



# TRANSITIONING OFFENDERS PROGRAM<sup>®</sup>

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www.TOPwa.org

## Parenting in Prison

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*“Even though I am in prison I am not just a convict, I am a parent too. Although my family roles are seldom acknowledged in a prison setting, once incarcerated, I do not give up my family identity or parental status. I have many of the same dreams and aspirations for my family and children as other men and share many of the same parenting joys and difficulties. Maintenance of responsible husband and father roles during imprisonment is related to my well-being, to the well-being of my family and children, and to our post release success.”*

- Children of Incarcerated Parents

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While parenting on the outside is challenging, parenting while in prison has its own unique challenges. No matter what your own situation is, there are some things you can do to be a better parent while you are incarcerated. These include:

- Giving your child your time
- Listening to your child
- Being prepared
- Focusing on your child
- Taking advantage of programs that are offered to you
- Being involved in their life
- Listen, Listen, Love, Love

Each one of these is important to your continued positive involvement with your child while in prison.

### *Give Your Child Your Time*

You have been given an allotment of time to serve in the Washington State Prison System. You have the choice on how you spend that time. There are many positive activities that you can utilize it for that can benefit your child. These include:

- Writing to your child
- Making games and puzzles for them
- Drawing pictures for them
- Finding jokes and sending to them
- Keep a journal for them
- Calling them
- Ensuring you are eligible for visits and

### Extended Family Visits

- Use your craft box to make things for them, bead necklaces, scarves, mittens, and other projects

These are all *positive* things that they can hold in their hand and say “My dad sent me this.”

### *Listen to Your Child*

Active listening opens the door for clear communication between you and your child. When you listen as a parent you are trying to understand what your child is trying to communicate to you. Avoid roadblock responses such as giving orders, using threats, preaching, lecturing, analyzing, etc., just listen. There are phrases that open doors to communication, some examples are:

- Your ideas are important to me.
- I want to understand you better
- Your feelings are important and valid
- I really do want to hear your point of view.

These phrases say more than just what the words say, they open the door for your child to talk to you. They allow you to listen from your heart.

### *Be Prepared*

When you have an opportunity to interact with your child be prepared ahead of time. It is really easy to be so excited to see them or talk to them that the focus shifts from them and their needs to you and your needs. As an

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event approaches where you are going to interact with your child think about what their needs might be, their concerns and worries. Plan to actively listen and address these concerns *first*, before addressing your needs.

### *Focus On Your Child*

There are many things that you can focus on while you are incarcerated from being a better parent to the weight deck. Focusing your time and energy on your child will both build your relationship with them now and will help them build their self-esteem and character for the future.

### *Take Advantage Of Offered Programs*

There are several programs offered while you are incarcerated that can help you understand your child better and be a better parent. Being a better parent starts with you. Any class that helps you be a better person helps you be a better parent. There are also some specific programs for parents that can be of use to you. These include:

- Partners in Parenting Class
- Read to me Daddy Program
- Parent Teacher Conferences
- Special Events at Visiting

Partners in Parenting is a class that covers concepts important for parenting including communication skills, guidance techniques and positive discipline strategies.

The Read to me Daddy program is a program where you record yourself reading books to your child and then send them to them.

Parent Teacher Conferences are set up through your counselor and are a three way call with your child's guardian, their teacher and you.

Special events at visiting include things such as craft and game night, back to school event, winterfest and day with dads.

These are all opportunities for you to learn to be a better parent. See your counselor for more details on programs that your institution offers for fathers.

### *Be Involved In Your Child's Life*

Just because you are incarcerated does not

mean that you cannot be an active and involved part of your child's life. Through listening you will learn more than just what sport they are playing and what grade they are in, you will learn their hopes, their dreams, their worries and their fears.

With the information you gain from listening to your child you can become involved in those things that truly matter to them. This may be music, writing, playstation, or history. Now you can research that subject and help them make their interest and dream grow. It gives you things to talk to them about and things to write about.

Being involved does not mean being in control. There are many factors involved in making decisions for your child's life, factors that those caring for your child on the outside are aware. Trust them to make the right decisions. They have control of the situation, support them in their parenting of your child.

### *Listen, Listen, Love, Love*

Active listening takes practice, focus, and your full attention. When you actively listen you are listening with your heart. It comes without judgment or condemnation. Through your actions it says "I Love You" and "I care enough about you to listen to what you have to say." First you listen, then you listen some more. Then you love and love some more.

### *How Can I Make A Difference*

Make your child a priority

- More important than fighting
- More important than status
- More important than your ex
- More important than your gang
- More important than you.....

Listen, Listen, Love, Love

Be there. Every father has a different situation. Be there for your child as much as your situation will allow.

### *Make A Commitment To Your Child*

*I commit to being the best father that I possibly can be, not for me, but for my child no matter what the personal cost may be.*

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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