

Making visits positive and hap

All about visits

Children benefit emotionally from seeing their mum or dad on a regular basis.

Visits will usually reassure and nurture your child and help with healing the pain they have been living with.

Visiting can be stressful and tiring for carers and kids. It takes a lot of effort to make the visit enjoyable.

In some prison visit areas there are activity kits and play equipment for children, but most do not have anything to make visits enjoyable for children.

If you are visiting behind glass – on a box visit – then your child may be upset because they cannot touch mum or dad.

It is often a long hard day with families travelling by bus and train or many kilometres to get to the prison.

When you arrive, everything will seem strange: big gates and high fences, concrete everywhere you look, locked doors, uniforms, sniffer dogs, family members dressed in strange clothes, metal detectors, people queued up, limited privacy during the visit itself.

You need to help prepare your child as best you can, by being honest and describing what will go on.

Perhaps consider going alone to visit the first time so that you can share your experience with your child before they visit for the first time.

Again, be honest with your child.

This way your child will be less frightened about the visit because they have an idea of what to expect and this can help make sense of it all.

Getting ready to visit – a few days before

Before you visit you can show young children photos of their parent and explain that in two days time you are going to the big house to visit mummy or daddy.

This gives your child a chance to get excited about seeing their parent.

You can ask them to think about what special news they have to tell their mum or dad.

You can give your child ideas about what to talk about with mum or dad.

Ideas are subjects such as:

- That recent trip to the 'mini golf'
- The name of their new pet
- The name of their new 'best friend'
- That great game of footy in the park last week
- Getting 6 out of 10 for your maths test.

You can help reassure your child that their parent does want to hear all their news so your child does not need to worry about making mum or dad upset when they find out what they have been missing out on.

Some children need to talk about it for a few weeks before they are ready to visit.

Video Visits

Using technology to keep in touch is a good way to stay connected with your family member when you are interstate or overseas.

Check with the prison whether this is available and then check with SHINE for Kids that we can assist you with this service.

Making the travel interesting

You can explain how you will travel there (that it will take two hours to get there and you will go on a bus and a train.)

Try to make the journey interesting if you are travelling a long distance maybe play Hangman, Noughts and Crosses or “I spy with my little eye” or talk about the scenery whizzing past.

You can start to tell your child about what to expect and the visit rules.

Try and make that time enjoyable also and tell your child that they will see mummy or daddy soon.

Explain what the sniffer dogs are there for.

Point out other children in the queue and explain that they are also going to see someone they love.

At the end of the visit try and leave the room to go home before their mum or dad is due to go back – it is easier for your child to leave first.

Describe to your child what to expect

The parent in prison can help by describing how it all works to your child over the phone or by letter before the first visit.

Visit rules do vary so you need to find out from your local prison.

It is best if you have gone to visit by yourself first, so you can see how it all works, ask officers questions and then explain it to your child before their first visit.

Explain to your child:

- What the visit room looks like
- What mum or dad will be wearing
- What the officers wear – a special uniform – often blue
- That you will go through a metal detector
- That you put all your things in a locker
- That you will have to queue for a long time to get to your turn
- If your child is wearing a baseball cap or has toys in their pocket these will need to go in the locker
- That if the sniffer dogs are there your child is not allowed to touch or pat the dog
- That sometimes chairs and tables are bolted to the floor.

Make sure there are no drugs or weapons on you or your child when you visit.

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by yourself first, so you can explain it to
your child before their first visit.

Some common visit rules to be aware of

Find out from your local prison what the rules are.

Sometimes your child can give mum or dad a kiss and a hug when you arrive and leave; sometimes this will not be possible.

Sometimes mum or dad will be in a small room sitting behind glass and this can be confusing for a child. You can help reassure your child by telling them that their parent loves you very much, but during this visit they are not allowed to hug or kiss you.

Sometimes your child is allowed to sit on mum or dad's knee during the visit.

If mum or dad are called away during the visit your child needs to sit quietly waiting for them to come back.

If there is a jungle gym for your child to play on, usually you or their parent must be standing beside the equipment while they play.

Sometimes there is a toy cupboard and your child can get one toy to play with.

Your child needs to do what the prison officers ask of them.

Your child is not allowed to run around or scream or the man in uniform will come over and tell your child to stop.

Your child may request their mum or dad to get food from the vending machine but often the inmate is not allowed to.

Sometimes if you buy lollies or chips you will have to break open the packet and leave them on the table, and not walk around with them.

Some suggestions for telling your child about the visit rules

“We will need to wait quietly in line to hand in our forms.”

“We will sit down and wait until it is our turn – even if we get bored.”

“Sometimes you have to go to the toilet before the visit starts.”

“Security sometimes checks your pockets, under your collar, and in the cuff of your pants or shirt.”

“There will be lots of people there and it may be very noisy and busy.”



Remember there are lots of support services out there to help you and your children get through all these extra challenges.
