

How to Talk about Incarceration



Amachi
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Hands of Faith in Action

Why talk about parental incarceration?

Parental incarceration is important to discuss with children whose parents are incarcerated. Many children of incarcerated parents have several unanswered questions of where the parent is, how to get in touch with their parent, and who will look after them while their parent is away. The following information will be helpful for mentors to use with a child/teenager who is ready to talk about their parent or parents in jail or prison.

Talking about incarceration:

- Talking to a child about their incarcerated parent can be very difficult.
- When having this conversation about the incarcerated parents, it is important to be honest.
- Depending on the age of the child or teenager, do not sugarcoat the information.



When speaking to a child or teenager about their incarcerated parent, be sure to use:

- Empathy
- Compassion
- Mindfulness
- Always be honest



Helpful Tips!

These are to be used when first initiating the conversation...

- The mentor should never be the one to initiate this conversation.
- Be sure to ask the child or teenager how they are doing.
- Check up with them on their week, schooling, family and friend interactions.
- Talk about the situations in their lives that may be giving them stress.
- Show the child or teenager that you care.
- Be a role model for the individual.
- Talk about any negative influences they are having.
- How to make the right choices in their lives through situational exercises.

Common Questions



Kids may ask these and **this is a guideline** for how you should respond. We recommend that you modify the language to fit your relationship with your mentee/child as well as the child's specific needs and circumstances.

Child/Teenager: Where is my mom or dad?

Responder: The view of Amachi Pittsburgh is to tell the truth and be open. (The custodial parent should be respected and have the final word).

Child/Teenager: Why did mom or dad go to jail or prison?

Responder: People are sent to jail or prison because they did not obey the law.

Child/Teenager: Will I go to jail or prison?

Responder: If you make good choices and obey the law, you can graduate, obtain the job you want, and be successful.



Child/Teenager: Is it my fault that they went to jail or prison?

Responder: No, absolutely not. You had nothing to do with what happened.

Child/Teenager: Do they still love me?

Responder: Reassure him or her that the parent will always love them. No matter what happens.

Child/Teenager: How long will mom or dad be in jail or prison?

Responder: Give concrete answers, something like, "We don't know what will happen yet" or, "We're unsure." (If the custodial parent approves of telling this information and it's factual, you can share this information with the child or teenager.)

Child/Teenager: Can I talk to my mom or dad?

Responder: Writing them a letter or drawing them a picture will be more important to the person in jail or prison since phone calls aren't always the quickest and most available option.

[This could be a great mentoring activity with your mentee if the child's parent/guardian approves.](#)

Child/Teenager: Who is going to take care of me?

Responder: Let them know who will be taking care of them and what his or her living rearrangements will be.

Child/Teenager: What can I do to help?

Responder: Your mother or father will need your love and support and need to be on your best behavior.

- For information on this subject regarding younger kids, please visit this Sesame Street website: <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration>
- For additional information, please contact Amachi Pittsburgh at (412) 281-1288 and look at the website at www.AmachiPgh.org