

Raising a Relative's Child



A FREE guide
for caregivers of children
with incarcerated parents

Developed by JustKids, an initiative of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, through the generous support of The Law Foundation of BC and The Notary Foundation of BC.

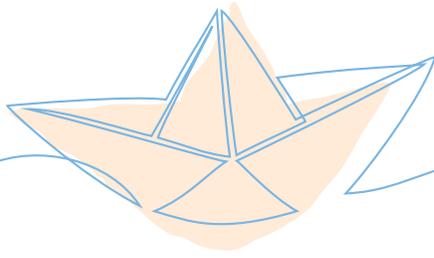


Table of Contents

How to Use this Guide	4
Becoming a Child's Caregiver	5
YOUR ROLE AS CAREGIVER	5
MAKING THE CHILD FEEL AT HOME	6
HOW THE CHILD MIGHT BEHAVE	7
PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE	11
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	13
HEALTH COVERAGE	17
School	18
HOW PARENTAL INCARCERATION CAN IMPACT A CHILD'S EDUCATION	18
TALKING WITH SCHOOL PERSONNEL	19
THE PRINCIPAL OR VICE-PRINCIPAL	19
TEACHERS	20
COUNSELLORS	20
BEING AN ADVOCATE	20
COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL	21
AFFORDING FIELD TRIPS	21
SPECIALIZED EDUCATION SUPPORT	22
MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY AT SCHOOL	23
IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS	23
What to Do During School Breaks	24
CAMPS	24
SUMMER CLASSES AT SCHOOL	25
RECREATION	25
GIRL GUIDES AND SCOUTS	25



Child Health & Development	26
RAISING CHILDREN OF DIVERSE CULTURES	26
CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES	26
TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE SAFE AND RECOGNIZE RISK	26
INTERNET SAFETY	27
SMOKING AND VAPING	27
ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE	28
PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN (3-5 YEARS OLD)	28
YOUNG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN (6-10 YEARS OLD)	28
PRETEENS AND TEENS (11-18 YEARS OLD)	28
GANGS	29
SUMMER AND AFTER-SCHOOL JOBS	29
Supporting Child-Parent Relationships	30
BENEFITS OF MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH PARENTS	30
TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR PARENTS	30
VISITING PARENTS IN PRISON	30
ALTERNATIVES TO IN-PERSON CONTACT	31
WHEN THE PARENT IS RELEASED	31

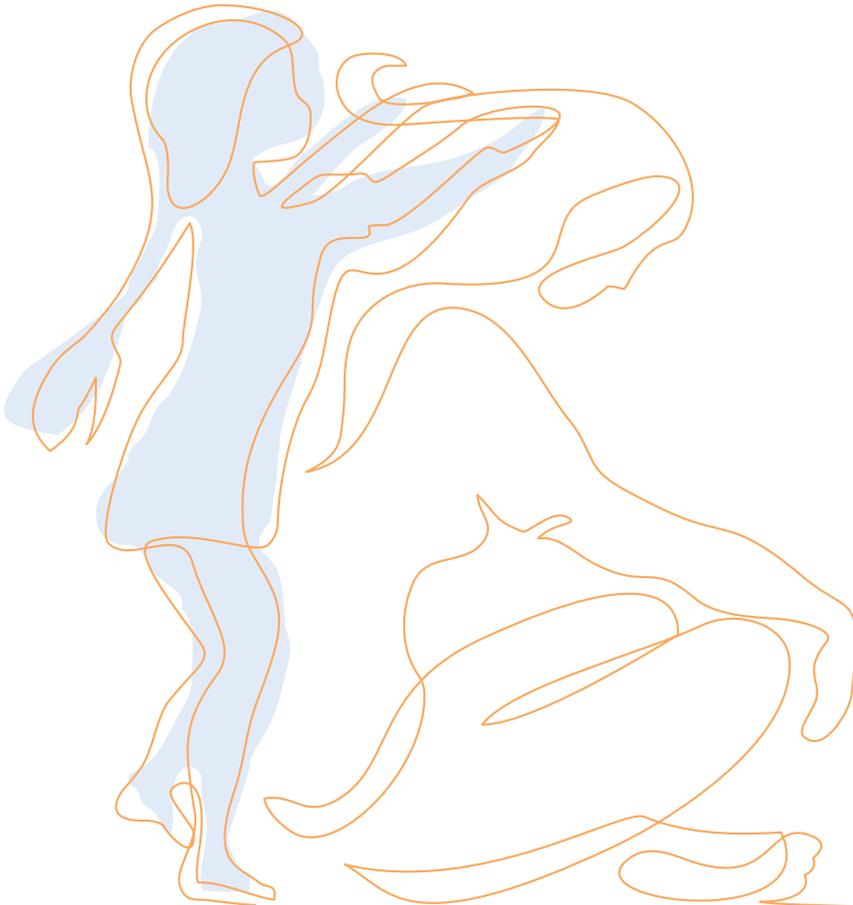
How to Use this Guide

If you have become the main caregiver of a relative's child because their parent is in prison or can't look after them due to addictions or mental health issues, this guide is for you.

This guide contains general advice that applies to most caregiver relationships. Your personal situation may have restrictions or complications which limit how you might apply this information.

You don't need to read this guide in order or all at once. It has been designed for you to be able to jump from one section to another as needed over time.

Inserted into this booklet, you should also find a list of organizations that offer support services in your area. If this is missing, please call EFry at **604-520-1166** or if you live outside of Greater Vancouver, call toll free at **1-888-879-9593**. Ask for JustKids, which are EFry's services for children with incarcerated parents. If you prefer, you can email us at caregiverhelp@elizabethfry.com.



Becoming a Child's Caregiver

YOUR ROLE AS CAREGIVER

When you take in a relative's child, you help make the best of a very hard situation. It is much better for children's emotional well-being to be cared for by family than it is for them to enter foster care. Still, it is usually a traumatic change for a child. For you, becoming responsible for a child can feel overwhelming, particularly if you are a grandparent who did not expect to be raising a child again, or if you are an adult who has never raised a child before.

You have probably made your decision to take in the child because you love them and want to protect them as much as you can. It's also likely you are hopeful that the parent and child will one day be able to live together again. At the same time, it is normal for you to feel many difficult emotions: grief, embarrassment, guilt, anger, resentment, isolation, anxiety, fear or sadness.

For now, you are essentially the child's parent, though you might not have a formal, legal guardianship. Whether the child is well-known to you and has always lived nearby, or this new situation means a long distance move for the child, you are both (along with anyone else living in your home) going through a big transition. Try to be gentle with yourself as well as the child. It will take time to become settled and comfortable in this new role.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Know that you are not alone and the roller-coaster of feelings you likely experience are normal. Each year, nearly 250,000 Canadian children have a parent in prison. What you have taken on is not easy. There is help available to you, both financially and in dealing with the challenges of raising a child.

Throughout this handbook, you will find information on resources that can help with various issues.

If you have internet access, EFry invites you to join our private Caregiver Support Group on Facebook. Visit EFry's Facebook page, [@EFryVancouver](#). Click on Groups, which is on the left side of the page, and choose Caregiver Support Group. Because it is a private group, EFry's staff must approve all applicants, so it may take a day or two to get access. If it is easier for you, email caregiverhelp@elizabethfry.com and we will send you an invitation to the group.

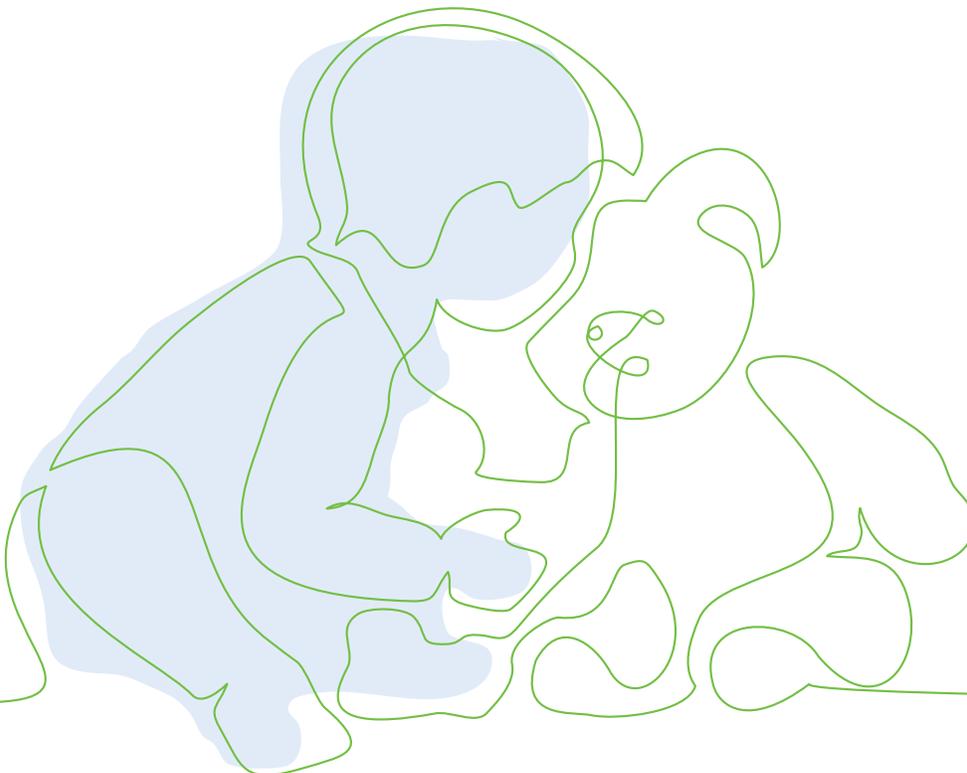
MAKING THE CHILD FEEL AT HOME

When a child's parent can no longer look after them, it is very traumatic for the child. They lose their main caregiver and their home all at once. If they must move far away from where they were living, they also lose their school and friends.

You can help ease the transition by letting the child bring familiar objects, like toys, books, pictures from their walls and even bedding (many children have a favourite blanket or pillow that brings them comfort).

If there is room in your home, it can be helpful to give a child a space of their own where they can keep their belongings and decorate the walls with pictures. Even if the child sleeps in a shared space, they may like to have some of their art displayed, to help them feel like the space is theirs too.

If you don't live too far away from the child's former home, it can be helpful to plan playdates with their friends from their old school, especially if they have a best friend. Playdates can be comforting to children. You arrange these by calling or emailing the other child's parents. If the children are old enough, they can contact each other to make the arrangements. Playdates don't have to cost money. Children are usually happy just to play at each other's homes or at a nearby park or school playground.



HOW THE CHILD MIGHT BEHAVE

BEHAVIOUR	WHAT TO DO
School problems	<p>First, calmly talk to the child and let them know you want to help. Ask how it's going at school. Explore the child's perspective about how they are being treated by other students and the teacher, and what they think the problems are.</p> <p>Whether the problems are academic or social, the child's teacher and/or school counsellor may be able to help. Teachers are usually willing to help children who are struggling, so consider talking to them if you think the problem could be made better with their support. If the teacher says they cannot help, ask for a meeting with the school principal. All school personnel are required to protect your child's privacy so they cannot talk about what you share unless you say it's okay.</p>
A hard time focusing on anything	<p>Is the child getting proper sleep and nutrition? Do you need to remove or reduce distractions in the home like music or TV to help them focus and have a calm space?</p> <p>Consider whether the child is seeing and hearing correctly. Perhaps they need a vision or hearing test, which can be arranged for by a family doctor at no cost.</p>
Clingy: The child won't let you out of their sight	<p>The child is likely afraid you will abandon them like they feel their parent did. Assure them you will keep being there for them as long as they need you. Be patient, it can take awhile for a child to feel comfortable.</p>

BEHAVIOUR



WHAT TO DO

Reverts to behaviours they'd grown out of or there is a sudden behaviour change

(Examples: bedwetting, crying inconsolably at the thought of being left with a sitter, being unable to sleep at night)

These are signs of anxiety. Don't punish the child. Assure them everything will be okay. It's perfectly normal for children to prefer being with their parents, so let them know their parent is safe and did not choose to leave them but had no choice. Tell the child you will make sure they are safe. If there is a logical reason the child is with you explain it (for example, your family relationship to their parent). Assure the child their parent knows where they are and wants the child to be safe and cared for. If you are going out and the child is with a sitter, say when you will be back, what you will be doing, and explain to the child what they will be doing while you are away.

Changes in eating habits: eating less or more, hoarding food

Feeding themselves is one way a child can feel some degree of control. When their life completely changes and they can't control it, behaviours like these can emerge. Assure the child food is readily available. Try to speak with them about their behaviour in a way that is not hurtful. If they seem to need a food stash to feel secure, a large Tupperware container with a lid to keep out bugs could let them keep their emotional safety "basket of food" until they feel more comfortable.

Takes on responsibilities they are too young for

(Example: trying to parent their younger sibling)

This may be another way children try to feel safe, by proving to themselves they can do more grown-up things. They might also be trying to prove to you they are helpful, so you do not abandon them.

Let the child know that while you appreciate their efforts, they are too young for that responsibility. Ask them to do something else more suited to their age.

BEHAVIOUR



WHAT TO DO

Behaviour gets worse after visiting parent

It's natural for a child to feel conflicted. They love their parent and want to be with them but visiting their parent can make a child feel disloyal if they also care for you.

Research shows it is best for children to maintain a relationship with their parents. As their caregiver, be patient with the child's conflicting emotions or behaviours. Let them know you don't want to replace their parent and that the two of you have a special separate relationship. Your job is for the child to be safe and loved for the entire time they are separated from their parent. Tell them their parent, you and everyone who cares about them wants them to be happy. Speak honestly. If you don't know how long the situation will go on, tell them that. Also let them know you will tell them when you do know. Use strategies like those outlined above for when a child reverts to behaviours you thought they had grown out of.

Inappropriate sexual behaviour

Sometimes children exhibit sexual behaviours. Exploration of their own body and curiosity about others' bodies is normal, so the first question to ask is whether what is happening is normal for the child's age and developmental status. There can be different cultural, ethical and religious views about appropriate sexual behaviour. If you decide the sexual behaviour is about age-appropriate exploration, it can be an opportunity to talk to the child about social and other expectations regarding public and private behaviour.

If you believe it is not age appropriate (for example, if the child in your care or any other child is being convinced or forced to take part, or if they seem to do it a lot, it is degrading, or involves another child who is quite a bit older or younger) then you need to take other action. It could be a signal that something has happened to the child. It doesn't necessarily mean they have been physically or sexually abused.



Inappropriate sexual behaviour

There are several things that can lead to inappropriate sexual behaviour: witnessing family violence or illicit drug use or alcohol abuse; experiencing trauma, loss and alienation; a chronic lack of parental supervision; a lack of age-appropriate behaviour boundaries and circumstances where young children are required to assume parental or caregiver responsibilities for younger siblings.

The first thing to know is such behaviour communicates that something has troubled the child and they might not be able to tell you what that is. Children can be affected by things they see before they can speak, so their feelings might not be organized around language and thinking. You need to intervene to stop the behaviour and monitor the situation and child for safety. Explain what appropriate behaviour is and how their behaviour broke that norm.

There is a relationship between the severity of the situation and how you should respond. In BC, if you think someone under the age of 19 is being abused (or neglected), you have the legal duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker. Phone **1-800-663-9122** at any time of the day or night. If you are unsure, plan to consult with others, talk to a health professional like a doctor or nurse, and make notes for yourself. After you have done that, you may still need to call a child welfare worker. If you call, you need to follow the direction you are given about what to do.

You may also need to speak to the child about their physical and emotional safety. Invite them to talk to you about their feelings, regardless of whether they are socially acceptable or not. You can help a child understand what they are feeling, and seek additional help for them if necessary.

PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE

PARENTING DON'Ts	PARENTING DOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not spank or hit. It has been proven to damage self-esteem and is no longer acceptable.• Screaming or yelling at a child is not okay. If you make a mistake and yell, apologize.	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be kind, firm and fair.• Tell the child what you expect of them when they come to live with you. Repeat as needed.• Let the child know the consequences of not doing what you say. Follow through.• Encourage the child to do what you ask with when/then statements, like “when you clean up your room, then you can go play outside.”• Live by the same household rules you expect from the child. For example, picking up after yourself and expressing anger without yelling.• You are their role model. Say you are sorry when you make a mistake.• Pick your battles. Sometimes, you need to let small things go so your home doesn't become a place of constant negativity.• Give children limited choices when possible. For example, instead of “What do you want to do today?” try “Would you like to go to the park or to the library after lunch?”• Let them know you always love them, even though some of their behaviours are not acceptable.• Praise them for good behaviour. “Thanks for getting ready for school without me asking.” “You were really helpful with folding the laundry. Good job.”• Reward good behaviour with things they enjoy. “Since you helped clean up the kitchen, we have time to go to the park if you want.”

PARENTING DON'Ts

- Never break or take away a comfort object like a blanket or toy. Children form deep emotional bonds with special items, which should never be used as part of discipline.
- Do not compare the child with their parent.

PARENTING DOs

- Read together. Children love being read to and it can be a good way for children to be calm and relax. Let them know how much story you will read before you start, such as "I'll read two books. You can pick them." or "We have time for two chapters tonight." Help the child feel safe and let them know they can about their feelings with you. Tell them all feelings are okay.
- If a child is misbehaving, you can give them time to calm down and think by having them move into a different place for a few minutes. As the child may struggle with feelings of abandonment, it is okay to stay nearby.
- Sometimes, a child acting out needs a hug and reassurance from you, rather than punishment.
- Try to use natural consequences to correct behaviour. For example, they feel cold if they won't bring a jacket when they go out.
- If you are getting frustrated, go to another room to calm down before talking to the child.



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

PROGRAM 	WHAT IT OFFERS	WHERE TO APPLY
BC Government Income Assistance	<p>You may be eligible if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're out of work or not earning enough to meet your basic needs • You're waiting for other sources of money to arrive • You can't work at all • You urgently need food, shelter or medical attention. 	<p>Search online for "BC Employment and Assistance" or visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance/apply-for-assistance</p> <p>If you are not sure if you meet the eligibility requirements but still need help or have questions, call: 1-866-866-0800.</p>
Family Care Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are five kinds of Family Care Homes: kinship (restricted), regular, and three levels of specialized homes. Each has its own type of Family Care Home Agreement. • Kinship (restricted) homes care for children known or related to the foster parents. The agreement is restricted to a specific child and ends when the child leaves the home. • Regular homes are studied and approved family care homes. Children placed in these homes are not usually known to the foster parents. 	<p>BC Federation of Foster Parent Association (BC Foster Parents) provides training and support to BC foster families and can assist in understanding the different types of foster homes, and the different funding levels.</p> <p>Search online for "BC foster child placement with a person other than the parent" or visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/fostering/temporary-permanent-care-options/placement-with-a-person-other-than-the-parent</p>

PROGRAM	WHAT IT OFFERS	WHERE TO APPLY
 <p>Family Care Homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized homes (levels 1, 2 and 3) care for children with moderately to extremely challenging behavioural/emotional issues or significant developmental delay. Each level has specific approval, experience and training requirements, and separate service expectations • Occasionally, a child’s plan of care includes requirements for additional goods and services. Sometimes caregivers need increased support for one-time or ongoing costs. One-time costs include: long-distance travel for recreational, cultural, medical and visiting purposes, and comprehensive plan of care requirements for travel within a child’s own community. • Ongoing costs can be time-limited or continuous and include costs related to special treatments for child development or health needs, or specialized recreational or cultural opportunities that are part of the child’s plan of care. 	<p>You can also call or visit your local Ministry of Child and Family Development or Delegated Aboriginal Agency office.</p> <p>Once you are approved as a caregiver, if you want a funding review or need additional funding to cover either one-time or ongoing costs, contact the social worker and ask to speak with the local office director who is responsible for approving the expense. The director makes a recommendation to their supervisor, who is responsible for final approval.</p>

PROGRAM 	WHAT IT OFFERS	WHERE TO APPLY
<p>BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit (BCECTB) & Canada Child Benefit (CCB)</p>	<p>BCECTB is a tax-free benefit of up to \$55 monthly per child for families with children under 6. It is combined with a payment for the CCB, which is payable for children up to age 17. Both are based on household income.</p> <p>To receive the benefit, the caregiver's taxes must be up-to-date, even if no money is owed. If necessary, past years can be filed. Once a child moves into the foster home, the caregiver completes the Application for the Child Tax Benefit. It usually takes a few months to process the claim. Once the application is submitted, you will be asked to provide evidence of your caregiving. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the child's birth certificate • a document from a daycare, school or a recreation program • a letter from your family doctor or dentist confirming the child is under your care • a legal agreement showing you have custody of the child, or • another document that proves the child lives with you. 	<p>Call 1-800-387-1193 if you have questions about the program.</p> <p>The Parent Support Services of BC also has services to help caregivers understand the benefits to which they are entitled. They offer a free support line for grandparents raising grandchildren at 1-855-474-9777.</p> <p>The Legal Services Society also provides information to help caregivers understand what benefits you might eligible to receive. You can reach them at: https://familylaw.lss.bc.ca/resources/fact_sheets/grandparents_benefits.php</p>

PROGRAM	WHAT IT OFFERS	WHERE TO APPLY
 <p>Affordable Child Care Benefit</p>	<p>A monthly payment to help pay for child care.</p>	<p>Contact the Child Care Service Centre between 8:30 am and 7 pm Monday to Friday for more information: 1-888-338-6622.</p> <p>You can also get more information by searching online for “Affordable Child Care Benefit” or visiting: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children/child-care-funding/child-care-benefit</p>
<p>First Nations Child and Family Services</p>	<p>First Nations Child and Family Services funds prevention and protection services to support the safety and well-being of First Nations children and families on reserve.</p>	<p>Call the support services line for more information: 1-888-440-4080.</p>

HEALTH COVERAGE

PROGRAM	WHAT IT OFFERS	WHERE TO APPLY
<p>Medical Services Plan of BC (MSP)</p>	<p>Every BC resident is entitled to medical care coverage. Premiums are based upon income. An application for premium assistance must be completed to qualify for reduced premiums.</p>	<p>Contact 1-800-663-7100 to ask about reduced premiums or to add, update or remove a dependent for coverage.</p>
<p>Healthy Kids Program</p>	<p>Coverage for basic dental treatment, eye and hearing care for children in low-income families that don't receive income assistance, disability assistance or hardship assistance.</p>	<p>Search online for "Healthy Kids Program" or visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/health-supplements-and-programs/healthy-kids</p> <p>You can also reach them toll free by phone at 1-866-866-0800.</p>



School

HOW PARENTAL INCARCERATION CAN IMPACT A CHILD'S EDUCATION

Early life experiences can have a major impact on a child's future. Not only has the child you are caring for lost their parent, they have lost the home they knew and quite possibly, they may have to change schools.

Many people think of school only as the place where children get an education but the social aspect can be just as important to a child's sense of worth and well-being. If the child in your care has to change schools, you will need to help support this transition, which will be hard for them, especially if it is in the middle of the school year.

Elementary schools provide more personalized support to children but if the child is in high school, it is also important for you to do what you can to help them settle in.

Without your help and the support of teachers and staff, the child may struggle with school work and making new friends, which can make them feel even worse about their situation. The earlier you get involved in helping the child succeed at school, the better.



TALKING WITH SCHOOL PERSONNEL

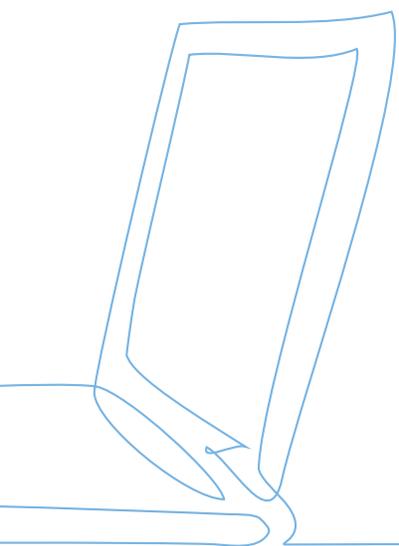
Developing a good relationship with school personnel is important. It can be hard for you to tell if issues a child might be having are because of their life changes, are just common for children their age, or are because of something else entirely. You and the school personnel can be partners in helping the child succeed.

As early as you can, even before the child starts school, call the school and ask to meet with the principal. School principals are used to meeting with parents and guardians of both current and future students. Schools have very strict privacy policies and you can be comfortable that the principal, teachers and counsellors cannot talk about your child with other people unless you give them permission to do that.

THE PRINCIPAL OR VICE-PRINCIPAL

Let the principal know the child in your care has had a severe upheaval in their private life and you are concerned it will impact them at school. While school personnel will understand this, they do not receive training in how to help children who have suffered trauma, have parents in prison or whose parents struggle with addiction or mental health. If you have suggestions on how they can help, please share them. Do not feel you have to share more details than you are comfortable with. You can also ask the people you talk with to keep your conversation confidential.

The reason you start with the principal if it's a new school, or if it's before school starts in September, you won't know who the teacher will be. Teachers are usually not assigned to students until sometime during the first week of school. If the child is in high school, they will have more than one teacher and may not even have a homeroom teacher who they check in with each day. That makes it much more important to talk with the principal, as they can connect you and the child with school counsellors or others who might be able to help.



TEACHERS

In elementary school, children have one main teacher, and may have other teachers who teach a single subject. It should be enough for you to meet with their main teacher. Three to six weeks after the child starts school, book an appointment with the main teacher. This will give the teacher a chance to start getting to know the child before you meet.

You have important information to share. Teachers will be interested in learning about the child: what is hard for them, habits they have, what they are good at, and the things they like to do on weekends. Knowing these things will help a teacher support a child who is struggling and improve the child's feelings about school and themselves.

It is okay for you to let the teacher know your concerns. Teachers can help with school work and making friends. For example, if the child loves art and running, and there is another child with the same interests in class, teachers may seat them together or assign them to work on a group project together.

If the child will miss school to visit their parent in prison, let the teacher know. The teacher can help the child keep up on what they missed and can let you know about any changes in the way the child acts after the visit. At the high school level, there is much less support with catching up on missed work, so the child will have to be proactive in finding out what was missed.

COUNSELLORS

Most schools have counsellors at least part-time. Through the principal, teacher or school office, find out who the school counsellor (or the grade counsellor) is and make an appointment with them to find out what supports are available for the child.

BEING AN ADVOCATE

By having these meetings, you will help make sure the child does as well as possible at school. Advocating this way helps the child get the support they need – and makes sure school personnel know how to reach you if they are concerned about anything.

Depending on the situation, classmates may or may not know about the child's parent. Once the child makes friends, those friends will notice the child isn't living with their parents and will ask why that is. The child may decide to share the news at some point. It is likely that this news won't change how people treat the child but every school has bullies that may tease them. Children might ask questions without

realizing some questions hurt. “Your Mom is in jail? What did she DO?” could be no big deal or very hurtful to the child. You may want to have conversations with them about how they would like to answer such questions if they are asked.

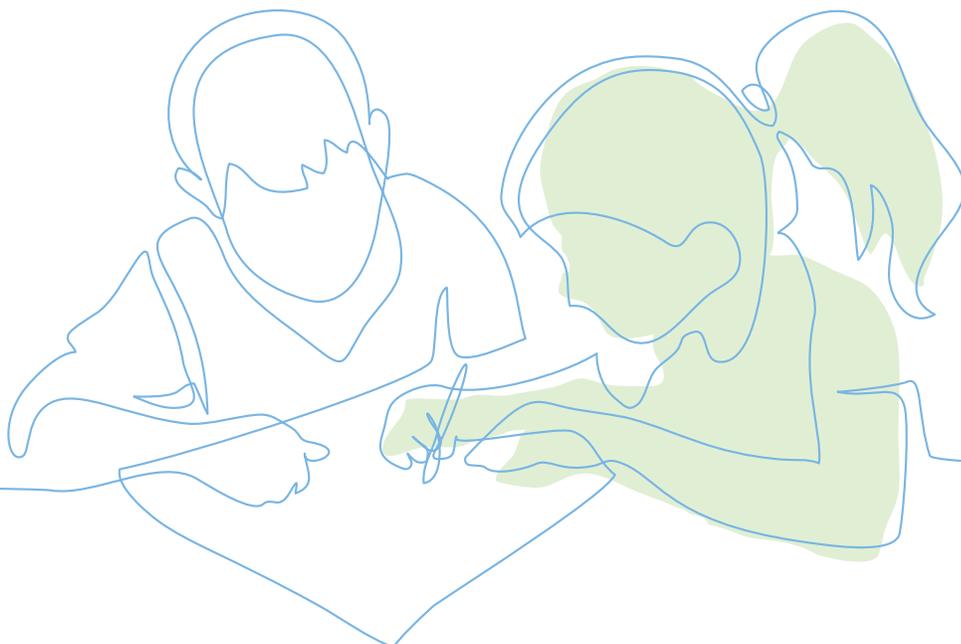
Most schools in BC have strict anti-bullying policies and celebrations like Pink Shirt Day, where people try and wear pink to show they do not tolerate bullying. If the child is teased or bullied about anything, be sure and contact the school about it.

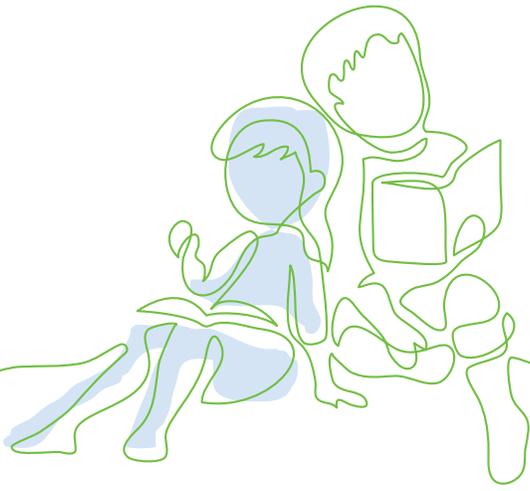
COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL

Ask the teacher or principal how the school communicates with parents. Many schools now rely on email as the main way they communicate with parents and caregivers. It is fast, paperless and free for people with computers and internet access. If you find out your school uses email and you have daily access to a computer, make sure to share your email address. If you do not have email or a computer, make sure the school knows and that they must communicate with you another way so you don't miss important information.

AFFORDING FIELD TRIPS

Some schools take children on field trips throughout the year. These are opportunities for children to experience new places and ways to learn. You will always be asked for permission, usually by a paper permission slip you have to sign. Field trips may have a cost but you do not have to pay if you can't afford it. Let the school know you want the child to participate in field trips but cannot afford the fees. Schools are required to have a budget to cover the fees for any children whose families cannot afford them.





SPECIALIZED EDUCATION SUPPORT

Children struggling in school or with challenging behaviours may have an unknown medical issue. Common issues that there is help available for include:

- *AD/HD*: Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) can make it hard for children to focus on one thing or sit still. If diagnosed, it can be treated with therapies and/or medication. The earlier this is diagnosed the better. Treatment can help children overcome most of the issues over time. Not all therapies are hard or expensive. For example, children that can't sit still benefit from quick movement breaks or fidgeting with special objects in class to help them concentrate.
- *Dyslexia*: Children's brains mix up the order of letters and numbers, making it hard to read or do math. This is quite common and can be treated.
- *Autism*: Autism is a term that covers a wide range of medical conditions and it can affect people differently so is called a spectrum disorder. Children affected may choose to isolate themselves, focus only on particular objects or not interact well with others. Diagnosis will trigger extra help and can improve a child's interaction with their surroundings and others.
- *Hearing Loss*: Children may not hear well and it can affect speech, speed of learning, and the volume the child speaks at or tries to listen to music or TV. A special hearing test can identify a problem and trigger help with hearing aids.
- *Gifted*: Sometimes children are able to do some things better than most others their age. These children may not do well at school because they are bored or because they need help in other areas. It is possible to have a disability and be gifted at the same time.

Schools may also provide extra, specialized support for the above conditions. First, the diagnosis is required by a doctor or other health professional. Sometimes, schools can help with accessing a diagnosis but wait lists can be long. This is a situation where being an advocate will help the child. If you think support is needed and keep asking for it, the child will get tested faster than if you say nothing.

If your community doctor diagnoses an issue, the school needs to know. The school will complete paperwork to designate your child for extra school funding to learn, like a teaching aid. Also, you may also get access to money from the provincial government, potentially up to several thousand dollars a year, for things the child needs to function well. These things can include counseling, therapies, tutors, special activities or equipment like a computer.

While awaiting diagnosis, schools don't usually have extra money to hire aids but there are still things that can be done to help. Teachers can make a big difference in helping a child with special needs. Also, school counsellors may have the ability to do some testing on their own and get permission to develop what is called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that identifies what areas a child needs help with and how to help them. The difference between that kind of IEP and one a child gets with a designation is that there is no additional funding provided for aids. The school is not required to create an IEP for a child without a designation but they must create one for every child with a designation.

MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY AT SCHOOL

Many elementary schools have children create crafts as gifts for Mother's Day and Father's Day. If the child in your care visits their parent, they may also be happy to make them something. If the parent is in an institution far away, it might be possible to mail the item. If you think making Mother's Day or Father's Day crafts will be hard for the child, ask if the teacher could announce that these projects could also be for a grandparent or other important person in the children's lives. Be sure and contact the teacher shortly after spring break because planning starts early.

IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

One of the most important things school teaches children is how to get along with others. Friends can make a huge difference in a child's happiness, so do encourage any friendships you see forming.

Ways to encourage friendships in preschool or elementary school:

- **Volunteer** – If you have the time and physical ability, volunteering can be a great way to get to know staff, other children and their parents.
- **Let the child play when school is over** – When the weather is nice, kids want to play on the school playground after school. If you can, pick the child up yourself and let them play. It will get them exercise, help them make friends and give you the chance to talk with parents and caregivers.
- **Ask teachers for help** – If the child is new to the school or struggling, ask the child's teacher to help by matching the child with others of like interests. Almost always, they will be happy to help. If you get a teacher who isn't, don't let that stop you from trying again the next year.
- **Invite children for playdates** – Once they are in elementary school, children will start asking to play with their friends outside of school. Try to say yes when you can. If the child in your care goes to a friend's house, be sure to find out the friend's name, address and phone number. You should speak with the parent before agreeing to playdates as children can get excited and forget.

By high school, children will not rely on your help in getting together with friends. Make sure the child in your care knows they must ask you before going off with friends. Also, try and learn the child's friends' names and where they live.

What to Do During School Breaks

There are many times during the year when children are not in school and you may be wondering what to do with them, particularly during the long summer holiday.

CAMPS

There are many different kinds of summer camps, which give children the chance to get exercise, make friends and do new things while giving you a much needed break.

There are two main kinds of camps:

1. *Day camps*: Children attend for a few hours a day. Half-day camps are usually three hours long and full-day camps are usually six hours long. You will need to drop-off and pick-up the child, as well as supply snacks and lunch.
2. *Sleep-away camps*: Children stay overnight at the camp for however long the camp runs. You do not send food but will likely have a list of clothes and supplies you need to send.

While camps can be costly, there are some which are low cost or even free. In Greater Vancouver's Lower Mainland, EFry operates Blue Sky summer and spring break sleep away camps for children ages six to 16. These camps are very low cost or can be free in exchange for volunteer work by caregivers. EFry also offers day camps on Saturdays when school is in session. These are called Saturday Club and like the other EFry camps, no child is turned away because their family cannot afford to pay. The camps all offer fun experiences, supportive adults to supervise and nutritious meals.

For information on the EFry camps, call **604-520-1166** and ask for JustKids. If you live in the Lower Mainland but get a message it is a long distance number, you can call us free through our toll-free number, **1-888-879-9593**.

SUMMER CLASSES AT SCHOOL

Many school districts offer free classes for children in the summer, at both the elementary and high school level. Some of these classes are designed to help children who struggle with particular subjects to prepare for the coming year. There may also be behaviour-related classes, such as self-regulation, which teach children how to manage their feelings and control impulses that can get them in trouble.

The classes vary by school district. Contact your school to find out what might be available in your area. It is suggested you do this shortly after spring break so you will have time to register your child.

RECREATION

Many cities in BC offer Leisure Access Passes, which provide free access to recreational activities like swimming and skating (including rentals) for low income families. To find out what is available in your area, search online for “Leisure Access Pass” and the name of your city. Sometimes, these include admission to other activities too. For example, in Vancouver, there is one free admission to the Vancouver Aquarium each year. If you do not have computer access, most libraries offer computer access for free. If that is difficult to access, you can call us at **1-888-879-9593** and ask for JustKids. We will look it up for you.

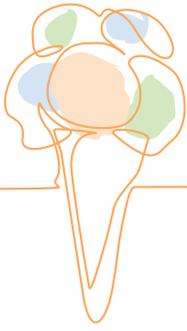
GIRL GUIDES AND SCOUTS

Both Girl Guides and Scouts (which accepts boys and girls) provide children ages 6 and up with opportunities to develop skills and friendships. There is normally a cost to register and do some activities, but they will often waive these so children of all backgrounds can participate. Their programs run during the school year after school.

To find out what subsidized opportunities exist in your area, call or email the BC councils:

- Girl Guides: **1-800-565-8111**, info@bc-girlguides.org
- Scouts: **604-879-5721**, bcy@scouts.ca





Child Health & Development

RAISING CHILDREN OF DIVERSE CULTURES

Understanding and appreciating their cultural heritage is important for children's self-esteem. You can help the child in your care be proud of who they are by giving them information about their culture. Books, food, music and cultural celebrations help children learn about their heritage. If you have a library near you, ask the librarian for book recommendations.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Growing up in an environment that is unpredictable, or where a serious traumatic event or events have occurred, can cause emotional difficulties for children, such as anxiety, panic, defiant behaviours and trouble connecting to others. The child in your care may benefit from counselling, particularly if in addition to grief and abandonment, they have experienced neglect or physical or sexual abuse.

Research also suggests that children with one or both parents who have a mental illness can develop mental health problems themselves. It can be difficult in a small community to find help. A good place to start is a family doctor to help children identify and manage a mental health problem early. A family doctor can refer the child to a mental health professional and assist you in finding community resources. Some schools also have counsellors who can provide support and assistance. It will take a long time to get an appointment for a specialist, so if you have concerns, see a family doctor soon.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE SAFE AND RECOGNIZE RISK

Children need to be taught how to be safe. Make sure the child knows:

- How to dial 911 in case of emergency. They need to know their full name and address.
- Your phone number, full name and home address.
- How to call long distance so they can call you from wherever you are (1 + area code + number).

You can help the child feel and be safe by:

- Encouraging them to call you or someone else for help if they are uncomfortable, day or night. It can be helpful to tell children in advance (and mean it) that if they ever call for your help, they will never be in trouble, no matter where they are or what they are doing.
- Advising children never to go anywhere with anyone without letting you know where they are and who they are with.
- Letting children know they should trust their instincts. If something feels wrong, they should seek help.

INTERNET SAFETY

Children are exposed to computers and the internet in many places: at school, libraries and possibly, even at home. Computers are very good educational tools and can help people who live apart to stay connected. However, it is important to know that children may be able to access violent, sexual or hateful material online with a simple search. It is also possible for children to be bullied or harassed in social media and even tricked by predators who try and befriend them online through games or web sites where they can carry on online conversations.

If a child has access to any credit card, they can make costly purchases online, either for actual goods or for extras in some computer games.

It's important to speak with your children about this and check in with them regularly. There is special software, called parental control software, which you can install to block websites with adult content. You can do a search for this software online and download it.

Helpful internet rules to protect child safety:

- Never share identifying information: name, age, where they live or where they go to school.
- Never arrange to meet someone in person that they have met online. Predators can trick children into believing they are other children.
- Never share passwords.
- Don't say things online that you would not say to someone's face.
- Don't do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Tell you or another trusted adult if they feel like they or someone else might be in trouble.
- It is also a good idea to limit the time children spend online.

SMOKING AND VAPING

Fewer teens are smoking traditional cigarettes but e-cigarettes, also known as electronic cigarettes or vapes, are growing in popularity at middle and high schools. Vapes work by turning flavoured liquid, called "juice", into vapour the smoker inhales. Many young people do not see this as hazardous but the juice is full of chemicals, including nicotine. It is addictive and bad for the user's health.

Vaping is becoming an issue in schools. Children are attracted by the many flavours of vape juice, which include candy and fruit flavours. If you can, talk with the child in your care about the dangers of vaping before they enter high school and are exposed to it. If the child in your care is already vaping, talk to them about the risks and encourage them to read online articles about the health hazards.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Children hear about alcohol and drugs everywhere: on TV, on the internet, in movies and music, and from their friends. Some may have been exposed to drugs in their home. Drugs have a greater effect on children than adults because of their lower body weight. They are also more dangerous to children because of their developing brains and bodies. It is important that you tell the facts to the children in your care. How you discuss drugs will depend on the child's age but you should think of drugs as an ongoing topic of discussion instead of a one-time talk. Let the child know that you are always there for them if they have any questions.

PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN (3-5 YEARS OLD)

Young children need help to understand what they see and hear but do not need a lot of details. It is important they understand the difference between the medicine a doctor prescribes for them when they are sick and other harmful drugs. Children also need to know who they can trust. Often, you will be the only person who can give them medicine, as daycares and preschools are usually not allowed to give children any medication at all. You can tell them never to take medicine unless you say it is okay.

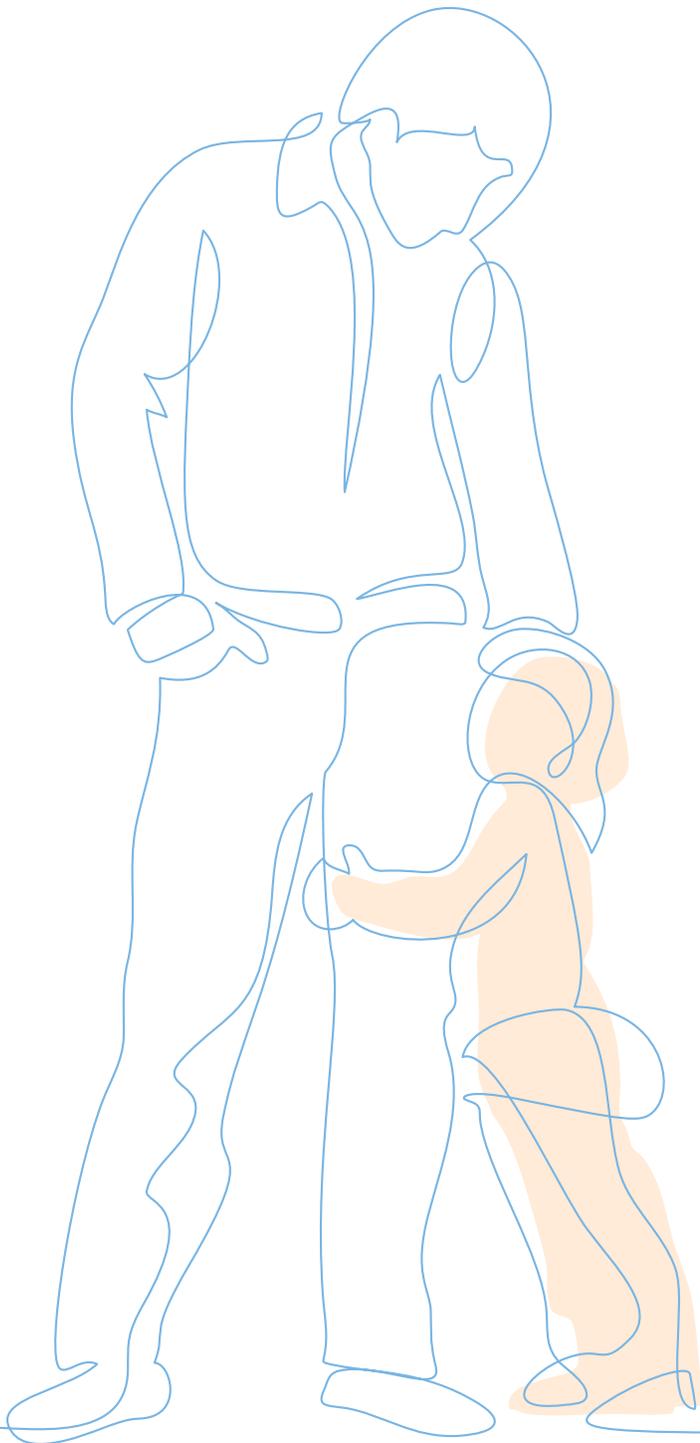
YOUNG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN (6-10 YEARS OLD)

Children this age are influenced by what their friends think and they are starting to want to be seen as grown-up as possible. Some children will have learned about specific drugs from older siblings and will share that information at school. It is possible drugs may be available where the child in your care attends school. The best thing you can do at this stage is to talk openly about alcohol and drugs.

PRETEENS AND TEENS (11-18 YEARS OLD)

Teens are at a higher risk of experimenting with drugs. Being accepted by peers is extremely important, so if a child's friends use drugs, the chance they will too is high. Talk to preteens and teens about the negative and lasting effects of drugs on their bodies. It is important for you to tell them how addiction happens. If addiction runs in the family, they are at greater risk of becoming addicted and it is important for you to let the child know this. Even if you think they are not paying attention, they will hear what you say and it may help them say no when the time comes.

Encourage the child to come talk with you about drugs or alcohol. Make sure to tell them they will not be in trouble with you, no matter what they tell you. You must stick to that for them to trust you. Teens may turn to drugs for recreation when they don't have other things to do or because they are stressed. Work with them to find healthy things to do: sports can be great for both. Most schools have sports teams that do not cost money but keep teens busy and encourage them to be healthy so they perform well. If sports are not an option, work with your teen to find things they enjoy.



GANGS

Research shows that children whose parents have been in prison are more likely to get involved with gangs. Gangs can make teens feel like they belong. Once teens are involved in gangs, it can be hard to get them out. Gang involvement can lead children to doing things that are against the law and get them arrested.

School personnel, police, Aboriginal or other cultural elders, church groups and various charities can help you and the child find other ways to feel they belong and are accepted by peers. If you think your teen is at risk or involved in a gang, contact people in your area who may be able to offer advice and support.

SUMMER AND AFTER-SCHOOL JOBS

Getting a job can be very good for teens: not only will they earn money, they can increase their self-esteem by learning skills and responsibility. Whether there are jobs available will depend on where you live. If you are in a city or busy town, there may be entry-level jobs in stores or restaurants. Teens may be able to create their own jobs by offering yard work or other services to people in your neighbourhood.

Nearly all teens 16 and over are good candidates for a summer job. If they are not struggling at school, they may be able to take on some part-time work after school.

Supporting Child-Parent Relationships

BENEFITS OF MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH PARENTS

Children and parents love and need each other, even when they are separated because the parent is in prison. Research shows both children and parents do better when they can stay in touch and be emotionally close. How the child in your care keeps in contact with their parent is important for you to think about.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR PARENTS

Children have strong feelings about their parents, which may be complicated if the parent is in prison. They may love their parent but also feel abandoned. They may be angry, feel guilty or have anxiety about where their parent is. Try to make the child feel safe in talking about their feelings with you. Talk to them not only if they seem upset but when they are calm and doing other things. Some ideas:

- Walking in the park
- Baking together
- Playing a game
- Drawing or painting.

Ask the child's teacher or a librarian to suggest books about loss, separation or anxiety that you can read with the child or that they can read by themselves.

When you talk with the child about their parent, tell the truth but only share as much as the child can understand. Never badmouth the parent. Make it clear the child is not responsible for the parent's absence. "Mommy/Daddy's problems make it hard for them to be here but they love you very much."

VISITING PARENTS IN PRISON

Visiting parents can be complicated but good for both the child and parents. Depending on the prison, it may offer different kinds of visits such as: in-prison, via a video screen at the prison, through glass on a telephone, or even periodic private family visits over a weekend. Prepare by:

- Contacting the prison to learn what the visiting hours and days are, and pre-book the visit
- Asking what the visiting rules are. Ask specifically about being able to touch or hug the incarcerated parent. You may need to prepare a child for prison restrictions.
- Finding out if there are rules about what you can bring into the prison, like food, something to keep the child entertained, pictures or other things. Ensure you understand the rules.
- Talk to the child about what to expect. It may be loud. They may be visiting through glass with no touching allowed. There will be guards present.

ALTERNATIVES TO IN-PERSON CONTACT

If prison is far away, children can keep in contact with:

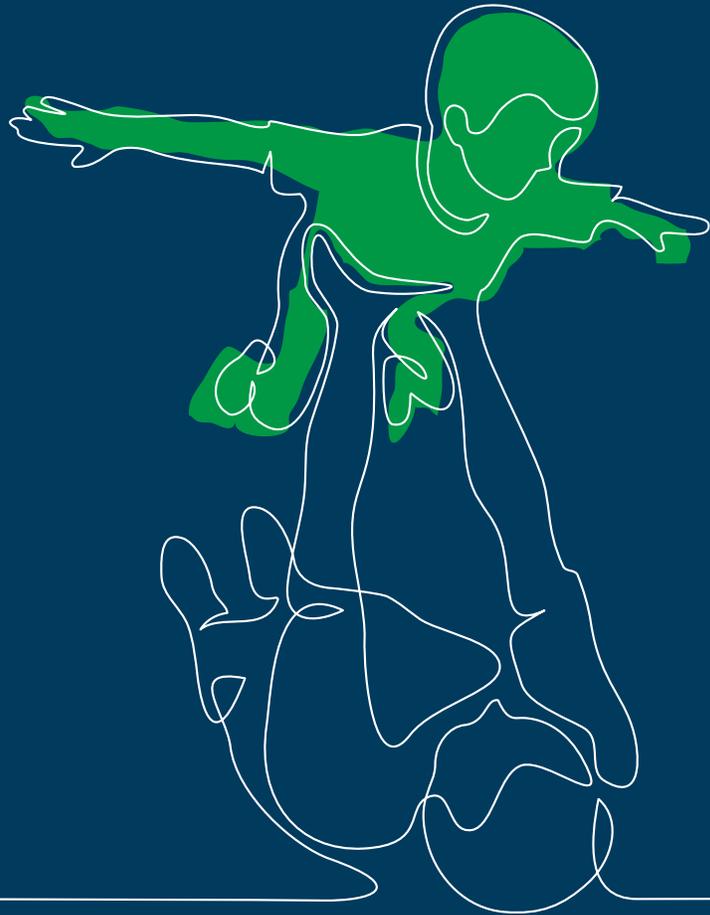
- Phone calls
- Letters and cards
- Video visits – Some prisons have special equipment that let child and parents visit through video conference. Ask the prison if they have this and how to arrange visits.
- Storybook program – EFry operates a program in many BC prisons that records parents reading to their children and then delivers the book, recording and a media player to the child so they can share a story with their parent anytime. If the parent isn't sure if there is such a program, call JustKids at EFry to ask: **1-888-879-9593**.

WHEN THE PARENT IS RELEASED

When the parent's release date approaches, talk to the child about their hopes, fears and expectations. A parent may not be able to see their child immediately, for example, if the parent will be going to live in a halfway house or addictions treatment program. It will be important to manage the child's expectations and help them understand what is happening.

The child may be wondering if they will move or have to change schools again. They could be excited and/or worried about living with the parent and leaving your home. Depending on how long the parent has been in prison, the child may not feel comfortable with the idea of living with them. Help the child understand what is going to happen with their parent's living situation and how the parent's release will impact them.





For more information, please contact:

Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
402 E. Columbia Street, New Westminster, BC V3L 3X1
Phone: 604-520-1166 Toll-free: 1-888-879-9593
Email: info@elizabethfry.com

elizabethfry.com

