

A BILLOF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Right #5: *"I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent."*

When Children Visit Someone in Jail or Prison....

Preparing Children for a Visit:

Caregivers and other adults can help make a visit less stressful by letting the child know what the visit will be like. This information might include the following:

- How long the trip will take and how long they will be there
- The appearance of the facility
- Why the correctional officers are there during the visit; what they will be doing; what their uniforms will look like
- If there will be any predictable delays prior to the visit, such as waiting in line, or waiting for their loved one to come to the visiting room after they arrive
- What their incarcerated loved one will be wearing and any changes in their appearance since the child last saw them
- What questions they will be asked by officers; what rules can be anticipated; information about searches and limitations on what can be carried into the visit
- Any restrictions on clothing, and planning what to wear to the visit
- Rules for using the restrooms, buying food from vending machines, etc.

The incarcerated parent can help by:

- Writing to the child to tell them what the visit will be like
- Keeping informed about the child's daily life
- Giving the child special attention during the visit
- Discussing the visit with the child's caregiver so they can anticipate and respond appropriately to any concerns
- Providing simple, age-appropriate information about their daily life in the institution
- Having realistic expectations of the visit, including adjusting the length of the visit to the child's developmental age.

After the visit:

The caregiver should talk to the child to help them debrief after the visit. They might ask the following questions to help the discussion along:

- What was the best and worst thing about the visit?
- Was it as they expected it to be?
- Were there any surprises?
- What was different than expected?
- What memory will they carry with them?
- What would they like to do differently next time?

When appropriate, it is important for the incarcerated person to be allowed to write and/or call the child. Communication with the incarcerated parent will help the child to:

- Make a better adjustment to the parent's incarceration
- Have a greater sense of wellbeing
- Build and sustain relationships between a child and the incarcerated parent
- Alleviate fears about the separation and incarceration

Excerpted from the Friends Outside brochure "When Children Visit Someone in Prison" (2005)