

## Parenting From Behind The Walls

This is a collection of ideas that I am putting together because I am going to a federal prison camp for 4 years and I have been looking for any ideas or links to information that I can personally do to love and support my family while I am detained, but I have not been able to find very much at all. I have looked within the system, various prisoner support groups and on the Internet and I cannot find a single, simple and thorough collection of ideas.

So hopefully I can start one that I can use and that will eventually become a catalyst for a conversation that should be taking place in every nook and cranny of the penal system. I am initially trying to think of things (from silly to stupendous) that I can do or prepare before reporting and those I can do while I am serving my time. I imagine that this will expand into what I can do to be the best parent I can after I am released from prison as well as to how I can love my wife before, during and after as well.

As a disclaimer, this is my first time going to prison so I do not know an awful lot about what you are allowed to do, receive or send while in prison. I do not know how actively a prison wants you to be in your children's lives and what they are willing to do to foster these relationships. I imagine that it will vary a great deal from facility to facility. So with that in mind, I understand that not all of these ideas will work in every situation. So just use the ones that work in your personal situation and fight for changes that are needed to allow prisoners to be the best parents they can be while they are imprisoned and for the rest of their lives. This is in everyone's best interest, especially the children's.

If you're reading this and have any ideas that you would like to share, please send them to me at [calicodog@gmail.com](mailto:calicodog@gmail.com) or you can call me at 425.485.1048 so that I can add them to my list. I will post this list online before self surrender on July 1, 2008 so that other families can use the ideas to stay closer to each other and so that they can add their great ideas to it and pass it on as well!

**Highlighted items** are things that need to be included or worked on. Most often these are for hyperlinks or attachments.

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## Important Notes:

Make sure and have someone make photocopies or take digital scans of the important communications that are going back and forth. These memories will be important for generations to come. Also, if your copies get lost or stolen while you are in prison, you can have the copy sent to you.

# Parents For Their Children

## Pre-Incarceration

### Audio Stories

Record audio stories, poems, letters for your children either with a tape recorder or your computer so that they can play them while you are away. [Here is a list of some ideas...](#)

### Buried Treasure

Bury a “treasure” in your back yard (or a family member’s or friend’s backyard) and draw up an elaborate treasure hunt map for your children to go on. This is great for birthdays or other special events that will happen while you are in prison.

### Cards

From what I can tell, cards are pretty expensive at the prison commissary, and I imagine the supply is limited. So if there are any really special occasions that you want to have a special card for, I would buy those now and write what you want in them. Leave them with someone you can trust to give the person it is intended for.

### Games and Game Boards

Find a way to play your children’s favorite games with them from prison, either over the phone or by mail. You can make personalized game boards for them such as the checker and chess board I made for my daughter ([checkers board](#)). I used first names of family members and then funny description words to make it more interesting.

### Letters

I think for most of us checking into a prison there is usually at least a week or two where we might not be able to write to our family. Write a couple of letters that you can send before being incarcerated (or have someone drop in the mail for you). Let your children know that you are all right in those letters and that you are thinking of them constantly. Let them know that you haven’t gotten your “room assignment” yet and you can’t tell them much about the facility because you are still in processing, etc. but you are doing well and you love them and miss them like crazy. This will help calm their fears and know that you are making them a priority.

### Pictures

#### *Blue Screen Pictures*

If you take a digital picture of somebody in front of a blue screen or a green screen (even a blue or green blanket), you can place them in just about any other digital picture that is taken. So get someone to take a bunch of pictures of you in front of a blue or green screen and give them to someone who will be able to do some fun things with them. For instance, your pictures can be inserted into family photos and pictures of graduations, vacations and family gatherings and then mailed to you in prison or kept by your loved ones.. Make sure and take some pretty funny pictures as well as some normal or serious ones.

### ***Life Size Model***

You can have life-size, standup cutouts made of you that your family can use to have some fun and “include” you in special occasions. These are great for family and friends as well as for yourself.

### ***Photo Pillows***

You can have a picture of yourself put on a pillow that your child can go to sleep with every night.

### **Puzzles**

take a couple of your favorite pictures and have them made in to a puzzle that your family can put together.

### **Videos**

Make videos with and/or for your family before you go. You can make a video for graduations, birthdays, anniversaries and other important events that you will miss while you are in prison. Do not worry about production quality or anything like that. They will not care!

## **During Incarceration**

### **Activity Calendar**

Make sure that you have a written calendar of all of the important events happening in your life and the lives of your family and friends outside of the prison. Use this calendar to remember these events and to send letters or cards to these people at appropriate times. Ask your friends and family to keep you updated of important events so that you can add them to your calendar.

### **Book of Questions**

Write for children a “Book Of Questions” that they can answer and send back to you. Have them write a book of questions that you can answer and send back to them. These can start off kind of silly and then move on to more serious questions after a couple of exchanges.

### **Copy That**

Copy everything and send it to the parent in prison. Report cards, soccer schedules, school work, artwork, etc. . Make copies or have duplicate copies provided by school, etc.

### **Dad Mail**

Have the person taking care of your younger kids get a mail box and decorate it, putting a picture of dad and child. Your child can put mail in whenever they want and put the flag up. Your mail to them can be put in their as well. If there are times when you can't write, the caregivers can put a letter or gift in there for your child.

### **Fill in the Blank Letters**

To make responding easier to you or to just break the ice; you can send a fill in the blank letter complete with a self-addressed stamped envelope to someone. These can be funny or serious, depending on the situation. [Examples](#)

### **Freedom Calendar**

Once you know your expected release date, you can make a freedom calendar for your family to use to count down the days until you'll be reunited. Make the calendar fun, colorful and creative as possible.

[Example](#)

### **News Source / Family Journal**

Have your child act as your eyes and ears to the outside world while you are in prison is a great way to communicate, help your children with their writing skills and help them feel more involved in your life. The premise that I used was that I could not access much information at all about what was happening in the world, our neighborhood and our family; so I really need my children's help to stay connected. My six year old daughter really got behind the idea and felt really involved.

### **Movie Night**

Talk with your children and coordinate watching movies, sporting events and/or other TV programs that you have access to in prison. Then discuss these with your children on the phone, in letters or at upcoming visits. You can even make a fill in the blank sheet to send to one another with questions ranging from "What was the best play of the game?" to "How did you like the ending?" to "How many burps did you count?". [Sample Sheets – Sports – Movie](#)

### **My Little Illustrator**

Parent can write stories with spaces for pictures and child can draw pictures and return the story to parent.

### **My Favorite Things**

Make a list of your favorite things.....

### **Notes from Dad/Mom**

Send little notes to the person(s) taking care of your children that they can put into their lunches, backpacks, under their pillows, in the ashtrays other cars, etc. at random or special times.

### **Where do We Want to go From Here?**

This is an exercise that every family should do while one of them is in prison. Start a dialogue with your kids, wife, lover, parents, etc. and actively discuss how you want your life to look and what you want your life to include once you are released from prison.

### **Write a story**

I am going to write Maddy a story in the beginning, probably a chapter each month or something like that. I am working on developing an idea for the story line and trying to decide what I want to communicate most through the story. After that story, I plan to write a story with Maddy (and Jacob) where I write a chapter and send it home and then they write a chapter and send it back, and so on.

### **After Incarceration**

# **Children for Their Incarcerated Parents**

**Make a Book**

**Growth Chart**

## **Institutionally Supported (or at least allowed)**

I know I am probably dreaming here, but what the heck....

### **How To or Skill Sheets**

These are sheets that are pre-designed that prisoners could print off and send to their children. Or they could buy them (for hopefully very little) from the commissary etc.

### **Parenting Groups in Prison**

OK, so maybe I am dreaming, but how about a really well organized parenting group program for inside the prisons?

<http://www.forgivenministry.org/mprogramFantasticFathers.htm> - A Forgiven Ministry volunteer facilitates the meeting and participants look at ways they can be involved in their children's life even behind the walls. The result is a network of men who become accountable to each other and to God for their relationship with their children.

## Random Links and Resources

### Caregiver's Choice

In March 2008, the Department of Health and Human Services launched a program to connect children of incarcerated parents with adult mentors. This program is designed to provide a mentor for the children. The caregiver's/parent (of the children) apply and enroll their children into this program. Once enrolled, the caregiver/parent chooses a local mentoring program for the child to participate in. The best part about this program is that it is FREE to the children and the caregivers/parents.

This program is for any child between the ages of 4-18. To enroll directly call 877-333-2464 or look online for the program. The program is called Caregiver's Choice. Look it up.

### Great Dads – One Day With God Camp

It is called (Great Dads) One Day With God Camp. It gives children who haven't seen their dads in weeks, months, or years a chance to be able to spend a Saturday with their dad.

They have food and drinks (pizza, popcorn, hotdogs, desserts, etc). There are arts and craft activities the child and their father get to participate in together, and the kids get to wear a special T-shirt with the program logo on it and I think the dad can wear the T-shirt too and doesn't have to wear his prison uniform on that Saturday too (don't quote me on it though). But they get to have fun with their fathers and I think it would be great for anyone who has kids and doesn't already know about it

I have seen this program one day while I went to visit my fiance' in prison and they brought in 20 boxes of pizza hut pizza and all sort of food and games and there was a lot of kids there too with the program so I have seen it.

The program is a part of Forgiven Ministry and they have a website where you can find out about it. They travel to 8 Different States. I emailed the program and the founder gave me some info. But if you are unsure which prisons they go to or don't know if they will consider the prison where your love one is at WRITE OR E-MAIL!!!! You never know what could happen when enough people respond to these programs or ask the facility/DOC about those types of programs.

Articles:

<http://www.reflector.com/featr/content/features/stories/2007/11/18/oneday.html>

Program Website: <http://www.forgivenministry.org/mprogramOneDaywithGod.htm>

Contact Forgiven Ministry at 828-632-6424 or [forgivenministry@vol.com](mailto:forgivenministry@vol.com).