?

Your family member has food and water, a place to sleep and comfortable clothes. As part of their consequence, they need to stay at the jail/prison/correctional facility for some time. While there, they will eat, sleep and talk with other people. If you write to, or speak with your family member, you may want to ask them what they do while they are there and what their room is like.

Is it okay if I feel confused, scared, sad, or angry?

All feelings are okay. Sometimes it helps to talk to other people like a friend or trusted adult about your feelings. You could also write or draw pictures about how you feel.

Is it okay if I still love my family member?

Yes, it is okay that you love your family member.

Is it okay if I don't love my family member anymore?

Yes it is, and it is also okay for you to have different feelings about this later.

What can I do to help my family member?

Everyone in the family needs love and support. You can help by doing chores at home, being a good brother or sister, doing well in school and making them proud. And if you have bad days than that is okay, just remember to keep trying.

Is my family member safe?

The people who work at the jail/prison try very hard to keep everyone safe.

II. Talking to Friends

How do I tell my friends that my parent is in prison?

You should talk to your parent or caregiver and figure out what to say together. If you do not want to do this you can also speak with teachers, counselors and other trusted adults.

What if the other children do not understand my situation because it is different from theirs?

If children act out towards you because they do not understand your situation you can talk with an adult that you trust. If there is not an adult at school that you are comfortable talking to, you can talk to an adult at home or an adult that you are most comfortable with about what is happening at school.

My friend's parent is in prison. What do I do?

Your friend is very lucky that you are concerned. Your friend may be sad, angry, or even deny that their parent is in prison so try not to force them to talk about it. Instead, allow them to speak about what they want to. If you do talk about it, make sure you are in an area where no one else can hear you because your friend may be comfortable talking to you about their parent but not want others to hear. Do your best to listen to your friend.

You are doing the right thing by trying to help. If your friend has a bad reaction to talking about it, it is probably because they are hurt, not mad at you. While it may be difficult for you, know that what you are doing is helping your friend.

Here are some tips if your friend's parent is in prison:

- Do not force them to talk about anything.
Instead allow them to speak about what they want. Make sure you are in an area where no one else is going to hear you. Do your best to listen to your friend.
- Do not hesitate to ask for help.
If you feel like your friend is really upset or that you need help, you can go to a trusted adult and explain to them what is going on.
- Think about some things you might say.
Before your conversation with your friend, maybe think of some comforting things you want to tell them. You can also tell them where they can find other answers, like this booklet.

III. Prison

What is prison?

In Connecticut, prison is a place where some arrested and convicted people stay, if staying at prison is part of their consequence for breaking the law, or a rule. If you have a parent in prison you are not alone. 1 in every 14 kids in this country has had a parent in prison. Many of these children are having the same worries, fear and other feelings that you have.

Why do people go to prison?

Some people go to jail, or prison, when they are arrested for breaking the law.

I don't know if my parent went to prison or not.

Talk to the adult you live with and tell them you would like to know.

Does the TV really show what prison is like?

Usually it does not.

How do I know when my parent is getting out of prison?

This is something you could ask the adult you live with about. It is different for every person in prison.

What do my parent wear in prison?

People in prison wear identical uniforms that look like pajamas or the clothes painters wear. They also have socks, shoes, and jackets.

FAQS FOR CHILDREN WITH AN INCARCERATED PARENT

Can my friend come with me to visit my parent in prison?

You cannot bring your friend to visit, but you can send your parent a photo of you and your friend, and tell your parent about your friend and what you like to do together.

Will I be waiting for a while to see my parent in prison?

When you visit your parent you may have to wait for a while. Make sure you follow all the rules you are given (like what you can wear, and what you can and cannot bring in with you) so that you can see your parent.

Can I go to the prison on my own?

You must be at least 18 years old to go on your own. If you are not 18, than you need to have an adult who is on the visitor's list with you. If you are unsure as to who to go with, ask the adult you live with. If you are 16 years old or younger, you will need to have two forms of ID to see your parent. Talk about this with the adult you live with.

How often can I go?

Every prison is different. Check the visiting schedule for the prison your loved one is in. The schedule may be confusing so ask your family member or caregiver for help.

Can I hug or kiss my parent?

Only if your parent is allowed to have a "contact visit". If they are allowed to have contact visits, than at the beginning and end of the visit you can briefly hug and kiss. During the visit, you will sit across from each other at a table and cannot touch until saying good-bye. If you are not sure if you are able to touch, ask your parent if it is okay.

If your parent is allowed "non-contact visits", than you will get to see them through a glass partition like a window, and talk using a telephone. You will not get to touch them, though. Sometimes the rules change as to whether a parent can have contact or non-contact visits. Either way, you will get to see and speak with your parent.

What if I want to show my parent things?

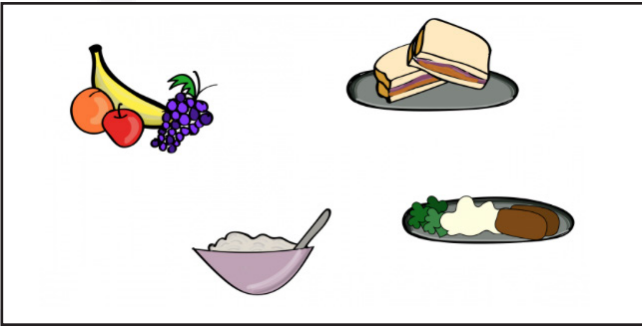
You cannot bring anything with you into the prison, but you can tell your parent about it. You might also be able to take a picture of it and send it to them with a letter. Ask the adult you live with about it.

Where does my parent sleep?



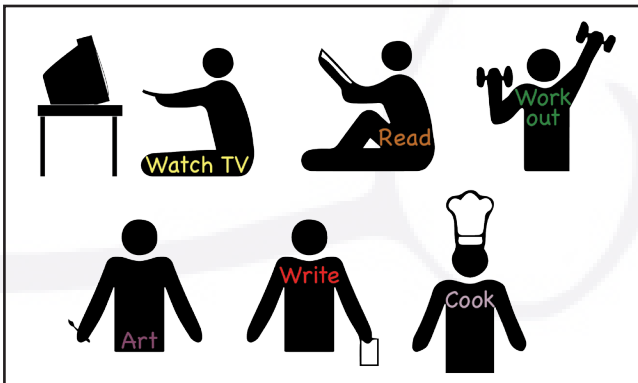
Your parent may sleep in a room that looks like this. If you speak with your parent, you can ask them to describe it.

What does my parent eat?



Your parent eats foods similar to what your school has in the cafeteria. They can go to the cafeteria to eat or buy their own food to eat in their room.

What does my parent do?



There are different things your parent may do. They may read, work, exercise, take classes or other things. If you speak with your parent, you might want to ask them what they do while in there.

DEFINITIONS

Arrested – A person is stopped by the police, asked questions, and may have to stay at a police department, jail or prison. If the arrested person does have to go to a police department, jail or prison, the stay can be very short or very long. Ask an adult you trust if they know how long the arrested person might have to stay.

Cell – A small room in a prison where a person in prison lives. One or several people may live in that same room.

CIP – this stands for Children with Incarcerated Parents.

Clerk – The Clerk helps the judge to make sure that court processes are followed.

Commissary – where people can buy food, snacks, toiletries, and other items for sale while they are incarcerated.

Community Caregiver – This is a person who gives care, guidance and support to children with incarcerated parents or loved ones. A Community Caregiver usually lives with the children they provide care for. Some examples of a Community Caregiver are parent, step-parent, guardian, girlfriend or boyfriend of a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or older sibling.

Community Supporter – This is a person who helps children with incarcerated parents or loved ones, and their families but does not live with the children. Some examples of Community Supporters are teachers, neighbors, therapists, counselors, coaches, mentors, social workers, doctors, and school nurses.

Contact visit – In most prisons in Connecticut, during a contact visit visitors are allowed to briefly touch (hug, shake hands and kiss) the person they are visiting at the beginning and again at the end of their visit. During the visit, the visitors and incarcerated person are allowed to sit across from each other at a table and talk. They are not, however, allowed to touch while sitting at the table during the visit.

Contraband – There are a lot of things that are not allowed inside a prison, like cell phones, toys and cameras. Anything not allowed inside of a prison is called “contraband”. When you go to prison to visit someone, you might be able to bring these items into the waiting area, but not inside the visiting room. Staff at the prison will check to make sure you and others visiting do not accidentally bring something into the visiting room that the prison does not allow.

Convicted – when the court decides that the person arrested for breaking a law or rule did break the law, they have been found “guilty” and are “convicted” of breaking the law.

Correctional facility, or correctional institution – In Connecticut, a correctional facility (sometimes called correctional institution or prison) is a place where an arrested person, and people convicted of a crime, stay. To find out how long your loved one might stay at a correctional facility, correctional institution or prison, ask an adult that you trust.

Correctional Officer – a person that supervises the people staying at a jail, prison or correctional facility. Correctional Officers, sometimes called COs, are also the people that supervise visits at jails, prisons and correctional facilities.

Court – Court is where a judge listens to your family member and other people during a trial or hearing. The judge tries to find out what happened and make a fair decision about what will happen next.

Custody – When police temporarily keep an arrested person at the police department, jail or prison.

Court Monitor – The Court Monitor sits in the courtroom to record what people say during hearings and trials.

Defendant – Is the person who the police say has committed the offense or broken the rule. Evidence – Information that is presented in Court to help the judge or jury determine whether they believe that the arrested person did break the law, or disobey a rule.

Guilty – when it is decided by the court that the person arrested for breaking a law or rule did break the law, they have been found to be “guilty”.

Halfway house – When some people are released from prison, they move into a halfway house. A halfway house is a home that is away from the prison and in a community. Living in a halfway house can help people that are leaving prison get used to life outside of prison before they return home. Once it is determined that the person living at the halfway house is ready to return home, they are released and allowed to move out.

Incarcerated – When a person has to live in a jail, prison or correctional facility they are “incarcerated”.

Inmate or prisoner – Both words refer to a person that is living at a jail, prison or correctional facility.

DEFINITIONS

Innocent – when it is decided that the person arrested for breaking a law or rule did not break the law, they have been found to be “innocent”.

Jail – The place where an arrested person lives while they wait for their trial if in another state. In Connecticut, there are no jails. A person that has been arrested in Connecticut will stay in prison while they wait for their trial.

Judge – A judge is the person that is in charge of the court and oversees the hearings and trials that happen at court. For some cases, the judge will also decide if the defendant is guilty of committing the offense (or breaking the rule). In other cases, a jury (a group of people) will decide if the defendant is guilty of committing the offense.

Judicial Marshal (or just “Marshal”) – A Judicial Marshal works at the court to make sure that everyone follows the rules of the court while they are there. Judicial Marshals will make sure that no one brings anything into court that is not allowed and they help people that have been arrested and are staying at a prison or jail get to-and-from court safely.

Jury – A jury is a group of adults, called Jurors, who are asked to come to court to decide whether the evidence presented during a trial demonstrates that the arrested person is guilty or innocent. Some cases don’t have Jurys. In those cases, the Judge will decide whether the evidence presented during a trial demonstrates that the arrested person is guilty or innocent.

Lawyer or Attorney – a person who has studied the law and gives advice to clients and assists them in court.

Non-contact visit – A visit in a jail or prison when visitors are not allowed to touch or hug the person that they are visiting. Usually, the visitor and the person they are visiting sit across from each other, separated by glass or a window. They can see each other through the window but not touch each other. Each side of the window has a telephone so the visitor and the person they are visiting can talk to each other on the phone.

Parole – When a person is released from prison but still has to follow some rules and check in with a Parole Officer, they are “on parole”, or “have been paroled”.

Parole Officer – A Parole Officer tries to make sure that the person on parole is following the rules that they have been given and is doing well while not in prison.

Police Officer – A person who works for a police department to make sure that everyone follows the laws, or rules, in that area. If they believe a law or rule has been broken, they ask people questions and look for proof that the law was broken to see if a person broke the law and needs to serve a consequence for it. Sometimes, police officers arrest people that they believe broke a law or rule so that the person can serve their consequence.

Prison – In Connecticut, a prison is the place where arrested and convicted people stay. **Probation** – When an arrested person is “on probation”, they are not in prison but do check in with a Probation Officer. Sometimes people are put on probation after an arrest so they don’t have to go to prison. Other times they are put on probation after being released from jail or prison.

Probation Officer – A Probation Officer tries to make sure that the person on probation is doing well and follows the rules given to them.

Reentry – when formerly incarcerated people return to life outside of jail, prison, or a correctional facility.

Release – when someone that has been staying at jail, prison, or a correctional facility is allowed to leave, they are “released”.

Sentence – When it is decided that an arrested person is guilty of breaking a law (they have been convicted), a sentence, or consequence, is given to them. This sentence may include living in a prison for a certain amount of time, paying some money, or having to follow additional rules that a Probation Officer will try to make sure are followed.

Trial and hearing – These take place at court. They are kind of like meetings where a judge, lawyers, and maybe a jury talk about the arrested person’s situation to decide if they believe the arrested person is innocent or guilty of breaking the law. If it is decided that the arrested person is guilty, then they will be convicted. If it is decided that the arrested person is innocent, then they will be allowed to go home.

Victim Advocate – This is a person who the judge has agreed can support a witness or victim while they are in court.

Witness – Witnesses are people who have knowledge that might help the judge or jury decide if the defendant has broken a law, or rule.



ABOUT US

Since fiscal year 2008, the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy (IMRP) at Central Connecticut State University has been receiving annual funding from the Connecticut General Assembly to administer competitive grants for providing positive interventions for at-risk youth whose parent(s) and/or family members have been incarcerated. In recognition of the significant growth and development of the work performed with these funds, the IMRP established the CIP Initiative, within which the numerous and diverse projects addressing parental incarceration occur. The CIP Initiative continually seeks to expand the understanding of these children and their service needs through research, evaluation and outreach activities. As such, the CIP Initiative, in collaboration with faculty members from Connecticut's public universities, as well as other colleges and universities, is evaluating the effectiveness of direct care services in alleviating negative responses to parental incarceration and improving the positive attributes of CIP. The mission for the IMRP's CIP Initiative is to improve the quality of supports for children with incarcerated parents by using the various data and knowledge it gains to inform public policy and practice.

Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative

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