

Tips for explaining prison to a child

BE HONEST

It can be hard to know where to start when talking about prison, but your child will feel less confused and worried if you answer their questions honestly.

EVERY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT

Some families get all the children together; others tell each child separately. Some families tell older children first. Think about what will suit your family.

PLAN AHEAD

Think about and plan what you are going to say before starting the conversation.

TAKE YOUR TIME

It is important to make your child feel safe; you can help with this by being calm. If you need to, take a day or two to calm down before you tell your child.

THE TRUTH

Answer questions as honestly as you can. If you do not tell your child the truth, your child might still find out and find it difficult to trust you in the future.

START WITH A LITTLE

Give basic facts at first, and let your child set the pace about how much information they want. They will ask questions in their own time.

TRY TO STAY CALM

If you look upset or tell your child in a harsh voice, your child will think they did something wrong regardless of what you say.

IT'S OK NOT TO HAVE THE ANSWERS

It is okay to tell your child that you are upset and you do not know all the answers; just try to be honest and tell them when you're not sure of something.

DON'T RUSH

Make sure that when you tell your child, you have plenty of time to answer questions and comfort them.



Tips for explaining prison to a child

ASK FOR HELP

You can invite a child's favourite trusted adult to be nearby. This can help if they want to talk more but are worried about upsetting you.

FOSTER CARERS

If you are a foster carer, it may be best for your child's favourite extended relative or long-term family friend to explain it to them.

WHEN TO TELL THEM

Talk to your child before the first prison visit. It is simpler to tell your child the truth as soon as possible.

TAKE CONTROL

Consider that your child may accidentally find out where their parent is by overhearing a conversation in the playground or on the news.

STOP CONFUSION

Sometimes, children already have an idea about what has happened, so the sooner you tell them, the less confusion there will be.

IT TAKES TIME

You may need to explain it a few times to your child before they can take it in.

ARRANGE A VISIT

Try to arrange a visit, phone call or video call with the parent in prison for soon after they are told.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Sometimes, parents in custody do not want their child to know about their new situation, but children have a right to know where their mum or dad has gone.

Remember, you are the best judge of how much information to give to make it easier for your child.

