



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL 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/)



Contact with a your Child is Important

You are not alone. 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 between an incarcerated parent and their child can greatly benefit the child. 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.

It is hard being separated from your child but remember you can help parent your child while you are incarcerated.

Appreciate your child's caregiver. Caregivers do not want you to worry about the stresses they are experiencing. Many children have academic problems, disciplinary problems and overall behavioral issues which makes a caregiver's daily life stressful. This stress is in addition to the additional pressures facing most caregivers for children of incarcerated parents. Many caregivers struggle financially to provide for your child. They often face homelessness, food instability and struggle to find affordable childcare. Most caregivers often have to re-arrange work schedules, finances and other aspects of their daily lives to give you the opportunity to visit with your child. However, positive interactions between you and your child can make parenting the child easier because it is likely to decrease your child's negative behaviors and therefore reducing your child's caregiver's stress.

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>.

Making the Child's Visit a Positive Experience

- ✓ Help the caregiver learn the security procedures, clothing requirements and visitation expectations of the facility.
- ✓ Prepare for your child's visit by setting your expectations based upon the child's age and development.
- ✓ Be respectful to the correctional officers so that your child will not fear them.
- ✓ The focus of the visit should be the child and the child's feelings; allow your child to express their positive and negative feelings towards you and your separation from each other.
- ✓ Focus on the child's life and reaffirm the positive things they are doing.
- ✓ Reassure the child that you are healthy and safe.
- ✓ Do NOT discuss adult issues or question the caregiver's parenting choices in front of the child.
- ✓ Use age appropriate language. This can be difficult since you are currently living and interacting with only adults.
- ✓ Give the child a 10 min and 5 min warning prior to ending the visit.
- ✓ Respectfully ask the caregiver what type and when the next contact you will have with the child will be.
- ✓ Be prepared that saying goodbye will be hard and try to establish a routine for saying goodbye.

Security Procedures

Confirm that your child and the child's caregiver have been approved by the Dept. of Corrections to visit.



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 caretaker or minor children, *the caretaker 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 two 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 an infant/toddler is visiting, 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.



Clothing Requirements

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



Visitors wearing *miniskirts, shorts, muscle, shirts, see-through clothing or halter tops* **will not** be allowed to visit.

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.

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 caretaker should explain to the child before entering the visitation room that they will not be allowed to touch their parent.

Keys for Successful Visitation

Ensure the child knows what to expect at the visit.

You child’s needs should be the focus of the visit not your needs.

Ensure the child has as consistent and predictable contact with you through mail, email, phone calls, video conferencing and in-person visitation as possible. Keep making attempts to contact them on regular and predictable basis to re-build your child’s trust in you.

Utilize programs such as “Story Book” to stay connected with your child.

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.

Utilize parenting classes and other programs that will help you parent your child while you are incarcerated and help assist you with the transition to a full-time upon your release.

Structure Visits Based on the Child's Age and Development³

Infants: 0-6 Months:

- Infants like to be held a lot! Know that holding your baby won't "spoil" him or her but help build your bond with your child.
- Hold your infant so he/she can see you and make eye contact with them. Allow your baby to touch your face and explore you.
- Gently unfold your infant's fingers when they grab your hair and other sensitive areas.
- Talk to you infant a lot during the visit. Change your tone of voice, sing and imitate the baby's sounds.
- Infants will cry because they need or want something. If you do not know what that is, ask the caregiver to help you read the baby's cues so you can successfully comfort him/her.

Babies: 7-13 months:

- Babies like to sit alone, crawl, move, pick up tiny objects, and practice banging/shaking/dropping things.
- Encourage your baby to crawl, sit alone or play "active" games such as patty cake with you.
- Age appropriate finger foods will not be allowed into the visiting room. Be very careful when using vending machine snacks (popcorn, small candy, etc.) as they can easily cause a baby to choke.
- Babies tend to go to someone they know (caregiver) when "strangers" are around. If the baby reacts to you like you are a stranger, be patient. Stay close to the baby but do not push the baby to interact with you. It might take a few visits for the baby to get to know you again.
- Babies can understand simple commands such as waving or saying "bye-bye".
- Good byes can be tough. In most cases it helps to develop a quick routine for the baby to say goodbye. This routine should be the same every time you tell the child goodbye.

Toddlers: 14-30 Months:

- Toddlers like to work on their motor skills like walking, running and climbing. They also want to explore everything, learn words, tell adults what they need/want and test boundaries.
- During visits you can play word games, make silly noises, ask them "Where is your nose, etc.?"
- Give toddlers clear choices whenever possible. Give them clear rules/limits and tell them what the consequence will be if you do not follow the rule.

³ Structure Visits Based upon the Child's Age and Development material came from Children of Prisoners Library, Facts and Issues: CPL 105, Visiting Mom or Dad, The Child's Perspective by Ann Adalist-Estrin. (www.fcnetwork.org) and Tip Sheet for Incarcerated Parents: Planning for a Visit from Your Child/Children (www.YOUTH.gov/COIP)

- Encourage the toddler by showing pride in their accomplishments. Understand that they will have many emotional needs similar to that of a baby.
- Toddlers need you to be patient and firm. Be understanding but give them appropriate discipline. Ask the caregiver to what works best for them so that you can be consistent.
- Prepare yourself for the visit to be cut short because of the toddler's behaviors. It is part of their developmental stage so you will need to hide your disappointment and frustration with your child because the toddler cannot meet visit expectations.

Preschoolers (2 ½ years to 4 years old):

- Preschoolers will be practicing their fine motor skills such as drawing.
- Preschoolers will also begin to express anger in their words.
- Preschoolers will insist on being the center of attention and will interrupt adult conversations.
- Preschoolers will enjoy being read to. They will wonder about your daily life (when/where you sleep, eat, go to the bathroom, etc.)
- Preschoolers will practice their emotional separateness by being oppositional and defiant.
- Preschoolers will also ask a lot of questions.
- During your visits, you need to accept any feelings of anger they express but will set limits on their aggressive behaviors. If the aggressive behaviors continue you will need to give them a time out and redirect their behavior by saying something such as, "It is okay to be angry but it is not okay to hit." You might *You should NEVER say you will leave them as a consequence of their behavior.*
- You can sing songs together, play classification word games, draw and talk about pictures, give choices and answer their questions.
- You will need to accept that it is hard for preschoolers to be quiet.
- If the child has a therapist, write to the therapist for advice as to the best way to support your child.

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

- Children this age need to be accepted by their peers. You will need to remember and accept that children may be embarrassed by your incarceration and crime.
- Children this age like to play sports, games and collect things. Play age appropriate games with them, ask them about their hobbies, sports and collections.
- Often, children want to talk about their life, but will worry that it will make you feel bad. Reinforce them talking by telling them it helps you feel good when they talk about their lives with you. Listen to their stories without asking too many questions or giving advice, they really want you to just listen to them.
- Children will hold back their emotions so that the visit will go well. Look for signs of sadness, disappointment, upset, anger. Let them know you accept their feelings and want to talk about them.
- Answer their questions as honestly as possible. Talk about things they can relate to such as TV shows you both watch, books you read, classes you take, etc.
- Remember, kids this age might refuse to visit you. Sometimes it is out of anger, hurt or fear and sometimes it is just because they would rather do an activity or hang out with their friends.