



A CAREGIVER'S GUIDE TO PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN IOWA PRISONS

For More Information and Resources:

[HTTP://WWW.DRAKE.EDU/LAW/CLINICS-CENTERS/MIDDLETON/RESOURCES/IPP/](http://www.drake.edu/law/clinics-centers/middleton/resources/ipp/)



Why is contact with a child's incarcerated parent important

You are not alone caring for your loved one's child while they are incarcerated. It is estimated that 1 in 28 children in the U.S. are separated from a parent due to parental incarceration.¹ Approximately 10 million children in the U.S. have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.²

Research has shown that if done correctly, visitation with an incarcerated parent can greatly benefit the child and reduce caregiver stress. Benefits to the child include:

- Visitation may decrease the child's elevated symptoms of PTSD from witnessing the arrest and the trauma of being separated from the parent.
- Visitation may decrease the child's mental health symptoms such as anxiety, aggression, withdrawal and difficulty regulating emotions.
- Visitation helps the child to feel more secure.
- Prison visitation will help the child know the parent is okay as the parent will be clean, sober and healthy.
- Visitation can improve a child's self-esteem.
- Children may suffer academically, distrust authority and have behavioral problems if they are "kept in the dark" about a parents' whereabouts and circumstances.
- Positive Visits with an incarcerated parent may reduce the child's chances of being involved in the criminal justice system themselves.

Despite the time and effort it takes for a child's caregiver to provide the child with consistent and positive interactions with a parent, visitation can reduce the daily stress on caregivers. Visitation can make parenting the child easier because it will likely reduce the child's negative behaviors. Many children who do not see their parents have academic problems, disciplinary problems and overall behavioral issues which makes a caregivers daily life stressful. This stress is in addition to the additional pressures facing most caregivers because an incarcerated parent cannot contribute to the family's financial well-being.

Society also benefits from the interactions as parents who have consistent contact with their child increases the likelihood a parent will reunify with their child; it improves the mental health and morale of the parent, reduces the likelihood of recidivism and increases the chances the parent will pay child support upon their release.

¹ The Pew Charitable Trusts: Pew Center on the States. *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. Washington, DC. 2010

² Mauer, M., Nellis, A., Schirmer, S.; *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children - Trends 1991 - 2007*, The Sentencing Project, Feb. 2009 - <http://www.sentencingproject.org>.

Ways to Reduce Caregiver's Stress and make the Child's Visit a Positive Experience

- ✓ Learn the security procedures, clothing requirements and visitation expectations of the facility.
- ✓ Prepare the child for the visit based upon their age
- ✓ Prepare the child to go through security
- ✓ Bring a quarter to lock up valuables in the waiting area
- ✓ Make sure the child has eaten a snack and had something to drink just prior to the visit. If age appropriate had a nap
- ✓ Make sure the child goes to the restroom just prior to going through security.
- ✓ The focus of the visit should be the child and the child's feelings.
- ✓ Give the child and parent 10 min and 5 min warning prior to ending the visit.
- ✓ Explain to the child and parent the type and next contact they will have with each other.
- ✓ Be prepared that saying goodbye may be hard and try to establish a routine for saying goodbye.

Security Procedures

Confirm that you and the child's visitor application has been approved by the Dept. of Corrections.



All visitors are required to **present current photo identification upon entrance** to the institution and shall be subject to search. Searches may include a pat down, metal detectors, electronic ion scanners, non-invasive drug test, electronic devices or visual searches.

If a personal search (strip search) is required for either the caregiver or minor children, *the caregiver should decline the search and cancel the visit.*

No personal items will be allowed past security. Items that should not be taken into the prison include: weapons (including pocket knives), cell phones, personal electronic devices, tools, cameras, pagers, tobacco and medications with three exceptions:

1. **Only necessary medications** such as Nitroglycerin will be allowed but the medication must be in a valid prescription bottle before being allowed in the visitation room.
2. **If you are bringing and infant/toddler the following baby items allowed in the visitation room:** 2 diapers, clear baby bottle (non-glass) with milk or formula only, clear sippy cup (empty), one baby blanket, one burp cloth, one factory sealed clear plastic container of baby food.
3. **Sunglasses** are prohibited unless they are accompanied with a prescription.



Clothing Requirements

All visitors are to **wear shoes** (no flip-flops or open toed shoes allowed)



All visitors must wear appropriate underclothing or will be denied entry.

Visitors wearing *miniskirts, shorts, muscle, shirts, see-through clothing or halter tops* **will not** be allowed to visit. Only children under the age of 12 may wear shorts inside of the facility.

If children are wearing shorts, the shorts must be longer than the child's middle finger when their arms are placed down the side of their body.



Visitors wearing clothing with slogans, pictures, or words intended to deprecate race, sex, or cultural values shall not be allowed entry.



Visitors may not wear outerwear such as coats, hats, gloves or sunglasses into the secured area and must be placed into lockers in the lobby.

(Lockers take a quarter to secure items & will be refunded at the end of your visit.)

Visitation Expectations

Prepare for Shift Changes. During shift changes visitors will not be allowed to go through security. Depending on the facility, this may take as long as forty-five minutes. Bring activities, food and beverages for the children if you are required to wait due to a shift change.



Prepare for Food and Drink Requests. If you do not have time to give the child a snack and beverage before the visit, consider buying them for the child during the visit. Visitors who wish to purchase canteen items during the visit must use a Debitek Card. Debitek Cards may be obtained in the lobby of the institutions prior to going through security. Debitek Care machines ONLY accept cash and the first purchase is a minimum of \$5.00

Beware of No Contact Visits. There may be times where a warden will determine the facility will only allow “No Contact” visits between an offender and visitors. If this occurs, a notice should be posted in the facility and visible before seeing the parent. The caregiver should explain to the child before entering the visitation room that they will be separated from their parents by a window but will be able to see and speak to them.

Keys for Successful Visitation

Ensure the child has someone they can freely talk to about their visits both before and after the visit.

Ensure the child knows what to expect at the visit.

Ensure the child has things to talk about during the visit such as the child’s accomplishments no matter how big or small.

Ensure the child has consistent, predictable contact with the parent through mail, email, phone calls, video conferencing and in-person visitation.

Ensure both the child and parent knows what type and when the next contact will be.

Be prepared to give the child a few visits to get used to the environment and to rebuild a trusting relationship with their parent. This may include some behaviors before and after visits occur.

Prepare the Child for Visitation Based on the Child's Age and Development³

Infants: 0-6 Months:

- Let the baby hear a tape (or video) of the parent's voice
- Wash baby's sheets and cloths in the soap or body wash used by the parent.
- Communicate with the parent about the child's new and emerging skills, what her noises mean as she learns to talk and how he is standing, crawling or rolling over. This may make the parent sad but will help maintain their attachment to the child and could minimize distress at visits.
- Take babies out of their car seat and encourage the parents to play with the child.

Babies: 7-13 months:

- Allow baby lots of time unencumbered by seats and straps. If they will need to be restrained during the visit, let them be out of car seat, walker or stroller and roll around on a blanket placed on the floor or grass for a while before the visit begins.
- Talk to the baby in both "baby talk" and using adult words.
- Be careful not to pressure the baby to practice for you and others their new developmental mile stones if he/she is resisting in order to show the parent at the visit.

Toddlers: 14-30 Months:

- Be sure the toddler is rested and fed.
- Explain to the toddler what will happen when going through security.
- Do not bombard the toddler with rules ahead of time...the toddler will either not remember them or will test boundaries anyway.
- Show toddler lots of pictures of the incarcerated parent.
- If possible, make arrangements ahead of time so that you can be prepared to cut the visits short if the toddler cannot follow the rules.

Preschoolers (2 ½ years to 4 years old):

- Read children letters from parents.
- Send drawings to parents (do not use stickers as those will be confiscated)
- Explain to the child what will happen when going through security.
- Be clear about whether or not the child has a choice. Such as state, "It's time to go, give your dad a hug" versus "Are you ready to go? Can you give your dad a hug?"

School Age: (6 years to 12 years old):

- Read children letters from parents.
- Send drawings to parents (do not use stickers as those will be confiscated)
- Explain to the child what will happen when going through security.
- Encourage the child to talk about their lives with their incarcerated parent. Assure them the parent will not feel about to hear how they are doing.
- Encourage the child to express their emotions (good and bad) prior to, during and after the visit.

³ This material is based off of, Children of Prisoner's library and Tip Sheet for Incarcerated Parents: Planning for a Visit from Your Child/Children (www.YOUTH.gov/COIP)