

LITTLE children BIG challenges: incarceration

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Sesame Street presents *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration*, an educational outreach initiative for families with children (ages 3 – 8) who are coping with a parent’s incarceration. Our resources provide talking points and tools to help families manage the changes resulting from this situation and to find comfort in one another.

Help your child to feel secure and express feelings

Reassure your child by surrounding her with reliable people and daily activities. Encourage her to share her feelings.

- Let your child know what to expect during everyday activities. Tell her who will take her to school and who will pick her up.
- Provide your child with a comfort item to keep during the day, such as a paper heart or family photo.
- Ask your child questions to help her open up. You might notice a negative behavior and say, “Did something happen today that made you feel sad?”

Talk honestly with your child

It’s important to tell your child the truth about his parent’s incarceration. It’s the best way to help him feel loved and cared for.

- If you do not provide information about the incarceration, your child may come up with his own mistaken reason for his parent’s absence. Let your child know that the incarceration is not his fault.
- Be patient as your child works to understand what has happened. You may need to explain the situation several times. Let him know he’s not alone.

Stay connected

When you involve the incarcerated parent in your child’s life, you show your child that she will always be cared for.

- Visits can be positive for children, but jails can seem scary. Break the ice with games. List favorite colors, music, or sports teams. Describe something and ask your child to guess it.
- Phone calls are a great way to keep in touch. Help your child think of things to tell her parent. Give her a picture of the parent to hold during the call.
- Use pen and paper to write letters. If your child can’t yet write, ask her to tell you what to write; she can draw pictures to go with the words.
- Televisiting can be helpful for some children. Sharing an everyday routine such as storytime during your televisit is a great way to be together.

For more Sesame Street resources on incarceration:

- Explore sesamestreet.org/incarceration
- Connect with facebook.com/sesamestreetincommunities
- Download the **FREE** *Sesame Street: Incarceration* app

