

General Effects: Many children exhibit symptoms after a guardian is incarcerated or after a guardian returns home from prison. These symptoms are persistent in different aspects of the child's life and over time. Here are some tips for working with a Little who has challenges resulting from pre/post incarceration.

Symptoms Pre-incarceration:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Concern/guilt
- Loneliness
- Shame
- Depression
- Social Isolation
- School problems
- Self-esteem drop
- Focus on relationship

Symptoms post-incarceration:

- Guilt (for maintaining a relationship with another adult)
- Confusion
- Excitement
- Fear
- Anger

Advice for Mentors with Littles experiencing pre-incarceration:

Planning the right activity ahead of time

- Plan outings in advance and stick to your schedule! Let your Little know when the next visit will be. This will provide consistency and also give your Little something to look forward to.
- Create a calendar at the beginning of your friendship. Allow a Little to look forward to different activities and plans along the way and know that someone is excited to see them too.
- It is important to keep your Little active as this is directly related to happiness. Encourage participation in things your Little is interested in and compliment them on jobs well-done. This will allow them to understand positive self-worth.

Role model a positive mentality

- Children with a guardian going to jail can feel depressed, lonely and deserted, so it is important to focus on the positive. Provide lots of positive encouragement.
- It is especially important to earn your Little's trust. A Little in this situation may be guarded in an attempt to avoid getting hurt or having another loved one leave. Let your Little know that they can trust you through your actions (saying so may feel like an empty promise to a child who has been disappointed in the past). Show that you are not trying to take a guardian's place. Be respectful of all guardians, even if you disagree with their behaviors / reasons for incarceration.
- Express emotions and show vulnerability. Show your Little that you are also comfortable confiding in them by sharing your feelings in an appropriate way. Act as a support system when necessary and ask about your Little's feelings on various situations. Show that you are interested in maintaining this friendship and build a sense of connection.

Advice for Mentors with Littles experiencing post-incarceration:

Helping them cope with feelings of guilt, frustration, and confusion

- Remind your Little that you are not replacing an incarcerated guardian and that you are there to be a friend. If a Little maintains a positive relationship with an incarcerated guardian, it may be nice to help your Little make a welcome home gift for their return.
- Create space and invite your Little to talk about how they are feeling. Let your Little lead. They may not be ready to share.
- Do your best to make a Little feel comfortable talking about this sensitive topic. A Little may struggle to find the words to express how they are feeling. A Big can suggest activities that use alternate forms for self-expression (journaling, painting, etc) that will allow a Little to write or act out emotions.
- Keep in communication with primary care-givers about the potential for transition or change following an incarcerated guardian's return. Know what to expect so that you can help your Little during this time.