



# Ten Tips for Kinship Caregivers of Children of Incarcerated Parents

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1. Recognize that the children have probably endured multiple traumas and may have behaviors that are reactive to these, including withdrawal, anxiety, isolation, or aggressive and unpredictable behaviors.
2. Keep the communication door open with the children. Proactively let them know you are accepting of their feelings and to feel safe expressing them to you in words. You have to tell them this, even when you think that they should know this.
3. Recognize your own ambivalence toward the incarcerated parent can bewilder the child, who, in turn feels conflicted in loyalties and may shut down their sharing with you.
4. Realize that there is often grieving and mourning in the worlds of these children, and rituals and symbols help to comfort the children.
5. Tell them stories about yourself as a child, allowing you to share some of the times when you were conflicted and were successful in working out your conflicts, both inner and with others.
6. When seeking counseling for the child in your care, and many need the professional help of mental health providers, be sure that the therapist has experience and compassion for children of incarcerated parents. Some of the typical prejudices in our society regarding incarcerated parents also exists with professionals who have not been trained in the research and understanding of these children.
7. If there has been a relationship with the parent in prison, and there has been no violence perpetrated against the child by their parent, permit the children to visit and receive letters and phone calls, with economics determining the frequency due to the high cost of prison calls. This is so important if the parent will be returning during the childhood of the child, as sustaining the relationship is critical to the well-being of the children. However, children of parents with longer sentences also need to maintain contact and the sentence length should not determine if there is a relationship.
8. Never force a child to visit their parent, but if they wish to, be sure to prepare them for the visit, the security protocols, the dress code, long waits, the presence of guards, and the change in appearance of their parent.
9. Know the visiting rules and teach them to the children.
10. Always tell the child the truth about the incarceration of the parent. Deception will only create more fear.