



HOW YOU CAN HELP A CHILD...

Children who have a parent in jail or prison grieve for the loss of someone important to them who has been taken away. Depending upon the age of the child, the grief is experienced in different ways. But no matter how old, children of incarcerated parents tend to experience loneliness, sadness, and anger. Children do not always express their feelings the same as adults. Children with a parent in jail or prison may remain silent out of shame or guilt or because they have been told to keep it a "secret." Sometimes their anger or their sadness are interpreted as bad behavior when they really just need someone to listen and understand without judging.

If you know a child who has a parent in jail or prison, there may be things you can do to help them:

Listen without judging. Especially difficult times are before and after visits, holidays, birthdays, and school events.

Refrain from criticizing the parent who is in prison or jail. Understand that to the child, their parent is unique and irreplaceable.

Answer all questions to the best of your ability. Be honest, but only up to the child's ability to understand.

Help the child find a safe support system where they will be accepted. This could be at school, church, Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, within the family or in a community organization.

Help them to find words to answer the question: "Where is your Mom?" or "Where is your Dad?"

Children may need professional help to deal with their feelings. Do what you can to get them that help.

Parents and caregivers need support, too. Listen, understand, and support their efforts to be a good parent.

Help children find ways to maintain contact with their parent through letters, phone calls, and visits. Offer to provide support to caregivers to facilitate contact.