

Building Bonds Through Books

How to Visit an Incarcerated Loved One

Disclaimer*

This is a comprehensive guide on what to expect while visiting an incarcerated loved one. With this being said, rules and regulations still vary from facility to facility so, to get the clearest and best information, check the website that your loved one is located to ensure that you receive the most accurate information for visitation.

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How to Enter

Depending on the location, most children under the age of 16 need to be accompanied by an adult over the age of 18 to visit someone in jail or prison (detention facility). If you are between the ages of 16–17, you will need written permission from your parent or guardian that is not incarcerated to visit the facility alone. In some states, you need to be accompanied by an adult until the age of 18. If you are visiting alone or are 18+, you will need some form of ID. Visitors also need to be on a visitation list created by the individual who is incarcerated, so make sure to contact them beforehand, by letter, email or phone to have them put you on their list. Otherwise, you may not be able to enter.

Days to Visit

Most people with incarcerated loved ones need to travel quite far to visit them. With that being said, it is good to prepare ahead of time when you're going to visit. If you look up the website of the jail or prison your loved one is currently located in, they should have a section detailing the days and times they accept visitors. This can change depending on holidays and other important events. Some facilities require you to schedule a visit with them in advance.

Clothing

There is typically a pretty strict dress code in jails and prisons, so you want to make sure you follow it accordingly so you can still visit your loved one.

- Do not wear clothes that resemble the clothing that incarcerated people wear (all blue outfits, all orange outfits, depending on where they are).
- Do not wear clothing that resembles what the guards or other staff wear. This will likely be both tops and bottoms in ‘army’ colors like green, tan and camouflage.
- Dress conservatively/modestly. Most detention facilities will not allow in people who are wearing strapless, sheer, or haltered clothing. Skirts, dresses and shorts must typically go to the knee or just above the knee. Very tight clothes are also frowned upon.
- When wearing bras under clothes, avoid wearing bras with an underwire since it will go off in the metal detector.
- Wigs, hairpieces, extensions, and other headpieces may not be worn in many cases except for medical reasons and with prior approval.
- Hats and gloves are not typically accepted without prior approval or inclement weather.
- Close-toed shoes are typically a good choice for visitation days since flip-flops and other types of sandals can be refused.

What You Cannot Bring

Detention facilities can be extremely strict with what they allow into their facilities. In most cases it is best to come empty handed if you can.

In most cases, you **cannot** bring

- Cell Phones or pagers
- Anything that can take pictures or record audio (including smart watches)
- Purses, briefcases, etc.
- Medication
- Photos
- Cash (varies quite a bit)
- Chewing gum
- Food/drinks
- Lighters/matches
- Drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and vapes
- Weapons of any kind

What You Can Bring

It is best to bring all that you need in a clear plastic bag. You may bring coin money to use for vending machines if they have them. If you are bringing small children, you may bring a few diapers, baby wipes, milk bottles or sippy cups. These should all be in limited quantities and in clear plastic bags.

What to Expect

When you enter the detention facility, you will need to sign in. They will need some basic information, such as your name, the inmate number of the person you're visiting and your relationship to them (child/step-child/mother... etc.) and your address (if you are being accompanied by an adult, they will do this for you).

After signing in, you will go through a metal detector. You will need to take off jewelry, jackets, shoes and anything else that may be in your pockets or that may contain metal.

Once you have walked through, you will wait for the rest of the group to go through and then be escorted to the visitation area. Here, your loved one may be waiting for you. If they are not in the room yet, you will likely be asked to wait and take a seat until they arrive.

Physical Contact

At first contact, physical touch is typically acceptable. Brief hugs and kisses are typically the norm before sitting down. If you do want to reach out to hold the hand of your loved one, in most cases, it is acceptable if the hands are on top of a table, in clear view of the surrounding guards. These guards may ask you to stop and if that happens, pull away. You may still continue your conversation until you decide to leave or visitation is over. At certain times, the guards will announce visitation has ended or if you want to leave, you may do so. At this point, you may embrace your loved ones to say goodbye. They will be escorted out and so will you.

Cancellations

It is common for detention centers to go on lockdown without much notice, especially if you are traveling quite far. Your loved one may be able to contact you slightly in advance to let you know they are not allowing visitors, so be sure to let your loved one know when you are coming to visit so they can prepare as well.

Visits may also be cut short for unknown reasons. This can be extremely upsetting and disappointing, but it is important to leave when asked, without a fight. Briefly say goodbye to your loved ones and be prepared to leave.

Any more questions...?

Email us at buildingbondsthroughbooks@gmail.com we're happy to help to the best of our ability!