

Safe and Secure, Family-friendly Visiting in Jails and Prisons: A Toolkit for Enhancing Child Visitation Experiences

About the Toolkit: Millions of children across the United States have an incarcerated parent. For the majority of these children, maintaining contact with that parent is in the best interest of the child. Research has also shown that visiting has a positive impact on reducing recidivism. While jails and prisons must be primarily concerned with safety and security, taking steps to support family visitors can have positive consequences for correctional facilities, too, including more positive interactions between staff and visitors, and inmates and staff.

The goal of this tool is to guide corrections administrators in identifying opportunities to create family-friendly visiting – while maintaining safety and security – within a correctional facility environment. This tool was developed in partnership with university extension educators, practitioners, and corrections professionals. The tool is not intended to be prescriptive; instead, it should be used to guide conversation with corrections administrators and key stakeholders about opportunities to improve the visiting experience, and reduce stress and confusion for children and families affected by incarceration. Specific attention was paid to creating safe, child-friendly spaces that would improve conditions for children visiting an incarcerated parent.

Who Should Use this Toolkit? The toolkit was designed to be used by corrections administrators, jail/prison programmers, employees in planning and performance, and

local policymakers (e.g., county commissioners) and key community partners (e.g., university extension educators, parent educators) to assess the current visiting environment and identify opportunities for change. We recommend that two or more stakeholders independently assess the environment, and then use the tool to discuss opportunities for organizational change.

When Should this Toolkit be Used? The toolkit can be used at any point in time. Correctional facilities that are considering change may find that using this toolkit before undertaking any organization change, and then again after a period of time, may be a valuable way to track progress and set new goals.

How Should this Toolkit be Used? Depending on your agency's goals and resources, the kit can be used in whole or in part. Agencies may find it easiest to start with one or two sections before taking on others. There is no specified order that needs to be followed. This toolkit can be used in conjunction with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) [“Model Practices for Parents in Jails in Prisons”](#) document. Each category below (e.g., website, lobby) lists corresponding chapters in the NIC document where more information can be found.

Additional Notes: Given the importance of early literacy for young children, several items are marked with a book icon , and in some instances, additional information is provided about strategies for building literacy in young children with incarcerated parents. We recommend that correctional facilities partner with local community-based organizations (e.g., extension educators, parent educators, librarians) to identify ways to create an early literacy environment for young visitors within the corrections environment.

Safe and Secure, Family-friendly Visiting in Jails and Prisons: A Toolkit for Assessing the Correctional Facility Environment

Correctional Facility _____

Name/Position: _____ Date: _____

1. Website (NIC chapters 4, 7)				Comments
a. The correctional facility has a dedicated page with information about visiting an inmate.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
b. Information about the visiting process (i.e., how to be added to an inmate's visiting list) is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
c. Information about the type of visiting (e.g., in-person, non-contact, video) is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
d. Information about the days and times for visiting is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
e. The facility's visiting hours are regular, straight forward, and include evenings and weekends.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
f. The website explains the policy for visiting on holidays.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

g. Driving directions to the facility or a link to a map is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
h. Directions to the facility via public transit are posted.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
i. Free or low-cost transportation options are available to visitors and information about the options is posted on the website.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
j. Information about where to park and whether or not there are parking fees is posted.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
k. All visiting rules (including what can and cannot be brought into the facility and dress codes) are clearly posted on the website.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
l. Images of the facility's lobby and visiting area are available.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
m. Specific information about visiting with children is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

n. Contact information for staff who can answer visitor's questions is easy to find.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
o. A link to the agency's visiting policy is provided.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
p. The website is regularly updated and information provided is accurate.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
q. Website navigation (i.e., ease with which information can be located, clearly labeled).	1 very difficult	2	3	4	5 very easy	

2. Exterior					Comments
a. If there is a smoking area, it is 15-20 feet away from the entrance.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe	
b. Designated parking is available for visitors.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe	
c. Parking lot is safe with lights.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe	

d. Bike racks are available.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
e. Signs clearly direct visitors to the appropriate entrance.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
f. Exterior signs convey information about what is not permitted in the building (e.g., guns, cell phones).	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
g. Cleanliness	1 Very Clean	2	3	4	5 Very Dirty	

3. Lobby (NIC Chapters 2, 4, 6)				Comments
a. There is a sign posted in the main lobby that welcomes visitors.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
b. Signage in the lobby is clear, easy to read, and accurate.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	 Any TV monitors play educational programs for children (not just entertainment [e.g., cartoons]) and are on low volume.
c. Free lockers are available for visitors to securely store their personal belongings. If free lockers are not available, signs are in the parking lot reminding visitors to bring coins with them, and/or facility offers free coins to visitors in need.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
d. A free, public phone is available in the lobby for visitors to make local phone calls.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
e. Printed materials about local community resources (e.g., public library, shelters) are available.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	 Materials are provided to caregivers on literacy building activities they can do at home with child (e.g., talking with child during routine activities).

f. Information about local transportation options (e.g., cab companies, bus routes) is available for visitors.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
g. Photographs and/or artwork on the walls are positive and portray images of diverse children and/or families.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	 Artwork or wall displays are literacy-based (e.g., alphabet, numbers, maps, photos, growth charts); materials are displayed at child's eye-level; materials represent different ages, races/ethnicities, cultures, languages, abilities.
h. Age-appropriate books, toys, and/or other educational materials are available for children.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	 Books are within a child's reach; books are available for children of different ages (e.g., board books, picture books); books are organized by reading level; other educational materials are available that actively engage children (e.g., puzzles, coloring sheets).
i. The facility partners with community organizations that donate children's supplies (e.g., books, toys, furniture, decorations) for the lobby.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
j. Lobby has enough seating for all visitors that allows for personal space.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
k. Lobby has child-size chairs or benches are available for child visitors.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	 Space is adequate and appropriate for children to read.

l. Lobby has a rug/mat for children to play on the floor.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
m. Lobby has vending machine with child-friendly snacks and juice.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
n. Restrooms are available and maintained.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
o. Diaper changing tables are available and maintained.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
p. Drinking fountains are available and maintained.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
q. Additional staff/volunteers who have demonstrated cultural sensitivity and speak the language(s) of visiting families assist in the lobby (ideally non-uniformed).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
r. When going through security, staff follows a child-friendly protocol (e.g., staff kneels to child's height, models the search).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

s. Facility partners with community agencies to offer occasional family-focused resource fairs in the facility during visiting hours.	☐ Yes	☐ No		☐ Did Not Observe		
t. Cleanliness of waiting area	1 very dirty	2	3	4	5 very clean	
u. Interactions with staff are friendly, respectful, welcoming, and calm.	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 strongly agree	 Staff directly interact with children in a warm and respectful way.
v. Noise level of lobby	1 very loud	2	3	4	5 very quiet	

4. Visiting (NIC Chapters 2, 4, 7, 9)					Comments
a. Signage in the visiting area(s) is clear, easy to read, accurate, and available in multiple languages.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe		
b. Photographs and/or artwork on the walls are positive and portray images of diverse children and/or families.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe		

c. Visiting room has soft, child-friendly furniture.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
d. Larger rooms or booths are prioritized to families first.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
e. Policies permit visits from minors, including non- biological children (e.g., step, adopted, or foster children).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
f. Policies permit multiple children to visit with the parent at one time.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
g. Policies permit people other than the legal guardian to accompany children on visits.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
h. Policies reflect the least restrictive eligibility requirements possible for all parents to be allowed to visit with children (e.g., parents on heightened security, medical still get visits).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
i. Parents with active CPS orders have access to court-ordered visits.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

j. Policies are in place to limit time that children wait to visit (e.g., child-preferred visiting hours, prioritize children getting checked in as they arrive).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
k. Policies are in place to separate children/family visitors from other adult visitors whenever possible.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
l. Children can take bathroom breaks and re-enter the visiting room.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
m. Age-appropriate books, toys, and/or other educational materials are available for children.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
n. Some of the same books, toys and materials are available on the parents' side so they can interact with children (for non-contact and video visits).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
o. Parents are not restrained in front of children.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

p. If parents are searched before and after visits, searches occur out of sight of children.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
q. Facility offers contact visits for parents and their minor children and/or extended family visits.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
r. Video visits are offered as a supplement to other forms of visitation.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
s. Staff in the visiting area is trained to be child-friendly.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
t. Resources are available to caregivers who are visiting with minor children.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
u. Visiting guidelines are implemented consistently by staff and in accordance with the same rules posted on the website and in the facility.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	
v. Visitors are provided the opportunity to give feedback on their visiting experience (e.g., a paper survey).	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Did Not Observe	

w. Cleanliness of visiting area	1 very dirty	2	3	4	5 very clean	
x. Interactions with staff are friendly, respectful, welcoming, and calm.	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 strongly agree	
y. Noise level of visiting area	1 very loud	2	3	4	5 very quiet	

Overall Comments:

What did you like about the environment?

What didn't you like about the environment?

What does the staff like most about the environment?

What would the staff most like to improve about the environment?

Attach any images from the environmental scan, including screenshots of the website, photos from the facility lobby and visiting areas, etc.