



Tip Sheet

Visiting Incarcerated Parents

When birth parents are incarcerated, communication with their children in foster care may be challenging but very important to the well-being of both child and parent. Visitation in these cases requires extra work, patience, and creativity but the benefits to child and parent are worth the effort. Planning in advance can help make sure that the visitation and the parent-child communication go smoothly.



Key things to do BEFORE the visit

- Know the visitation rules for the type of facility (local, state, county, or federal) and the rules for the security level (minimum, medium, or maximum).
- Research scheduling requirements as some institutions will require the visit to be scheduled in advance of the day of the visit.
- Be aware of any arrival time requirements, e.g., some facilities require arrival at least 15-30 minutes before the scheduled visiting time to check identifications and to process clearance papers.
- Call the facility about 30 minutes to an hour before departing to find out the status of the facility in the event that a lock-down has occurred and visitation is prevented.
- Make sure that the child is on the parent's visitation list.
- Ensure proper documentation for the child to enter the facility, e.g., the incarcerated parent might be required to complete a notarized letter or form in advance of the child's visits.
- Find out whether the parent will be in handcuffs/shackles during the visit and prepare the child accordingly.
- Inform the parent's facility case manager and the parent's attorney of all emergency notifications involving the child that may impact or interrupt contact

Visiting Schedules

Institutions generally have visiting hours on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays; some have them at other times during the week. Most facilities have information about the visitation hours on their websites. The incarcerated parent may also be able to inform the social worker about the visiting hours.

Keep in mind that two factors may impact visits: (1) the availability of visiting space, and (2) the facility's security level (minimum, medium, maximum). Again, make sure you research this information before arriving for a visitation.

Dress Code

All visitors, including children, must dress appropriately for visitation; clothing must cover from the neck to the kneecaps. Wearing certain clothing may result in denial of a scheduled visitation. The following clothing items are generally not permitted during visitation but please consult the visiting policy for the specific facility for permitted attire.

- Coats, jackets, shawls, and scarves
- Shorts (of a revealing nature)
- Bathing suits
- Form-fitting or see-through garments of any type
- Halter tops, crop tops, sleeveless garments or backless tops
- Low-cut blouses or dresses
- Leotards and spandex
- Miniskirts and skirts two inches or more above the knee
- Dresses or skirts with a high-cut split in the back, front, or side
- Clothing that looks like inmate clothing (khaki or green military-type clothing)
- Hats or caps

Babies

Some institutions do not allow baby items past a certain checkpoint, depending on the age of the child and the facility. The incarcerated parent should let you know what is allowed or you should contact the institution prior to the visit for the policy. To avoid problems, make sure of the following precautions:

- If the child wears a diaper, make sure child is changed before entering the facility.
- Make sure child is well fed before entering – not all institutions allow bottles inside the visiting area.

Preparing the child for the visit

Before accompanying a child to a jail facility, put forth the effort to coach, counsel, and support the child about what to expect, what he or she would like to have happen during the visit, and possible scenarios for what may happen. Consider the following suggestions:

- Arrange and monitor telephone calls, as appropriate, before the visit to allow the parent and child to converse. Your monitoring will ensure the conversation is appropriate and allows you to establish limits as needed.
- Assist the child in working through feelings of fear, confusion, shame, anger, depression or stigma associated with the parent's circumstances and incarceration, including but not limited to the reasons for their incarceration and inability to adequately provide care. For example, parental substance abuse may cause triggers and trauma to the child.
- Consider the child's reaction to the jail environment. Even approaching a jail or prison may be intimidating if wire fencing and guard towers are visible. The atmosphere inside is often unreceptive to children. Visits might be confined to areas that lack privacy, or contact may be allowed only through glass or wire mesh barriers.
- Be sure also to discuss the child's feelings AFTER the visit, and allow for creative expression of any fears, confusion, or other reactions, emotions, etc.

Websites for Local and Federal Correctional Facilities

In addition to the general guidelines above, before visiting you should read the visitation policy for the specific facility which defines the visiting regulations and procedures in greater detail.

- Maryland - <https://www.dpscs.state.md.us/locations/prisons.shtml>
- Virginia - <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/facilities/>
- District of Columbia - <http://doc.dc.gov/>
- Federal Bureau of Prisons - https://www.bop.gov/inmates/visiting.jsp#_blank

If any issues occur upon your arrival, ask to speak with the facility unit head or the administrative duty officer. Such individuals can assist you and make final decisions on admittance and visitation.