Prison visit dress code and what you can bring

Families are turned away at visitation for clothing and property reasons more than for anything else — after a long drive, with children in the car. Rules vary by facility, but the patterns are consistent enough that you can prepare for them.

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IMPORTANT NOTE

Every facility sets its own dress code and property rules, and they change without notice. Call the facility or read its current visitation page the same week you plan to go, and ask specifically about children's clothing.

WHO THIS GUIDE CAN HELP

- **For youth**
  Dress plainly and comfortably, and expect to leave your phone in the car. None of it is about you — it is the same for everyone walking in.
- **For supporters**
  A gas card, a spare set of plain clothes in the trunk, and a roll of quarters for lockers and vending machines are three of the most useful things you can give a visiting family.

CLOTHING THAT COMMONLY GETS PEOPLE TURNED AWAY

Assume all of these are prohibited unless the facility says otherwise in writing.

- Clothing resembling inmate or staff uniforms — khaki, orange, gray, forest green, denim-on-denim, or camouflage
- Revealing clothing: sleeveless or low-cut tops, short skirts or shorts, sheer fabric, crop tops
- Tight or form-fitting clothing such as leggings, yoga pants, spandex, and bodycon dresses
- Underwire bras, which set off metal detectors — wear a wireless bra instead
- Hoods, hats, bandanas, and sunglasses

- Open-toe shoes, sandals, or heels in some facilities; closed-toe flats are the safe choice
- Excessive jewelry — most facilities allow a wedding band and a religious item only
- Clothing with slogans, gang-associated colors, or drug, alcohol, or violence imagery

WHAT VISITORS CAN USUALLY BRING IN

Nearly everything else goes in a locker or stays in the car. Bring quarters — many lockers and vending machines are coin-operated.

- **Government photo ID for every adult visitor**
  Phones, smart watches, earbuds, and cameras
- **A small amount of cash or coins for vending machines**
  Purses, backpacks, and wallets
- **Car key (single key, sometimes only in a locker)**
  Food and drinks brought from outside
- **Baby essentials: limited diapers, wipes, one clear bottle**
  Diaper bags, blankets, and toys
- **Prescription medication with documentation, if pre-approved**
  Tobacco, vapes, lighters, and pocket knives
- **A clear plastic bag if the facility requires one**
  Gifts, letters, books, or packages handed over in person

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOUSE

- **1. Confirm you are on the approved visitor list**
  Most facilities require an application processed days or weeks in advance, for every adult and often for children. Approval is not automatic and is not permanent.
- **2. Confirm hours and visit type this week**
  Ask whether the visit is in-person or video, whether contact is allowed, whether you need an appointment, and how early to arrive. Schedules change with staffing and lockdowns.
- **3. Read the dress code out loud to everyone going**
  Including the children. Then pack one spare plain outfit per person in the trunk — the single most effective way to avoid losing a visit.
- **4. Bring documentation for children**
  Many facilities require a birth certificate for a minor and proof that the accompanying adult is a parent, guardian, or authorized caregiver.
- **5. Plan the arrival**
  Arrive early, use the restroom before check-in, and expect a metal detector, a search, and a wait. Tell children exactly what will happen so nothing surprises them.

DURING AND AFTER THE VISIT

- **Contact rules are strict**
  Where contact visits are allowed, a brief hug at the start and end is typical and physical contact in between is usually limited. Officers will correct you; it is routine, not personal.
- **You are being observed**
  Conversations may be monitored and visits can be ended for rule violations. Keep the focus on the child and the parent.
- **The ride home is the real visit**
  Feelings usually arrive after, not during. Leave silence available, keep the radio low, and let the child lead. Food afterward helps more than talking does.
- **Write down what happened**
  Note what worked, what the officers said, and anything you would do differently. It makes the next visit dramatically easier.

QUESTIONS FAMILIES ASK

- **What is the dress code for prison visits?**
  Most facilities require modest, plain, non-revealing clothing and prohibit anything resembling inmate or staff uniforms — often khaki, orange, gray, forest green, denim, and camouflage. Leggings, sleeveless or low-cut tops, shorts, hats, hoods, sunglasses, and excessive jewelry are commonly banned. Always confirm with the specific facility, because rules differ and change.
- **Can you wear leggings to visit someone in jail?**
  Usually not. Leggings, yoga pants, and other tight or form-fitting clothing are prohibited at most facilities. Loose-fitting trousers and a plain top with sleeves are the safest choice, and it is worth keeping a spare outfit in the car.
- **What can you bring into a prison visit?**
  Generally only a photo ID, a car key, and a small amount of coins or cash for vending machines, plus limited baby essentials if you have an infant. Phones, bags, food, gifts, and personal items stay in a locker or in your vehicle. Check whether your facility requires a clear plastic bag.
- **Do children need ID to visit?**
  Many facilities require a birth certificate for a minor visitor and proof that the accompanying adult is a parent, guardian, or authorized caregiver, and children usually must be approved on the visitor list in advance. Confirm the requirements before the drive.

KEEP GOING

- **Visiting a parent in prison**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/guides/visiting-a-parent-in-prison
- **How to find someone who is incarcerated**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/guides/how-to-find-someone-who-is-incarcerated

- **Sending money and staying in touch**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/guides/staying-in-touch-with-an-incarcerated-parent

More guides and family resources: myfairygodparents.org/resources

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