



DADS AT A DISTANCE

Incarcerated Dads

Ideas for Strengthening Relationships Between Dads and Children

Research tells us that children with involved dads receive benefits that children without involved dads don't get.

Children with involved dads

- have better grades, positive problem solving skills, good health, ability to maintain close friendships, higher levels of empathy and compassion.
- become adults with a higher sense of satisfaction with life, more education, higher income, more stable jobs, stronger and longer marriages.

Involved dads provide physical care like feeding, bathing, clothing, and general care. They take children to activities, doctor appointments, school conferences, child care, games and practices. Involved dads play and interact in ways that show love and limits to their children. They know their children's likes, dislikes, and routines. Involved dads know the important people in their children's lives like friends, teachers, and coaches. They connect with their children on an emotional and spiritual level and reconnect with their children after an absence.

Creating and maintaining a positive relationship with children is challenging when dads are in jail or prison. Dads can work on making themselves physically healthier, mentally stimulated, self-controlled, and more employable.

Work on yourself:

- **Learn job skills.** Take advantage of any work program you can get into. Learn as much as you can about how the job is done, how it relates to other jobs. Get as good as you can at whatever task you are assigned. Look for additional skill development opportunities.

- **Get physically fit.** Activity to build strength and endurance will also help your body create the chemicals it needs to combat depression.
- **Go clean and straight.** Get into a treatment program to deal with any addictions. Find help to work through the emotional pain that gets you craving a fix.
- **Focus on your strengths.** Think about what you have already done for your child. Have you provided food, clothing, and housing in the past? Have you offered financial support recently?
- **Forgive yourself** and others you blame for getting you into the situation you are in right now. We all make mistakes. Kids don't need perfect dads. It is the wise father who doesn't make the same mistake twice.
- **List healthy ways to deal with your anger** such as deep breathing or physical exercise. Do not hurt yourself or another person. You hurt your child and your future together when you do that.
- **Make a list of important values** and qualities you want your child to have as an adult. Pick one and write your thoughts about why that value is important and what it would look like if your child had it.
- **Write a short note to your child.** Fill it with all the love you can. Date the note and save for the future. Write a note each month on the day that matches your child's birthday.
- **Listen to your child's caregiver.** Understand that her emotions are real but not yours. Deal with your own emotions before you react to what she says.

- **Look hard at your decisions.** Your child's mother and other relatives are skeptical about your involvement in your child's life. Make up your mind to change one attitude or behavior that will get you closer to the father you really want to be.

Make the most of visits:

- **Pay attention to your body language.** Stand up and greet your child with a handshake or hug. Get on your knees to greet a young child. Avoid having furniture between you.
- **Smile!** Say your child's name warmly.
- **Calm yourself** with a slow, deep breath when you notice your heart beating rapidly. Relax shoulders and arms by stretching.
- **Give your child time and space** to get used to you. You can begin the visit by telling a story, singing a song, or sharing a joke.
- **Play and talk with your child.** Request toys be available - blocks, balls, dolls, trucks, etc. Say things like
"I see you like the orange truck."
"I wonder if the doll is hungry."
- **Tell your child** about when you learned to ride a bicycle, got a pet, took swimming lessons, played games.
- **Read together.** Arrange for a book appropriate for your child's age. Practice reading the book out loud before the visit so you are confident of the words.



Although fathers may not be with their children every day, they are devoted to them.
How fathers handle separation because of incarceration will make an impact on their children.

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