



TEXAS

Department of Family and Protective Services

Incarcerated Parents
Resource Guide

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INCARCERATED PARENTS

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) values the role of parents in a child's life regardless of whether they are incarcerated or not. Generally, incarcerated parents are afforded the same rights and duties as parents who are not incarcerated.

For related policy, see [6351](#) Incarcerated Parents.

TYPES OF INCARCERATION FACILITIES

Correctional Centers (Private)

These are privately operated correctional centers that house Correctional Institutions Division (CID) offenders.

County Jails

County jails are managed by the county sheriff or a designee. The county jail facility's primary role is to hold defendants awaiting trial or those who have been convicted and sentenced to county jail.

Federal Prisons

Federal prisons are managed and run by the U.S. government. The Federal Bureau of Prisons is responsible for the centralized administration of federal prisons. Federal prison inmates have been convicted for violation of a federal law.

State Jail Facilities

State jails house individuals who have committed certain kinds of felony crimes (primarily property crimes and low-level controlled substance offenses) that have a maximum sentence of two years and a mandatory term of community supervision. Some state jails are privately operated and house state felons as well as CID transfer offenders.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)

TDCJ is the agency which manages the overall operation of the state's prison system, parole, and state jail systems. The agency also provides funding, training, and certain oversight of community supervision.

Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJJ), formerly the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission

TJJJ promotes public safety by operating juvenile correctional facilities. It also partners with youth, families, and communities to provide a safe and secure environment for youth in the agency's care

and custody. These youths receive individualized education, treatment, life skills, employment training and have access to positive role models to aid in successful community reintegration.

PARENTAL INCARCERATION

Parental incarceration is a unique challenge facing families and the caseworkers that serve them. At the beginning of the case, the child's caseworker determines if the parent's location is unknown or if either or both parents are incarcerated. If a caseworker learns that a parent is incarcerated in any of the types of facilities described above, the caseworker takes the following steps to locate the parent.

LOCATING A PARENT WHO IS INCARCERATED

To locate a parent in a Texas Department of Criminal Justice Facility (a Texas prison or state jail) contact the Office of Classification and Records in Huntsville, Texas at:

- 1-936-437-6564 or 1-800-535-0283;
- Visit the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) website.
- The Quick (Link) box and use the list on the TDCJ website.

Parents Not Under TDCJ Supervision

If the parent is confined in a facility other than TDCJ, the caseworker will need to contact the facility directly. The following links may be useful:

- [Federal Bureau of Prisons \(BOP\)](#) (contains online inmate locator). The BOP Office of Public Affairs is 202-307-3198 or you may e-mail them at webmaster@bop.gov
- [Victim Information and Notification Everyday](#) (Vine Link) to locate a parent who may be incarcerated in another State.
- [Corrections Department by State](#) to locate a parent in another state.

The following are some additional links not supported or endorsed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice:

- [Prison Search Ancestor Hunt](#)
- [Corrections.com](#)

Parents in County Jails

If a parent is incarcerated in a county jail, the caseworker may conduct a search on the county's website to locate them or contact the county jail directly.

Once a parent has been located, the department must ensure that the parent has been, or will need to be served with the original and amended petition for the DFPS legal case. If the parent has not been served, the caseworker should arrange for the parent to be formally served with the pleadings at the facility where he or she is incarcerated.

GUIDELINES FOR CASEWORKER VISITATION TO AN INCARCERATION FACILITY

It is best to call the incarceration facility before attempting to meet with the parent, to determine if there are any special visiting times or other rules associated with visiting an inmate. When visiting an incarceration facility the caseworker should:

- Know the name and, identifying /SID number of the incarcerated parent.
- Have proper identification when visiting a facility (Driver license).
- Know the facility's visitation policy, including procedures and restrictions (such as, all visitors must be on the offender's visiting list).
- Dress appropriately when visiting the incarceration institution.
- Communicate any safety concerns with the facility staff, for example, if a caseworker is facilitating a visit between a child and a parent and overhears a discussion among inmates and visitors that may lead to violence.

ENGAGING AN INCARCERATED PARENT

Engaging a parent in service planning and building or maintaining a healthy relationship with the child can be more challenging with an incarcerated parent. Just like parents who are not in a locked facility, incarcerated parents must be involved in case planning and receive a copy of their child's and their own plan of service, as well as receive updates about the case on a regular basis. Remember that incarcerated parents have the same rights and duties, for the most part, as parents who are not incarcerated.

Here are some guidelines the caseworker can use to engage the parent:

- Meet with the incarcerated parent face-to-face or arrange for another DFPS staff member to meet the parent face to face. Face to face contact with the parent facilitates collaboration and engagement with the parent and allows for the parent to exchange information and feel more involved in their child's case planning and outcomes. Although a face to face meeting should be a priority, if face to face is not possible, obtain input from the incarcerated parent via mail. Whenever sending a letter to the incarcerated parent, include a self-addressed postage paid envelope so the parent can respond.
- Explain to the parent the concerns and allegations that have been presented to the agency, and discuss the incarcerated parent's rights, services available, and expectations as part of the process.
- Explain caseworker's role in the process.
- Discuss the safety plan in place while highlighting rationale for actively supporting the plan. Be prepared to answer questions from the parent about the safety plan and its rationale. Keep, keeping in mind that the incarcerated parent is still the child's parent. They, may not be totally aware of the situation the child is living in, and is entitled to the same respect and consideration as any other parent.
- Inform the incarcerated parent of the dates of any future court hearings and provide the parent with contact information for their attorney, if an attorney has been appointed to represent them.
- Provide the brochure appropriate to the stage of service (AR, INV, FBSS, and CVS) and any other available resources that could be helpful to the incarcerated parent such as the resource guides available online through the Children's Commission.
- Make every effort to obtain the identity of relatives and fictive kin of the incarcerated parent (see the [Services to Kinship Caregivers Resource Guide](#) for the definition of a fictive kin), as support for the child, support for the incarcerated parent, and as potential placement options for the child.
- Use a strengths-based case management approach to effectively engage the incarcerated parent and child in visitation planning. For example, a parent can use his or her incarceration to encourage the child to excel in school or the parent can communicate to the child about making healthy life choices.

- Obtain input from the parent about what he or she wants for the child. Ask for the parent's input on the child's plan of service.
- Discuss the different types of contact currently available and permitted between the child and parent.
- Share with the incarcerated parent any issues that may initially affect the quality and quantity of the contact (such as DFPS recommendations, restrictions imposed by the courts, facility rules and regulations, and so on).
- Be detailed and direct. Make sure the incarcerated parent knows what the needed steps are to increase the level and type of contact they have with their child
- Assist the incarcerated parent in talking with the child and answering difficult questions about their relationship, the incarceration, or other appropriate topics.
- Assist the incarcerated parent in working through feelings of fear, shame, isolation, rejection, anger or depression concerning the restrictions or lack of contact with the child during his or her incarceration.
- Identify special challenges and issues facing the incarcerated parent or the child, including literacy, learning disabilities, physical or mental disabilities, or indigence and ensure that the identified challenges are addressed in the family's plan of service with specific steps and actions items for each identified circumstance.
- Ensure any letters written to the incarcerated parent are written in a way that the parent can understand them.
- Find out what services are available to the incarcerated parent in their facility and incorporate them as appropriate into the parent's service plan and encourage participation.

SERVICE PLANNING FOR THE INCARCERATED PARENT

See [6242](#) The Family Plan of Service (FPOS).

Services for the Incarcerated Parent

To find out what services are available to the incarcerated parent, contact the facility or go online to The Texas Department of Criminal Justice and check the Windham School District website for additional resources for parents. <http://tdcj.state.tx.us/>

Windham School District (WSD) provides appropriate educational programs to meet the needs of the eligible offender population, thus reducing recidivism by assisting offenders in becoming productive members of society. Windham provides a variety of academic classes and Career and Technical Education (CTE) to offenders incarcerated in the TDCJ, along with behavioural change programs.

WSD operates schools on 89 sites serving TDCJ.

<https://wsdtx.org/en/students/services/classes-new/special-education>

<https://wsdtx.org/en/students/post-release>

For state correctional facilities, a designated chaplain is assigned to the inmate. The chaplain can advise or assist the caseworker in determining what services are provided at the correctional facility or unit.

Contact the Department of Chaplaincy 1-936-437-4965 to locate the chaplain for a specific facility.

Some examples are as follows:

- If the caseworker has knowledge of an activity that the child of an incarcerated parent is participating in, then the caseworker can have the incarcerated parent write to the child to inquire about the child's participation in a given activity to maintain some connection.
- If a caseworker working with a family concludes that a child is acting out because they are missing their incarcerated parent, the caseworker can assist the parent with choosing the correct language and tone when writing to bring some level of comfort to the child. The child may benefit from being able to see, touch, or simply be in the presence of his or her parent. Consider whether an in-person visit between the parent and child should be authorized or requested.

GUIDELINES FOR VISITATION BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD IN AN INCARCERATION FACILITY

See [6351](#) Incarcerated Parents, under Contact Between a Child and an Incarcerated Parent.

When possible, children should have face to face visits with their parent. The decision to conduct face to face visit is based on the individual circumstances of the case, the parent and child, and the guidelines for visitation at the facility. If, after careful consideration, the caseworker and supervisor

determine that face-to-face visits should occur, the caseworker contacts the individual jail or prison unit to set up and coordinate the visit. In doing this, the caseworker:

- Contacts the correctional facility about the facility's visitation policy, including procedures and restrictions (such as all visitors must be on the offender's visiting list).
- Determines if there is a social worker or chaplain who can help with arranging visits.
- Asks about any special family visitation programs such as the MATCH/PATCH program.

The MATCH/PATCH Program stands for Mothers and Their Children and Papas and Their Children. This program helps incarcerated parents to become better parents. The [Classification](#) program screens inmates who apply to be in this program. Once in the program, the inmate has to attend classes during the week. The inmate also has to exhibit good behavior to be able to get a one hour visit with his or her child and to stay in the program.

Guidelines for Ensuring Successful Contact between the Child and the Incarcerated Parent

To best prepare for successful contact between the child and the incarcerated parent, the caseworker may take the following steps:

- Talk with the incarcerated parent before the visit to help him or her focus on the purpose and benefit of the visit. This will help the parent and child use visits productively. For example, the parent calms the child's worry and lets the child know he or she is fine (this is positive interaction between the child and the parent).
- Prepare the child and caregiver for what it will be like to visit a jail or prison. This will depend on the facility and the facility's rules. Some examples of things to make children aware of are:
 - A lot of people waiting to visit their loved ones.
 - A glass partition between the child and the parent.
 - The child and parent may need to talk on a phone.
 - The child and parent will not be able to touch or hug.
- Prepare for the possibility of resistance from the child's caregivers.

- If met with resistance, the caseworker should discuss the importance of visitation with the incarcerated parent and how that can help maintain connections, allay children's anxieties about where their parents are, and reassure the child.
- Caregivers may want to protect the child from the incarcerated parent and from the prison environment, citing the child's behavior and mood before, during, and after visits as a reason for discontinuing visits. The caseworker needs to be prepared to help the caregiver better understand that it is natural for children to have emotional reactions to visiting their incarcerated parents no matter where the parents are, because they miss them, worry about them, want to go home, and understand family connections matter.
- After the visit the caseworker should take time to discuss and normalize the child's reaction to the visit with the child and the child's caregiver.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR INCARCERATED PARENT(S)

Resources for Incarcerated Parents

One of the important issues confronting formerly incarcerated parents is timely access to resources. For caseworkers who will be engaging with incarcerated parent(s) or formerly incarcerated parent(s), one component of their engagement must be around resources designed for successful reentry into society. Assisting parent(s) with identifying a few critical resources will be necessary if parents are to have the support needed to reconnect successfully with families and communities.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has established a reentry case manager for incarcerated individuals returning to their communities. Caseworkers should consult with the case manager to ensure that formerly incarcerated parents have access or knowledge on how to obtain the following:

Identification

Birth Certificate (Vital Statistics):

Address: 1100 W 49th Street Austin Texas

Phone : 512.776.3202

Website: www.dshs.texas.gov

To find local or regional branch locations, please call 1-888-963-7111.

Social Security Card:

US Social Security Administration

To find or locate an office in your area, please call 1-866-627-6999.

Valid Texas ID:

Department of Public Safety

Website: www.dps.texas.gov

Main Number: 512.424.2000

Required document(s) are as follows:

- Valid Texas ID

- Texas Inmate ID Card or similar form of ID issue by TDCJ

- Texas Department of Criminal Justice Parole or mandatory release certificate

- Federal parole or release certificate

- Federal Inmate ID card

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has established a website dedicated to formerly incarcerated individuals seeking employment. The website contains employers and career fields open to formerly incarcerated individuals. A best practice is for the (DFPS) caseworker to review the TDCJ website and share relevant information and resources with the incarcerated parent, including contact information for the TDCJ reentry case manager. The case manager can assist because of their knowledge of the parent's criminal history, and will have knowledge of what field of employment the parent can pursue to obtain the right certification. There are private employers who cater to those with challenging backgrounds. More information regarding private companies in specific communities can be obtained through the local 211.

1. Employment:

Texas Department of Criminal Justice- Website for Work

Provides inmate a direct link to hiring employers

Website: <https://reentry.tdcj.texas.gov>

Goodwill Industries

Services are unique to each location

Phone Number: 1-877-887-6151

2. Legal Services

Family Helpline- ask a lawyer any Texas Child Protective Services related questions.

Family Help Line – 1-844-888-6565

<https://texaslawhelp.org/>

Texas Rio Grande Legal Assistance- provides legal services for cases that range from routine family law counseling to complex litigation in state and federal courts, from the local Justice of the Peace to the United States Supreme Court.

Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid – 1-888-988-9996

<http://www.trla.org/>

Texas Law Help – provides free legal information & court forms for simple civil legal problems

www.texaslawhelp.org

Justice Center: The Council of State Governments - develops research-driven strategies to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/>

Housing is a critical component in restoration. Many formerly incarcerated inmates will be released to transitional housing when returning to their families and communities. Caseworkers may offer assistance in contacting the local housing or reentry support organizations to find relief. Caseworkers should attempt to schedule meetings at DFPS offices that are close to bus stops.

3. Housing and Bus Passes:

211 Texas

211 is a place where all basic social services in your community can be located

Phone Number: Call 211 or 1-877-541-7905

Website: <https://www.211Texas.org>

Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Most Texas cities and/or counties have a housing authority

Website: <https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us>

The National Reentry Resource Center

Source of information and guidance in reentry.

Reentry Website: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc>

Local Reentry Resources:

- Austin: <http://www.reentryroundtable.net/>
- Dallas: <https://www.unlockingdoors.org/>
- Houston: <https://www.beaconhomeless.org/beaconlaw>
- San Antonio: <https://www.havenforhope.org/>