THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Free Family Guide: Navigating Incarceration

Legal & Policy Literacy · Find Reliable Help

MFGP's free guide covering the first weeks: locating someone, first calls and visits, and supporting children.

IN THIS GUIDE

- Where to start depending on your moment
- Reading it as a reference, not a book
- What it covers and what it does not
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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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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Navigating Incarceration is MFGP's own free family guide, built for the first weeks after an arrest or incarceration, when families have the least time and the most unanswered questions. It requires no account and no payment, and it is written for people who are exhausted and scared, not for people with time to research.

Most families in this situation are handling several urgent problems at once — finding out where a loved one is being held, figuring out how to talk to a child about it, understanding the first visit and call process, and keeping the household's finances and school arrangements from falling apart. The guide was built to answer exactly those questions, in the order they usually come up.

This lesson is not a summary of the guide's contents. It is about how to actually use it: where to start depending on your situation, how to use it as a reference rather than reading it cover to cover, and how to keep it accessible when you need it most.

WHERE TO START DEPENDING ON YOUR MOMENT

If someone was just taken into custody and you do not know where they are, start with the section on locating a loved one. It walks through the inmate locator systems used at different levels — county, state, and federal — and explains why the right tool depends on which system is holding the person.

If you are past that point and preparing for the first call or visit, go to that section next. It covers what to expect procedurally, what commonly goes wrong the first time, and what to bring or prepare in advance so the visit is not wasted figuring out logistics.

If there is a child in the household, the section on telling children is worth reading even before you feel ready to have that conversation, because it gives you language broken down by age rather than a single script that will not fit every child.

If the household's finances or a child's school situation are the most pressing issue, skip directly to those sections — the guide is built so you do not need to read it in order.

READING IT AS A REFERENCE, NOT A BOOK

The guide is organized by the situation you are in rather than as a narrative, which means it is meant to be opened and closed repeatedly over weeks or months, not read once from start to finish.

It's available to read online and as a free PDF download — download the PDF the first time you open it, even if you plan to read it on the site, so you have it available without needing a signal or connection later.

Because it has no account requirement, there is nothing to lose access to. You can hand the link or the PDF to another caregiver, a grandparent, or an older sibling helping out, without anyone needing to create a login.

WHAT IT COVERS AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

It covers locating a loved one, first calls and visits, and how to talk with children about what is happening, along with school and money supports and where to get further help. It is built to answer the questions that arrive first, before a family has had time to find the more specialized resources covered elsewhere in this module.

It is educational, not legal advice, and it does not replace an attorney, a court self-help center, or a facility's own rules, which vary by state, county, and institution. Where the guide gives general information, it will point you to where to verify the specific rule for your situation.

It is meant to work alongside the other resources in this module — once the guide has gotten you oriented, tools like LawHelp.org or the LSC finder are where you go for the legal specifics that apply to your case.

MAKING IT PART OF YOUR ROUTINE

Keep the downloaded PDF in the same place as your other important documents — the paperwork folder mentioned elsewhere in this curriculum is a natural home for it, so it is available even without internet access.

Revisit sections as circumstances change. A family that used the locating and first-visit sections in week one often needs the school and money sections weeks later, once the initial shock has passed and daily logistics become the pressing issue.

If you are part of a caregiver support circle or peer group, mention the guide by name — many caregivers pass it along informally once they have used it, and it is built to be shared freely.

USING THE GUIDE OUT OF ORDER

A caregiver whose son was arrested on a Friday night found the guide through a search that same weekend. She did not read it start to finish; she went straight to the locating section because she did not yet know which facility he was in.

Once she had that answer, she opened the first calls and visits section to understand what a first phone call from a facility usually sounds like, so she was not caught off guard by the automated messages and

collect-call setup.

Two weeks later, once the immediate crisis had settled, she went back and opened the section on talking with children, because her daughter had started asking direct questions. She said afterward that having the whole guide already downloaded meant she never had to search for it twice.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Sharing the guide with another caregiver

"There's a free guide from My Fairy GodParents called Navigating Incarceration — it covers locating someone, first visits and calls, and talking with kids about it. No account needed, and there's a PDF you can save. I think it would help right now."

Using it to prepare for a first visit

"Before I go, let me check the guide's first visits and calls section again for what to bring and what the process usually looks like at this stage."

Bringing it up in a support group

"If anyone else is early in this, there's a free guide called Navigating Incarceration that walks through the first weeks step by step — locating someone, first calls, and talking to kids. It's free and doesn't need an account."

+ GET THE MOST OUT OF THE GUIDE

- [ ] Open the guide and identify which section matches your situation right now.
- [ ] Download the PDF the first time you open it, even if reading online.
- [ ] Use the locating section first if you don't yet know where someone is held.
- [ ] Use the first calls and visits section before your next scheduled contact.
- [ ] Read the talking-with-children section even before you feel ready to use it.
- [ ] Save the PDF in your paperwork folder for offline access.
- [ ] Revisit school and money sections as those needs come up.
- [ ] Share it with another caregiver, since no account is required.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Which section of the guide matches where my family is right now?

Have I downloaded the PDF so I can access it without a connection?

Is there a conversation with a child I've been putting off that a section of this guide could help with?

Who else in my circle would benefit from having this guide?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

Open the guide and download the PDF to keep offline.

+ 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.

The information provided through The #FKLM Family Blueprint is for general educational purposes and is not legal advice. Laws and policies differ by jurisdiction and may change. Families needing advice about their individual circumstances should consult an appropriately qualified attorney or legal-services organization.

You do not have to do this alone.

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