

# Incarcerated Parent Family Supports



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**CALL JODY OR APRIL AT 873-4159  
FOR MORE INFORMATION OR AID!**

Establish routines to help your child regain a sense of safety and balance



Create a network of trustworthy adults your child can rely on for help



Talk about emotions with the child of an incarcerated parent



Ways to express love and maintain some connection while apart





## ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Young children thrive with predictable schedules. Not only does it help them to know what routinely happens at certain times of the day, such as park time, lunch time, or nap time, but it helps if you prepare them for upcoming events in your day and week.

- In the morning, let your child know some of the things that will happen throughout the day. For example, "Grandma will pick you up from school. Then you'll go to the park, and later we'll all have dinner together."
- Or name the day of the week, and tell your child something like, "It's Friday. On Fridays we go to work and school. But tomorrow is Saturday. Saturdays are for chores in the morning and fun in the afternoon. Do you want to go to the movies Saturday afternoon?"
- Before you visit your incarcerated loved one, let your child know some of the things she can expect to happen. For instance, "We won't be able to sit in the same room with Mommy, but we can see her through a window and read a story together."



## CREATE A NETWORK

Young children cope with trauma by choosing to relieve themselves of small bits of what frightened or overwhelmed them in conversations with trusted adults. Help your child feel safe and cared for by allowing them to choose when, what and who they talk to.

- A great activity to introduce kids to trustworthy “resource” adults in their life is this all stars mobile from Sesame Street. The craft allows you to talk to children about the teachers, doctors, emergency workers, and neighbors who are great listeners and helpers. [http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms\\_services/services?action=download&uid=3601aea2-00ae-49f9-a05b-43f50e81c9c0](http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms_services/services?action=download&uid=3601aea2-00ae-49f9-a05b-43f50e81c9c0)
- Make sure kids have the chance to socialize through playgroups, sports or faith clubs, scouts, or similar opportunities. The friends and leaders they meet through these activities are important supports.
- Go through a family photo album with your child. Name important family members or friends, and talk about how they are all part of a big team that can help while an incarcerated parent is away. Talk about how lucky your child is to have so many loving family members rooting them on in life!



## TALK ABOUT EMOTIONS

Young children often have a hard time defining, much less controlling their feelings. A great place to start is introducing your child to the names and expressions of a variety of emotions. Studies show once children can identify emotions correctly, its easier for them to exercise self-restraint and control them.

- Take time each day to check in with your child and ask, "How are you feeling?" Remember to let your child know that it's okay to have big feelings no matter what they are. You can also use this art project from sesame street to talk about feelings: [http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms\\_services/services?action=download&uid=49c96b08-7c42-419c-9c3b-d5654230bdec](http://www.sesamestreet.org/cms_services/services?action=download&uid=49c96b08-7c42-419c-9c3b-d5654230bdec)
- Imaginary play is a safe way for kids to work out strong and sometimes scary emotions. Allow your child to pretend to be angry, mean, or frightened characters. Teach them how to twist negative narratives into healing ends. (Ex: if a mean troll smashes a village, maybe a small child will ask why the troll is so angry and offer to be the lonely troll's friend. Then they could rebuild the village together.) If this seems daunting, then start by reading books with emotional topics and talk about the stories with your child instead.
- Sometimes children need space to examine their emotions. Help your child create a "cozy corner", playhouse, or fort that is his or her retreat when they feel like they need to calm down and be comforted. Put a favorite stuffed animal or blankie there for consolation.



## WAYS TO EXPRESS LOVE

Separated by a criminal sentence or a recovery program it can be challenging to remain engaged and connected to your child. Here are a couple ideas to help bridge the gap.

- Give your child a paper heart to keep in her pocket. You might say, "This is to remind you that I love you even when I am not here with you."
- Send pictures and letters — even postcards or short notes mean a great deal to a child who will be thrilled to receive mail from you!
- Talk to your parenting partner about how important it will be for you to be able to communicate with your child by phone. Leave your child a photo to look at when they talk with you on the phone. Call when you can and use the time to encourage your child to share their daily life details with you. Ask about school, friends, their favorite cartoons, games, etc.
- Read several recordable books before you go, and leave them with your child's caregiver so your child can hear your voice when they open up their favorite stories.