



Photo: Rick Demopolis

# Resources to support fathers returning from prison or jail to families in Minnesota



## For fathers and their families

Being separated from your children can be hard under any circumstances, but prison or jail can make it even more challenging. Fathers are important and can support their children even when they are apart. The following actions can help fathers keep or start being part of their children's lives, both when incarcerated and after release:

**1. Give simple and age-appropriate explanation of why their dad is incarcerated can be helpful to your children.** If your children don't understand why you are gone, they may fantasize their own explanation or blame themselves for their dad's absence. Tips for how to talk with your children about incarceration are on the website below.

**2. Know your rights when it comes to your children.** If you were never married to or aren't married to the mother of your children now, you don't necessarily have any legal rights to parenting time or custody. Understand how paternity was established if you are listed as the father on a child's birth certificate. Know if a court order gives you the right to spend time with your children or have a say in how they are raised. Ask for help if you haven't established paternity and get the answers to your questions before you sign. The child support office can help you establish paternity.

**Family support and employment**  
"play an important role for released offenders who succeed at reentering society and avoid returning to prison."<sup>1</sup>

**3. Child support can be reduced or stopped while in prison or jail, but you have to request that change. It is not automatic.** Write to your child support agency and ask them to review your support order. Tell them that you cannot pay child support because you are incarcerated. Ask them to send you a case summary so that you know the status of your child support. The sooner you act, the sooner things can change.

**4. Talk to your child support officer before and after release.** Contacting your child support officer can help you manage your case and make child support plans and reinstatement of driver's licenses more realistic for you. Check in every month or within 10 days of a change in your mailing address, employment, school attendance, or living arrangements. Leave a message if you don't connect and give your full name, date of birth, Social Security number, child support case number, and phone number.

**5. Ask for help. Minnesota has people and programs that support fathers leaving corrections and their families.** Through the website listed below, you can find programs that can help you reunite with your family and community, find employment and housing, and make your transition.

For videos and connections to supportive resources for fathers and their families go to:

[www.mnfathers.org/mindthegap](http://www.mnfathers.org/mindthegap)

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1. "Incarceration, Reentry, and Child Support Issues: National and State Research Overview." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2006.

