What is Life like in Prison?

A Child's Guide to Understanding Incarceration

The Oregon Department of Corrections

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Thank you!

What is this Booklet About?

An Introduction for Caregivers

When children experience a loved one's incarceration, it can be a scary and uncertain time for them. Young children have questions regarding safety, environment, and daily experiences while in prison. This booklet is written to help children better understand what daily life is like inside Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Though this guide was created for young children, it includes information for children of every age. It is also suitable for others dealing with the transition of a loved one into prison, and those interested in better understanding life and routines at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

What is Prison?

What is a prison? A prison is a place where people stay when they have broken a grown-up rule called a law. Just like school has rules for children, adults have rules they must follow too. When adults break a law, they often spend some time in a place called prison. Usually, people stay in prison for a while. It's okay to feel however you want—scared, sad, or upset—when someone you love is in prison. It helps to talk to a grown-up you trust when you feel this way. And remember, you are not alone. This book will help you understand a little about what life may be like in prison.

Day to Day Life

When a person goes to prison, their life may change in many ways. They'll have to wear the same kind of clothes as everyone else, and they have to follow many important rules and directions. But even though their life may be different from yours, there are still some things that are the same.

Sleeping in Prison

When someone is in prison, they are given a room called a cell. This is like a bedroom with a bunk bed, and they might have to share with another person. The cells usually have a toilet and a sink too.

Sometimes many people share one large room with several bunk beds, called a dorm. In both cells and dorms, people get their own bed to sleep in each night, with a pillow and blanket—just like you!

Eating in Prison

Your loved one has tables outside of their room to eat, read, study, or play games during free time. At Coffee Creek, they can get their food from the kitchens and bring it to these tables so they may eat with their neighbors or roommates.

If they need it, people may be able to get special food that helps them follow their religion or keep their body healthy.

Activities

It's important that people in prison use their time well, and keep busy. Even though someone is in prison, they may still be able to enjoy some of the things you like too, like reading books or getting fresh air.

They can get books from the prison library...

They can enjoy the prison garden...

They can even take classes and learn new things.

Special Activities

People living at Coffee Creek have some really cool activities they may be able to do. Not everyone can take part in these activities, which is why they are special.

The puppy program teaches people how to train puppies to be good dogs. Once the puppies have learned how to help people in need, they go to new homes outside the prison.

The beekeeping program teaches people in prison how to care for bees and harvest honey. Beekeeping is a lot of work, but without bees we wouldn't have flowers, fruits, or vegetables. The beekeeping program happens outside, where bees are happiest.

Work

Grown-ups can also work while they are in prison. There are many different jobs they can do.

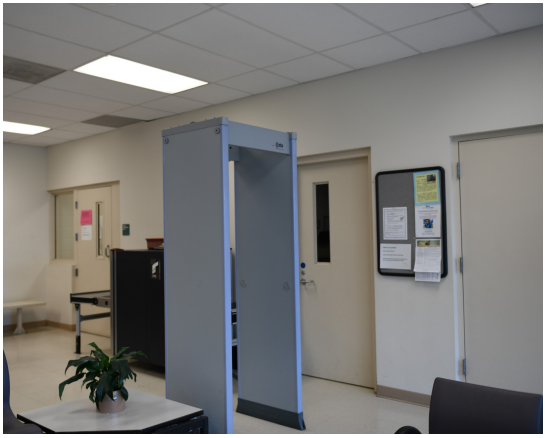
People at Coffee Creek have the option to work in the textile program. They can make things like baby clothes...

and beautiful quilts.

They can also learn how to cut hair, do makeup, or paint nails with the School of Cosmetology.

Visiting

While people are in prison, it can be hard being away from family. That's why prisons offer visits for family members! Here's what to expect if you and your family decide to visit the prison.



This is a metal detector. You'll have to walk through it before visiting someone in prison. It scans your body to make sure you are safe to enter the visiting room.

This is the visiting room. You can hang out with your loved one in this area. Look for the colorful and creative art in the visiting room. Some of the people living in the prison worked together to make this art for visitors like you.

Visiting

There are some fun things just for kids and their loved ones to enjoy during a visit.

This is an area for kids to watch movies and read books.

If you make a drawing while visiting, it can be hung up on this special wall. It has art from other kids too.

The prison also has a playground for kids when the weather is nice.

Communication

There are many ways to talk to your loved one while they're in prison. Some people can use a phone, a computer, or even write letters.

Your parent may be able to use these phone booths to call family and friends.

There is also a video chat station so people in prison can see and talk to their family members even when they can't visit in person.

The prison also has a mail room, so that people can send and get letters.

Conclusion

Someone you know may be in prison because they broke an important grown-up rule, but that person can still be a part of your life. There are many ways an adult can grow and learn while in prison, so they can become a better person.

Remember if you have questions or want to share your feelings, talk to someone you care about and trust.

More for Kids and Caregivers

Books for Young Readers

Mamma Loves Me from Away by Pat Brisson (2-5 years)

What is Jail, Mommy? by Jackie A. Stanglin (4-6)

Far Apart, Close at Heart by Becky Birtha (4-8)

What Do I Say About That? Coping with an Incarcerated Parent by Julia Cook (4-8)

Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson (5-7)

The Night Dad Went to Jail: What to Expect when Someone You Love Goes to Jail by Melissa Higgins (5-8)

When Dad Was Away by Liz Weir (5-8)

Our Moms (Living with Incarcerated Parents) by Q. Futrell and Clarissa Ferguson (7-9)

Ruby on the Outside by Nora Raleigh Baskin (8-12)

Clarissa's Disappointment: And Resources for Families, Teachers and Counselors of Children of Incarcerated Parents by Megan Sullivan (8-12)

Everyone Makes Mistakes: Living with My Daddy in Jail by Madison Strempek (9-12)

Jakeman by Deborah Ellis (10-12)

An Inmate's Daughter by Jan Walker (12-15)

Wish You Were Here: Teens Write about Parents in Prison by Autumn Spanne (13-17)

More for Kids and Caregivers

Books for Caregivers

Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children by Laura M. Maruschak and Lauren E. Glaze

Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality by Christopher Wildeman and Sara Wakefield

Empowering Children of Incarcerated Parents by Jennifer Carsey, Stacey Burgess, and Tonia Caselman

Loving Through Bars: Children with Parents in Prison by Cynthia Martone

More for Kids and Caregivers

Online Resources

https://www.prisonersfamilies.org/telling-the-children/

http://friendsoutside.org/assets/pdf/How-to-Tell-Children.pdf

https://app.pelorous.com/public/cms/209/432/570/2195/The_Outsiders_Telling_the_children.pdf?realName=Kip719.pdf?v=

https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/

https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/parenting/explaining-fathers-imprisonment-to-the-kids

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