



▼ *Tips from a Father in Prison*

▼ *Michael Carlin*

As a father in prison, I have experienced many different emotional highs and lows in trying to reattach to my son who is now a man with a family of his own. In my particular case, it was most difficult getting past the negative things my son was told about me during our separation.

This is a common experience for incarcerated fathers. For years I had many questions about my son and how he was managing without a father.

How had our separation made him feel about me being in prison? What exactly had he been told about me, and how could he eventually overcome any negative images or preconceived notions about me based upon what he was told?

Was he angry? Was he worried about it? How did he think I felt about him? Most importantly, who did his father's incarceration make him in his own eyes? So many questions.

The following is a list of suggestions that you can try in maintaining the attachment to your children from inside a prison.

(1) **Even if your relationship with the mother of your children is over**, you need to establish and maintain a positive relationship with her. For the sake of your children try to find ways to connect with her respectfully.

(2) **Don't expect big changes right away** from your family members. Take your time.

(3) **Find out about policies** regarding how you can connect with your child-visitation, letters, telephone calls, audio tapes, etc. Ask your prison chaplain, counselor or other staff.

(4) **Develop a plan and follow it** on how often you will connect with your child.

(5) **When explaining to your children** why you are not living with them, be honest but respect their ability to understand it according to their age.

(6) **When telling your children how important they are to you**, do not be surprised if they do not respond the way you want them to. Children are often angry that you did something wrong that prevents you from being with them.

(7) **To establish and maintain your family relationships** be ready to make amends and apologize to them.

(8) **Find ways to support your children** emotionally, financially, and spiritually as much as possible.

(9) **Your family/children need to be able to rely on you** if you say you will call or write regularly, so be consistent in your approach and your contact schedule.

(10) **Be realistic about goals and expectations**. Don't expect too much, too soon from them.

(11) **Remember family celebrations, special occasions and cultural events**. If you have hobby crafts at prison make gifts or draw pictures and make them into a coloring book.

(12) **If at all possible, purchase small items for your children** through commissary or mail order catalogs.

(13) **Use your time constructively**. Get your GED, take Parenting Classes, Anger Management, Adult Continuing Education Classes, anything that betters yourself.

(14) **Some prisons allow you to purchase and make video or audio tapes.** Use these to tell stories, share memories, bedtime stories, etc. Have your children listen to it when they miss you.

(15) **Before your release date, clear up any legal problems** that may be pending: driving record, credit problem, child support, etc.

(16) **Your children might not know how to say exactly what they are feeling and thinking,** so be patient with them.

(17) **Make a realistic plan** and follow through, no matter how bad things get, when re-connecting with your children after you are released from jail.

(18) **While you are still in prison, research programs that might help you reach your goals once released.** Seek out programs about parenting, housing, jobs, legal problems, credit problems, etc.

(19) **Work with other prison fathers** trying to connect with their children from inside prison.

(20) **Get some counseling** from the appropriate staff (psychologist, Chaplain, case manager, correctional counselor).

(21) **Think about how you want to be a parent and your future as a dad** and make decisions about that future. Look at your own relationship with your Dad to see what was learned, good and bad.

Think about how you want to be a parent and your future as a dad and make decisions about that future. Look at your own relationship with your Dad to see what was learned, good and bad.

(22) **Go to the prison library,** take the time to read what you can to try to learn being a better Dad. Try to read as much as you can about father/child relationships.

23) **Check out some of the other resources** in the Incarcerated Fathers Library.

Michael Carlin was selected as the recipient of the first Fellowship of the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents in 1996. He has served 14 years of consecutive sentences to state and federal prison for bank robbery and escape. •

Incarcerated Fathers Library pamphlets may be downloaded without charge from the Family and Corrections Network (FCN) web site, www.fcnetwork.org. Duplication is permitted and encouraged, so long as the materials are not altered or sold.

A printed set of the ten pamphlets can be ordered for \$6.00, shipping included, from FCN at the address below. Ask for *FCN REPORT #31 - The Incarcerated Fathers Library*. Sorry, FCN is not budgeted to mail free copies.

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Send comments to The Incarcerated Fathers Library at FCN, 32 Oak Grove Road, Palmyra, VA 22963, 434/589-3036, 434/589-6520 Fax, fcn@fcnetwork.org.

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