THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Letters, Messages, and Small Rituals

Co-Parenting & Communication · Parent-Child Connection

Low-cost ways to stay present between calls and visits.

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.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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> *Low-cost ways to stay present between calls and visits.*

THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Calls and visits are limited by schedules, facility rules, and sometimes distance, but letters are not. A letter can be written at 2 a.m. or during a rec period, mailed on any day, and read and reread by a child whenever they want, which makes it one of the few forms of contact fully within a parent's control.

For children too young to read well, or too anxious to hold a phone conversation, a letter, drawing, or small mailed object often communicates more than a call does, because there is no pressure to perform in real time. A picture arriving in the mail says someone thought about them on an ordinary Tuesday.

This lesson is about low-cost, repeatable ways to stay present between calls and visits — not grand gestures, but small rituals a family can actually keep up for years, which is what makes them work.

SHORT AND FREQUENT BEATS LONG AND RARE

A five-sentence letter sent every week does more for a child than a four-page letter sent every few months. Frequency builds the sense that a parent is a steady presence rather than someone who appears occasionally with a big effort attached.

Short letters are also easier to actually write, which matters. A parent who feels they must produce something long and meaningful every time will write less often; permission to send something brief keeps the habit alive.

For caregivers reading letters aloud to younger children, shorter letters are also easier to read in one sitting without losing the child's attention halfway through.

SHARED ACTIVITIES GIVE BOTH SIDES SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

Reading the same book on both sides — even a simple picture book — turns a letter or call into a conversation about a shared experience rather than a report on separate lives. "What did you think happened next" is a question a young child can actually answer.

The same idea works with a drawing prompt: both parent and child draw "your favorite animal" or "what you want for your birthday" and mail or show each other the results. The activity does the work of connection;

neither side has to invent something to say.

These shared activities are easiest to sustain when they are simple and repeatable — the same book series, a drawing prompt each month — rather than a new elaborate project each time.

+ MARK THE MOMENTS A CHILD ALREADY NOTICES

Children track certain days whether or not an adult reminds them to: the first day of school, a birthday, a lost tooth, the start of summer. A letter or card that arrives around one of these moments tells a child their parent is keeping the same calendar they are.

This does not require perfect timing. A card that arrives a few days after a birthday because of mail delays still lands as "they remembered," as long as it clearly references the actual event rather than being generic.

Caregivers can help by passing along dates and small upcoming events — a school play, a tournament — so the incarcerated parent has something specific to mark rather than guessing at the calendar from a distance.

+ KEEP THE TONE AGE-APPROPRIATE

A child should not be the recipient of adult worry, legal frustration, or details about the case, even when a parent needs somewhere to put those feelings. Letters to a child work best when they stay in the child's world: what the parent remembers, what they're proud of, what they're looking forward to.

If a parent needs to process something heavier, that belongs in a letter to another adult, a counselor, or a program set up for that purpose — not folded into a child's mail. Caregivers reading letters aloud should feel able to skip or gently edit anything that doesn't belong in a child's hands, and to say so kindly if it becomes a pattern.

+ A DRAWING A MONTH FOR THREE YEARS

A mother incarcerated when her son was four started a simple ritual: once a month, she drew a picture of an animal and mailed it with one sentence about why she picked it. Her son's grandmother drew one back on his behalf until he could draw his own.

There was no theme to explain and nothing complicated to sustain — just one drawing, one sentence, once a month, for over three years. The boy kept every one in a shoebox and could describe most of them from memory.

When she came home, he showed her the box before he showed her anything else. The ritual had cost her almost nothing each month and had become, for him, proof that she had never stopped thinking about him.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Starting a shared reading ritual

Written in a letter proposing the idea.

“I'd like us to read the same book, a little at a time. Could you (or Grandma) get a copy of [book title]? I'll read the same pages here and write you what I thought happened next.”

A short, frequent letter

A model for a five-minute letter.

“Hi bug — I keep thinking about the joke you told me last time, the one about the chicken. Made me laugh again today. What's something funny that happened this week? I love you and I'm thinking about you every day.”

Caregiver passing along a date to mark

Letter or message to the incarcerated parent.

“Just so you know, her school play is on the 14th — she's playing a tree and is very proud of it. Something to ask her about, or a card that mentions it would mean a lot.”

Gently redirecting adult content out of a child's letter

Caregiver speaking honestly and kindly to the parent.

“I want to keep reading her your letters, and I also want to ask that the harder parts about the case go in a separate note to me. I'll always make sure she gets your love and the fun stuff.”

+ BUILD ONE SMALL RITUAL THIS MONTH

- [ ] Pick one ritual: a book, a drawing prompt, a short letter schedule.
- [ ] Aim for short and frequent rather than long and occasional.
- [ ] Note upcoming dates a caregiver can pass along to mark.
- [ ] Ask the child directly what they'd like to hear about.
- [ ] Keep the tone in the child's world, not the adult's worries.
- [ ] Set a simple, sustainable frequency you can actually keep — weekly or monthly.
- [ ] Save copies or photos of letters and drawings somewhere safe.
- [ ] Check in after a few months on whether the ritual still fits the child's age.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

What is one small ritual we could realistically keep up for a year?

Am I sending longer, rarer letters when shorter, frequent ones would land better?

What has my child mentioned wanting to hear about from me?

Is there anything in my letters that belongs with an adult instead?

YOUR NEXT STEP

Pick one ritual you can actually repeat monthly.

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.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint