

## 11 Seek Mentorship

There may be mentors available for you and your children through mentoring programs. Take advantage of these programs. Your counselor or chaplain may be able to point you in the right direction. Often faith-based or non-profit groups will offer mentors to inmates. Mentors can listen to your needs and offer a different view from your own on how to build and maintain a relationship with your children. These same groups and nationwide organizations may offer mentors for your children. Mentors will never replace you as a father, but they can support you as you try to stay connected with your children. If your children have mentors, get to know the mentors as another way to stay connected with your children.

## 12 Take a Fatherhood Class

Your prison or jail might offer a program on fathering or parenting in general. Sign up for it. The more you can learn about fathering and parenting the better. If your facility does not use National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad® program for incarcerated fathers, suggest to the staff that they begin using it. Pass on the contact information below to your counselor, chaplain, or facility administration so they can get more information about this great program.



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# STAYING INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILDREN

## WHILE INCARCERATED

### 12 Ways to Build a Strong Relationship with Your Children...even now!



**You might think it's hard to be a part of your children's lives while incarcerated.** Visits with your children might be rare, or they might not happen at all. If you get to talk with your children on the phone, the cost of the call may limit how many calls you can make. And you might not get much time to talk. So if you don't see, visit or talk with your children very often, how can you build a relationship with them?

**It may be difficult, but it can be done!**

Even if you don't see, visit or talk with your children, you can build a bridge to them in other ways. By using the tips in this brochure, you can begin to build a great relationship with your children. These tips will help you to nurture the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of your children. Use any of the tips that will work for you. They might give you other ideas for ways that you can be the best dad that you can be.



“I’ve learned that it’s not **what** you have in your life but **who** you have in your life... that counts.”



## 1 Become an Expert on Your Children and Their Stages of Growth

**What are your children learning?** Let’s say that you have a child who is 7 years old. What subjects does he or she have in school? What are the difficulties he or she faces? If you don’t know, find out. Use the prison or jail library to find a book, video, or other material that explains what happens to a growing 7-year-old.

## 2 Notice What Your Children Like

**Do your children like math or science?** One incarcerated father found that his son was into science and biology. The father wrote to a health organization for free materials on those subjects. He asked them to send one set of materials to him and one to his son. They learned a lot together about both subjects. He also learned how smart his son was by talking to him about his favorite subjects. Many children learn a new language in school. Why not learn it along with them? You could even write simple letters to each other in the new language.

## 3 Respect Your Children’s Mother

Whether you are married to the mother of your children or not, it is important that you keep a good relationship with her. Even if you don’t always get along with her, show her respect because that’s good for your children. If you are married to her, love her with all your heart. One of the best things a dad can do for his children is to love their mom.

## 4 Become a Long Distance Coach

If your children like basketball or some other sport, learn all you can about it. What skills does someone need to play it, and what are the rules? Which athletes do your children look up to? When you stay on top of what is going on in your children’s sports, then you can share more in letters, phone calls, and during visits. It’s a great way to be a part of your children’s physical growth, even though you can’t be with them.

## 5 Take Care of Your Health

Do you want to be around when your children are adults? How about being there for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren? How well you take care of yourself today will determine whether you are around in years to come. Work out, eat right, and do other healthy things as often as you can. If you won’t do it for yourself, do it for your children.

## 6 Be Willing to Take Risks For Your Children

Incarcerated fathers, like many men, often find it hard to show emotions. But to help your kids grow emotionally, you need to take risks and open up. Show your love during phone calls, visits, and in letters. Children can get used to physical distance, but they have problems with emotional distance. Emotional distance by a father hurts children and may lead to problems as they age.

## 7 Tell Your Children That You Love and Accept Them No Matter What

Think about how you talk with your children. Everything you say or write shows how you feel. Even the way you move your body and the looks on your face tell your children how you feel. When children think that a parent is down on them, they start to feel unwanted. They try to win back the love and approval they feel that they have lost. If children still feel this way after years of trying to win a parent’s love, they seek others to love and accept them. When this happens, children are more likely to get into bad relationships.

## 8 Don’t Mess Around With Their Emotions

Do you use guilt, pity, shame, or intimidation to get the mother of your children, your family members, or even your children to notice you? If so, you need to make big changes in what you say and do. Children learn to treat others by the way they’re treated. **Choose your words and actions wisely.**

## 9 Learn to Show Your Emotions

Being a father means to sacrifice and put the well-being of your children above your own. **True love will draw your children to you.** You must also be open with them. One incarcerated father said it this way, “A father’s love isn’t shown by how many letters he gets from his kids, but by how many he sends—even when his kids don’t respond.”

## 10 Keep the Faith

Many incarcerated fathers find that a relationship with Jesus Christ and spirituality help them through troubled times. Learn more about your spiritual beliefs by taking advantage of books in the prison library or by participating in activities and programs through your chaplain’s office. Most importantly, share your spiritual and religious beliefs with your children. The lessons you learn could help your children through the hard times that they have faced and will face in life.

