



Visiting a loved one behind bars can be challenging. Prisons do not have the most inviting atmospheres, and seeing a loved one inside can be hard. Even so, staying in contact with an incarcerated loved one can be essential to their well-being and their progress. Correspondence and phone calls help, but you should never miss the opportunity to visit when you can. We have put this section together to help give you some information on visiting a prisoner.

TIP 1 Be sure that the inmate knows you are coming, and be sure you have completed all necessary paperwork to be on the approved visitor's list. You cannot just show up at a prison and expect to visit someone.

TIP 2 Call the prison one hour before you leave to verify that visitation has not been canceled for any reason. A lockdown of the prison will typically suspend all visitations for that day, and we have heard many stories of people visiting the prison only to be turned away through no fault of their own. Hopefully one day prisons will come up with an alert system for this type of thing, but until they do, call ahead.

TIP 3 First off, try to find information about the specific institution that you are visiting. Rules do vary from institution to institution. You can search for a specific facility using WriteAPrisoner.com's [Prisoner Locator](#) at <http://writeaprisoner.com/prisoner-locator>. It is good to know all rules before you show up. In most cases, the inmate will be able to give the specifics to you as well.

TIP 4 Print the directions to and from the prison, and try to arrive slightly early instead of slightly late. Even if you arrive early, there are often events that slow things down. For instance, if inmates are being transferred you will be asked to wait for security reasons. Always comply and be patient.

TIP 5 Avoid altercations with other visitors, guards and inmates. This could have an adverse impact on the inmate. Focus on the person that you came to see. Otherwise, you may be asked to leave, and you may be permanently banned from visiting again.

TIP 6 Be mindful of what you wear. Do not wear clothing with metal in or on it or excessive amounts of jewelry. You will most likely have to pass through a metal detector. Bring nothing in that you don't need. Prison is much like clearing airport security in that the less you have on you, the fewer holdups and problems you will have. Wear freshly laundered clothes. Some prisons will randomly scan clothing for drug residue, and in some instances brand new (unwashed) clothing will trigger the scanning device because of the chemicals used to treat new clothing. If that happens, you will be sent home, and you may be temporarily banned from

“Any visit reduced the risk of recidivism by 13% for felony reconvictions and 25% for technical violation revocations.”

Data based on a 2011 study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections titled *The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism*

visiting. So, if you buy a new article of clothing to wear, be sure to launder it first. Bring some cash (change and single bills) to buy food and drink for you and the person you are visiting. Visiting rooms typically have many vending machines, and this will be your only food source. You cannot leave for lunch and return; plan to eat in the visiting room. Most prisons require you to bring your money in a see-through plastic pouch or Ziploc bag. Take only your ignition key in with you if you drive. Most prisons do not allow you to bring in more than one key. If you are taking an infant and need diapers and bottles, check ahead to see how this is handled at the prison. Take a valid government-issued ID (e.g., driver's license). Do not joke inappropriately with guards or other visitors (e.g., jokes about breaking someone out).

TIP 7 If you are thinking about smuggling something into the prison, think again. If you are caught (and many are), you will likely be charged with a crime, and you will most likely be banned from ever visiting that inmate again. In addition, the inmate is likely to be charged with another crime, and you may extend the length of his incarceration. Visitors to prisons are subject to search.

TIP 8 Inmates often suffer from depression, and your regular visits can have a lasting positive impact on them. Make a mental list of positive things to discuss with the inmate. Time can sometimes drag during a prison visit, and the best thing you can bring is a lot of love and good conversation to pass the time in a positive way. The last thing that you ever want is to fight with a loved one while they're locked up. You will both regret it. If the

“*A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.*”

-Walter Winchell

conversation takes a turn for the worse, be the better person, and remember why you're there - to show them that they're loved and to give them hope. Most visiting rooms offer photo opportunities for a small fee. Inmates often like to have a photo to remember the visit, so if you can afford this in your budget, try to plan on it.

TIP 9 WriteAPrisoner.com features a “Share a Ride” link on each inmate's profile on our site. This section is designed to help you find people visiting the same prison so that you can carpool. You will need to register to use this service, but there is never any fee.

Success story or suggestion? We want to know what worked for you so we can share it with other inmates.

If you have a suggestion to make about this resource, please do so at:

Self-help Suggestion - P.O. Box 10 - Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

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