



Accompanying discussion guidelines Child rights video

“Because it’s our right”

<http://childrenofprisoners.eu/awareness-raising-videos/>

Children who have an imprisoned parent may experience anxiety, shame, low self-esteem. Sharing important moments, events and experiences may not be possible because their father/mother is far away. This can cause a young child to feel alone and confused.

Caregivers, teachers, and service providers like you can support children during this difficult time by validating their emotions, providing routine and structure, as well as helping them keep in touch.

One of the main recommendations of studies and experts working in the field is maintaining a quality contact between the child and their incarcerated parent. Children of Prisoners Europe supports an approach that works to ensure that the preconditions for good visits are met, moving towards re-establishing contact as early as possible when in the child’s best interest and towards strengthening the child-parent bond. Maintaining contact with their imprisoned parent (whether through visits or other forms) is reassuring for the child and has positive effects on their development. More information on children visiting prison and other forms of contact can be found in chapter 5 of “Children of imprisoned parents: European perspectives on good practice”, available online: <http://childrenofprisoners.eu/goodpracticeguide/>.

Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to maintain contact with their parent unless it is contrary to the child’s best interests.

Often, children are unaware of this right. To help them understand their right, as well as ways to connect with a parent who is far away, you can watch the following video with the child, and use the discussion prompts below to help begin a discussion about keeping in touch.

Discussion Prompts:

- *Rights* are something that all children have; things that they are entitled to. For example, all children have the right to:
 - Live in a safe place;
 - Eat nutritious food;
 - Wear clean clothing;
 - Express their feelings, and;
 - Speak what is on their mind.

The aim here is to teach children that they are rights bearers. A useful printout of a simplified Convention on the Rights of the Child can be found at: <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

- *Emotions*: Let the child know that they might feel sad that their parent is gone and frustrated that they can't speak to them as often as they're used to. Reassure the child that it's also still normal to feel happy in moments that bring them joy, and to laugh when something is funny. Tell the child that they have the right to express any and all of their feelings. Tell the child to think about speaking to a grown-up they trust.
- Explain to the child that they have the right to communicate with their incarcerated parent. If they need help doing so, encourage them to reach out to a grown-up they trust, like their parent or caregiver at home, their teacher, their coach, their doctor, or a close family friend.

Note: Depending on the country, there are Children's Commissioners and/or Ombudspersons for Children who are available to receive complaints and questions from children or their caregivers if their rights have been violated. There may also be other relevant local authorities who can help in these situations. Social workers and children's centres can also provide good bases for support.

- Writing a letter or speaking to a parent on the phone may not feel the same as it used to when the child was able to speak to them in person or to give them a hug. Assure the child that in each letter, drawing, and phone call, they can show that they still care about and miss their parent.
- There are many ways to keep in touch with a parent who is far away. You might:
 - Encourage the child to write a letter to their parent
 - Suggest that the child draw a picture and ask their parent to write a story about it
 - Schedule a phone call for the child to speak with their parent
 - Help the child find an article or story you think their parent might like to read, and then send it to the parent
 - Send the parent pieces of the child's schoolwork or their report card to keep the parent updated on how the child is doing
 - Take the child to visit their parent in person, if possible
 - Put them in touch with a local organisation supporting children of prisoners

- Writing a letter or talking to a parent on the phone may be difficult at first, especially if the child has not communicated with the parent in a long time. They may quickly run out of things to say. It can be helpful to have prompts on-hand to help the child create conversation. You might encourage the child to talk about:
 - What they are learning in school
 - Who they are friends with
 - Sports or hobbies
 - Activities they have recently done or trips they have taken
 - Something they are looking forward to, such as a holiday, a school trip, or a friend's birthday party

- Let the child know that they are not alone; there are many other children in their situation. You might also show them the video "800,000 voices" which highlights the different ways in which children across Europe react to the imprisonment of a parent. The video can be viewed online: <http://childrenofprisoners.eu/campaign-videos/>

- Reassure the child that you are here to listen and to talk with.