



Talking to Children About Prison

Should I tell the children?

This is a tough decision, and it is your choice. But our experience tells us that children cope better if they know the truth.

But won't the truth upset them?

Children will usually know that something is wrong. Not telling them the truth could make them feel more insecure and anxious. It could also make them feel they can't trust adults around them.

What are the advantages of telling them?

Telling children the truth means that they can ask questions about what prison is like and talk about other things that are bothering them.

If they can't speak openly and honestly, it's hard for them to process their feelings and they may feel more troubled.

Social media means that news can spread very quickly, and your children may find out from someone else.

How should I talk to children?

- Find a time that is quiet when you are feeling calm and when they will have plenty of time to ask questions.
- Talk somewhere familiar where they feel safe
- Sometimes it's easier to talk when you are doing something together like colouring in or drawing.
- Be guided by them. If they seem to have stopped listening or don't want to hear anymore - don't force the issue.

What should I tell them?

It very much depends on the age of the child and the type of offence. But here's some ideas:

- Use simple, age-appropriate language that they understand
- Explain that their parent or loved-one has made a mistake and done something wrong.
- Explain that they have had to go away for a while to a prison
- You could say that a prison is where grown-ups go when they have done something wrong or made a mistake.
- Tell them that doing something bad doesn't mean you are a bad person.
- Let them know that there is no particular way they should feel.
- Don't go into inappropriate detail - they don't need to know every detail of the crime.
- Reassure them that the person in prison still loves them
- Reassure them that they are safe.

Want to know more?

Contact one of the Sussex Prisoners' Families friendly outreach team on 01273 499843 who will help you talk through these issues.