THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

# When Other Kids Find Out

Caregiver Wellness & Support · Supporting the Child

*Preparing a child for questions, teasing, and deciding who they tell.*

**IN THIS GUIDE**


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**A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.**
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*Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.*

# When Other Kids Find Out



> *Preparing a child for questions, teasing, and deciding who they tell.*

## THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Children of incarcerated parents — and young people who have been through court, detention, or probation themselves — frequently describe the hardest part as not the absence itself but the exposure — the moment other kids find out, the whispering, the questions from a teacher in front of a class, the assignment about family that they do not know how to answer.

This is one of the few parts of the situation a family can prepare for in advance. A child who has decided ahead of time what they will say, and who has practiced saying it, is dramatically more comfortable than a child ambushed in a hallway.

The goal is not secrecy and it is not disclosure. It is control: the child decides who knows, how much, and when. That control is one of the few things this situation has not taken from them.

## THEIR INFORMATION, THEIR DECISION

Start by telling the child directly: this is your information and you get to decide who knows. Not a rule from you about hiding it, not a push to be open about it. Their call.

Some children want to tell a best friend. Some want no one at school to know. Some change their mind repeatedly. All of that is fine and none of it needs to be argued with.

What you can offer is the difference between people: a best friend, a teacher, a coach, and a group of kids at lunch are four different audiences, and the child may want a different answer for each.

## BUILDING THE LAYERED ANSWERS

Level one, for anyone: "He's away right now." True, complete, and closes the topic without lying.

Level two, for someone the child trusts a little: "My dad doesn't live with us right now." Slightly more, still bounded.

Level three, for a real friend: the actual truth, in whatever words the child chooses.

Write the three levels down together and practice them out loud, including the follow-up question. "Away

where?" gets "He just doesn't live with us right now" and a change of subject. Practicing the second question is what makes it hold.

## + WHEN TEASING HAPPENS

Teach the boring response. Teasing needs a reaction; a flat "Yeah, so?" and walking away starves it. Practice this — it is a skill, not an attitude.

Make clear that repeated teasing is bullying and is the school's job to stop, not the child's. Tell them exactly which adult to go to and that telling that adult is not tattling.

If it does happen, report it in writing, describe the incidents specifically, ask what the school will do, and ask for a follow-up date. A verbal complaint in a hallway disappears; an email exists.

## + THE ASSIGNMENTS NOBODY THINKS ABOUT

Family trees, "bring a parent to school" days, Father's Day cards, and "write about your summer" all quietly assume a household shape. These blindside children regularly.

Ask the teacher in advance, at the start of the year, to give you a heads-up on family-related assignments and to allow flexibility — the child can write about any adult who matters to them.

Rehearse a low-cost exit line the child can use in the moment: "Can I do mine about my grandma?" A child with one prepared sentence does not have to think while everyone is watching.

## + WHICH ADULTS AT SCHOOL SHOULD KNOW

At minimum, one adult who sees the child daily and one counselor. That is usually enough for the child to be read accurately when they have a bad day.

Ask explicitly for confidentiality: shared only with staff who need it, and not mentioned to the child in front of peers. Say that out loud, because the well-meaning teacher who checks in publicly is a real risk.

Tell your child which adults you have told and why. Discovering that adults have been discussing them behind their back is its own injury.

## + THREE ANSWERS ON AN INDEX CARD

A ten-year-old refused to go to school for three days after a classmate said her father was "a criminal." She had frozen, said nothing, and cried in the bathroom.

Her grandmother did not lecture. They sat down and wrote three answers on an index card: one for strangers, one for kids she sort of knew, one for her two real friends. Then they practiced, including the grandmother playing the annoying kid who keeps pushing.

The card went in her backpack. She used the first answer twice that month and reported, with some satisfaction, that it had been "boring" and the kid had moved on. Later that year she told one friend the whole

truth, on her own timing, and that friend came to her birthday.

## + WORDS YOU CAN USE

### Giving the child control

*“Something I want you to know: this is your information about your family, and you get to decide who knows it. Not me. If you never want to tell anyone at school, that's fine. If you want to tell your best friend, that's fine too. And you can change your mind whenever you want.”*

### The three-level answers to practice

*Write these on a card together and rehearse them out loud.*

*“For anyone: "He's away right now." For someone you kind of know: "My dad doesn't live with us right now." For a real friend: whatever you decide you want to tell them. And if anybody pushes for more: "I don't really want to talk about it," then change the subject.”*

### The boring answer to teasing

*“If somebody says something mean about it, the strongest thing you can do is be boring. "Yeah, so?" and walk away. People who tease want a reaction — if there isn't one, it stops being fun for them. Want to practice? I'll be the annoying kid.”*

### Email to the teacher requesting discretion and a heads-up

*“Hello — I'd like to share something in confidence about [child's name]. Their parent is incarcerated. I'm sharing so you can understand the context if you see changes in their mood or work, and I'd ask that it stay with staff who need to know and not be raised with my child in front of classmates. I'd also appreciate a heads-up before any family-related assignments so we can prepare. Thank you.”*

### Reporting teasing to the school in writing

*“Hello — I'm writing to report incidents involving [child's name]. On [dates], [describe what was said or done, and by whom if known]. This relates to our family's private circumstances and my child is now [reluctant to attend / distressed]. Could you tell me what steps the school will take, and can we set a date to follow up? Thank you.”*

## + PREPARING FOR THE DAY OTHER KIDS FIND OUT

- [ ] Tell your child plainly that this is their information to share or not.
- [ ] Write three levels of answers together, in the child's own words.
- [ ] Practice out loud, including the pushy follow-up question.
- [ ] Teach and rehearse the boring response to teasing.
- [ ] Name the exact adult at school the child should go to.
- [ ] Make clear that telling that adult is not tattling.
- [ ] Tell one daily teacher and one counselor, and request confidentiality.
- [ ] Ask for advance notice of family-related assignments.
- [ ] Give the child an exit line for those assignments.
- [ ] Tell your child which adults you told and why.
- [ ] Report repeated teasing in writing and ask for a follow-up date.

## + REFLECT AND WRITE

**Does my child know that who finds out is their decision?**

**What three answers would my child actually be comfortable saying?**

**Which adult at school does my child trust most?**

**What assignment or school event is coming up that could catch them off guard?**

## + YOUR NEXT STEP

> Practice the child's sentence with them once, out loud.

## + WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.

*This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.*

*For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.*

## *You do not have to do this alone.*

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