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*"I know
how you
feel,
because
this
happened
to me"*

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ook for Kids With a Parent in Prison

PRISON MATCH



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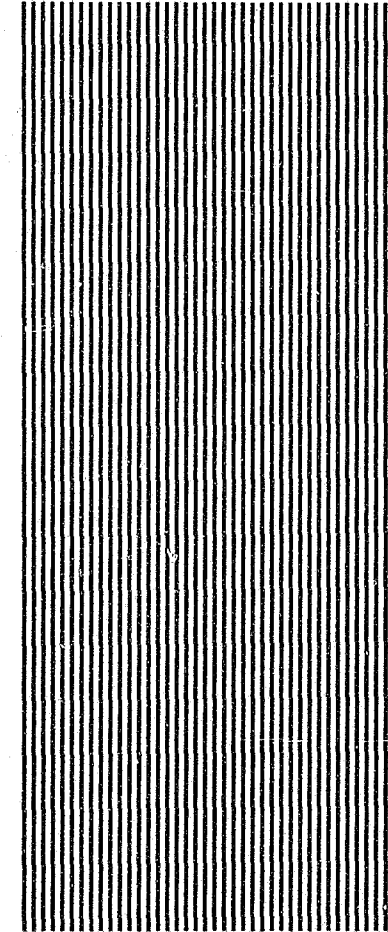
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**A Handbook for Kids
 With a Parent in Prison**



PRISON MATCH

**NCJRS
 SEP 22 1985
 ACQUISITIONS**

Prison MATCH is a non-profit agency which operates a multi-service Children's Center inside the Federal Correctional Institution in Pleasanton, California. In addition to direct services, Prison MATCH provides technical assistance to others interested in building programs for children with parents in prison, and responds to program development needs of children and their inmate parents on an on-going basis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of creating this manual involved many people who saw the need for such material being available to children, their families and the agencies that try to help. To all of these people I want to say, thank you.

The 10 youth who gave their time, energy, emotions and strength to this project in the hope that it will help other kids deal with the hurt and confusion of having a parent in prison did so with some initial trepidation. They knew they were taking a risk in sharing these personal accounts with "the public." I want to thank them for taking the chance, for trusting us, and assure them that their ability to share these experiences will be a great help to many other people.

Throughout the last year I also have been privileged to be able to call on a group of resource people who have been both generous and responsible in providing on-going feedback about the children's material. Coming from diverse fields, and bringing different personal perspectives, this group has been invaluable in helping me organize and develop the work with the children. To this group, Dr. Millie Almy; Ellen Barry, J.D.; Dr. Courtney Cazden; Leon Eisenberg, M.D.; Dr. Dorothy W. Gross; Dr. Susan Hunter; Arnita Johnson; Martha Moreno; Barbara Ramirez and Zitha Turitz, M.S.W., goes my thanks and appreciation.

Then there was the project staff. Since our beginning in 1978, Prison MATCH has operated as a diverse collective of community professionals, inmates and community volunteers sharing program-planning and decision-making responsibilities. Thus, I have had a broad and knowledgeable network of co-workers to share the inevitable ups and downs of a venture such as this. This group is too large for its members to be mentioned individually, so in keeping with our collective

structure, I give them my collective thanks.

In addition to the on-going support of my co-workers at Prison MATCH, Judi Parent at Friends Outside, Contra Costa County, needs to be specially thanked. As the counselor for four of the youth who participated in this project, her enthusiasm for their involvement and her willingness to "make it happen" were a constant support to both me and the youth participants.

Of course, without funding there would have been no project. The three foundations that supported this project—the Haigh-Scatena Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Abelard Foundation—provided more than financial support. Through their knowledgeable program officers—Jack Harrington, Edith Eddy, Lynda Abbott and Leah Brumer—whose lively interest in the material kept us in regular contact, the foundations were able to provide both useful feedback and on-going encouragement to the project. I am indebted to them for both the financial support and their project involvement.

While many people contributed thoughts and direction to the project, the final responsibility for the text is mine. I hope it provides both insight into the crisis of parental imprisonment from the child's perspective and help for children in working through this crisis. Perhaps it will even encourage people to start thinking about some creative program alternatives. There is much that remains to be done.

Louise Rosenkrantz, M.Ed.
Prison MATCH
Oakland, California
1984

INTRODUCTION

Everyone who wrote a portion of this book or was interviewed for it has had a parent in jail or prison—and all of us have had different experiences. In sharing our experiences we hope two things will happen. We hope that kids who read this book will feel less lonely, not so isolated, and will gain a sense of community from knowing there really are many other kids who are working out similar problems. We also hope the adults who read this book will stop and think more about these kids and how they can be helped.

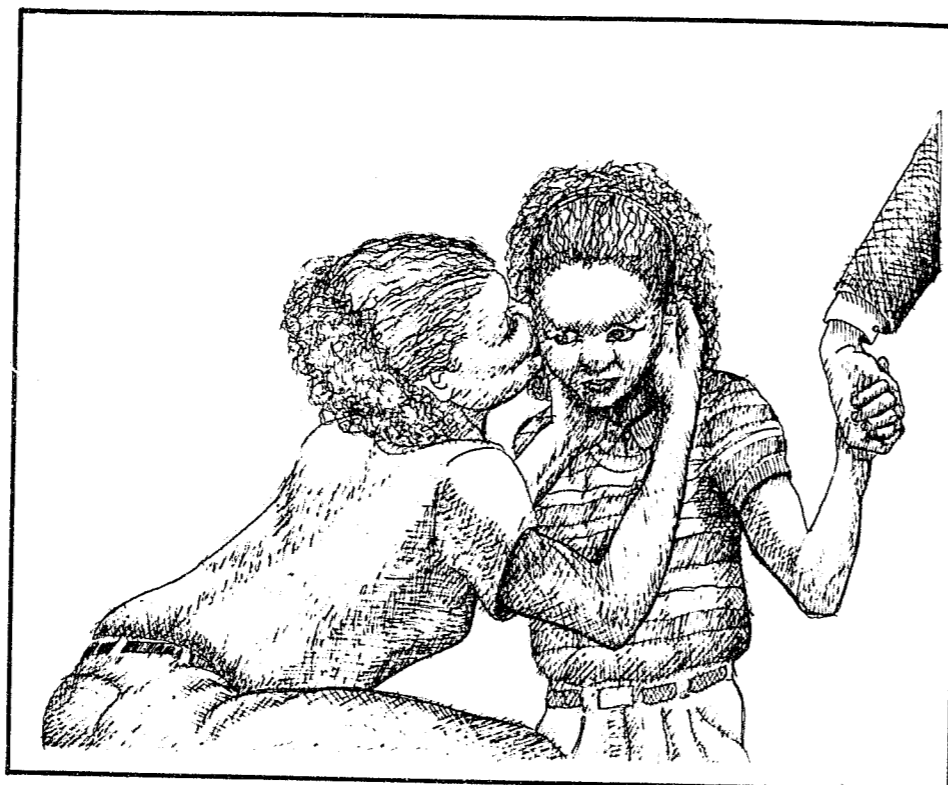
This book was put together by Louise Rosenkrantz, M.Ed., of Prison MATCH. When Louise was 8 years old her mother was arrested and briefly jailed. Years later, when Louise was a teen-ager, her father served a three-month prison term.

The 10 youth who helped put this book together have experienced parental imprisonment in different ways.

For some, one parent was arrested; for others, both were gone. Some of the kids were separated from their imprisoned parent for a few months; others for many, many years. In selecting the kids to participate in this project, the only criterion used was to choose a group of children with diverse experiences who were involved with a program that could make referrals and provide followup assistance to any kid needing it. All the kids selected were part of either Prison MATCH or the youth program of Friends Outside, Contra Costa Chapter.

Putting this material together was exciting, though at times painful. Each kid who participated told Louise her or his ideas for the manual. Most found it easier to talk about their experiences than to write about them. Some kids read self-help manuals for kids, on topics such as divorce and death. We all read and talked about the book *My Mother and I Are Growing Strong*, a children's paperback about a father in prison (see Resources).

The kids' work was shared and discussed with two



groups: a professional review panel and a panel of parents who are ex-inmates. After six months the kids were in high gear and frequently would ask about each other. Letters were exchanged and eventually a group retreat was planned.

The three-day retreat was a truly exuberant event: a time for sharing, relaxing and exploring our feelings. Two highly skilled resource people, Jan Faulkner and Rob Kessler, led the group in workshops on self-esteem, self-identity and writing skills. This experience had tremendous impact. It was the first time many of the kids had ever met other kids who shared the experience of having a parent in prison. It was the first time many of the kids shared what this experience had meant to them.

All of the kids were concerned about "going public." At first, many of them planned to use pseudonyms in the book and none wanted to be photographed.

Since those first discussions, all but one of the kids have decided to use their real first names, and most

changed their minds about the photographs. Some kids chose to be photographed so you could see what they're like but not who they are; others felt ready to have a portrait in the book. Some chose to be photographed with family members. We were unable to photograph two of the kids who moved out of the area as the project drew to a close. For all of the kids, working through these publicity issues has been important to their growing understanding of the impact of parental incarceration on their lives.

Another issue that provoked a lot of discussion was the use of "mother" and "father" in the kids' writing and in the general text of the book. While few of the kids live in a traditional family setting at this point in their lives, all are writing about experiences and relationships with their biological parent. When some of the accompanying text was written to include stepmothers and stepfathers the kids objected. While we all agree that stepparents play an important role in many children's lives, the kids felt it was better to call them mom and dad anyway. As one kid put it, "The only time my friends call their stepdad 'stepdad' is when they're mad at him. Otherwise he's just 'dad.'"

In reviewing the many different experiences of the kids who worked on this book, one fact is surprising: None of the kids has been in foster care. In the many shifting living arrangements these kids describe, there is

the fear of foster care, but no actual experience with the system. Since many children with a parent in prison are in foster care, we anticipate discussing it in subsequent material with a different group of kids.

Are these children representative of their peers? Aside from the foster care question, we believe so. Some of them are doing all right—some are having serious problems. One kid is currently in a California Youth Authority facility; another has already had a "brush with the law." Some are doing well in school; others are failing. But, at the time the 10 kids were involved in this project, there was a sense of hope and resiliency in their lives. These are children who have serious problems, but they don't need to be the losers. They have the same dreams and hopes that all kids do. They just need a little more help to see their dreams come true.

Youth Participants

Armando	Jay	Nyeletta
Dawn	Jeanine	Sandra
Janell	Juanita	Tish
	Michael	

I DON'T KNOW WHY MY FATHER'S IN JAIL



I am 10 years old now and in the fourth grade. Both my mother and father have been in jail. My mother went to jail first when I was very young. I don't remember a lot about it. I remember best when my father went to jail. I was already living with my grandmother.

I don't really remember how I found out my father was in jail, but I think the social worker told me. I remember feeling sad because I wouldn't be able to see him and worried that he wouldn't be coming back. I wasn't real worried about what would happen to me since I knew my grandmother would take good care of me, but I was worried about what would happen to my father.

I don't tell anyone about this because if I do then they keep asking me about more and more things and I don't like talking about it because it makes me sad.

Visiting my dad is good because when I talk to him it makes me happy. I miss him a lot because there isn't much to do and when he's home he plays with me a lot.

One problem I have is that I don't know why my father's in jail,

and I would sort of like to know. In our family we never talk about it. I never hear people talking about it. No one ever asked me how I feel about it. I wish someone would.

—Jeanine

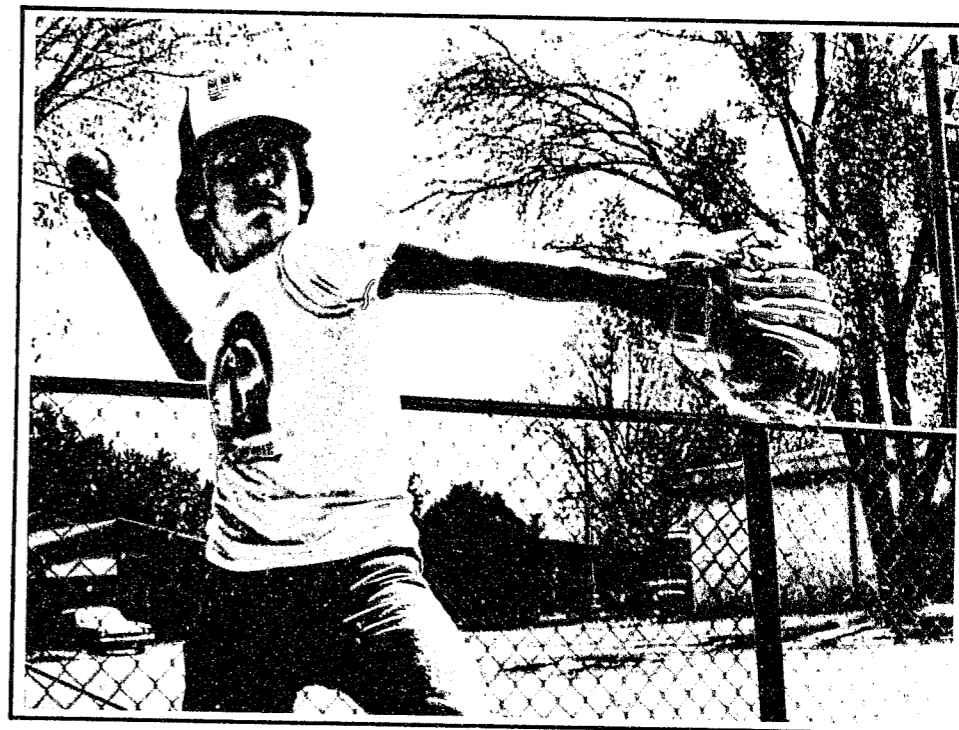


I DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY TO FIND OUT

My mom went to jail when I was 12 years old. She went for three months, which seemed like a long time. It was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. My mom didn't do nothing bad. All she did was pick up some money for my uncle—she didn't know what it was for.

I was scared I might get sent to a foster home. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Then my dad and my cousin talked to me about going to court and all that stuff.

I didn't want anybody to find out about this. I didn't want anybody to think my mom was a criminal. I didn't tell anyone except my best friend and he wouldn't tell anyone. If other people found out they probably wouldn't talk to me no more. Even now I haven't told nobody. I don't want to remember. I want to forget.



There are six people in my family who have been in jail—all for drugs except one stabbing. I don't think I'll go to jail, 'cause I won't do nothing bad. I'm a new generation. I'm going to play video games, not stab people or take drugs.

It feels horrible when your mom's in jail. You have nightmares sometimes. I was dreaming my mom was getting killed. Wardens don't understand. They've never had anyone in jail. They don't know what it's like to visit someone you love and not know when they're coming home.

—Jay



NO ONE ASKED ME HOW I FELT

I don't remember very much about living with my mother when I was young. We have a lot of family and there was always someone who would take good care of me. After my mother went to jail, though, nobody really talked about it. I was always well taken care of and had people who loved me and the things I needed, but I wish my family had told me more about what was going on. It really wasn't fair that no one would talk about it.

I think I remember the day my mom robbed the bank because when she came home she had this wig. I was about seven. I asked her what the wig was for and she wouldn't tell me. Then I remember she just kept fixing my hair and taking care of my hair.

I remember one day after the bank robbery a cousin of mine saw



a wanted poster with my mother's picture on it in the bank. The family all talked about it for a while then, but no one really talked to me about it. No one asked me how I felt about it.

My mom is coming home soon and I'm really excited about that. I don't know yet if I'll move to live with her or if I'll keep living with my auntie. Last time my mom was on furlough I went with her to see

her parole officer. I'm really glad I did that. It was a good experience. It helped me to hear her talk to other people about how much she doesn't want to go back. I really want her home.

—Tish

Not Understanding

I don't understand why I have to go to school.
I don't understand why teachers give us so much homework.
But most of all I don't understand why this world is so unfair.
(Thursday I watched the news and a lady's child had been kidnapped.)
What I do understand is I am learning a lot in school even though I don't want to go.

By Tish



YOU GOTTA TELL YOUR KID WHAT'S HAPPENING—IT'S ONLY FAIR

I was born December 13, 1971. When I was born I lived with my brother, Kevin, my mom and my grandparents. I don't think I ever lived with my dad.

I was five years old when my mother went to jail. I didn't really understand it at the beginning. When you figure it out you get real lonely. You wish she was there. At night sometimes I cried for my mom. I still love her a lot. I love her as my friend, but I love my grandparents as parents. While my mom was in jail my grandparents took care of my brother and myself. My aunts took care of us, too. My grandmother took me to school every day and I went to daycare after school.

My first big memory of my mother is when she went to jail. I remember visiting her at the county



go to jail for it. You gotta tell your kid what's happening. It's only fair.

I'm not ever going to jail. When you go to jail you can't leave it, and they have lots of rules. I want to live in a place where I can do what I want.

I want to go to Stanford. I want to go to college for at least a year and Stanford is one of the best schools in the United States. I want to work in computers. I love computers. We have a computer in our class this year. I love math and I'm in the highest math group.

—Janell



jail. It took about four or five months for me to understand. I don't really remember going to court or how I was told what was happening.

I think one of the reasons my mom robbed a bank was to get food for me and my brother and money to take care of us. My mom probably thought that robbing a bank would solve all her problems, but it doesn't really solve problems at all. You have to live with knowing that someone might find out you robbed that bank. You have to run away. You can't have a happy life.

I don't think it's good to rob a bank. I think my mom deserved to go to jail. Not that I liked it, but she deserved it. I love my mom too much to want her to go to jail.

If you do something wrong you should just tell your kid you did something wrong and you have to

HAVING A PARENT IN JAIL IS SOMETHING YOU CAN'T EVER FORGET



**GOING TO THE TRIAL:
A TRUE STORY**

It happened in the courtroom. It was scary. My mom and the judge were there. There were a lot of people there. The judge was sitting on the bench. I was seven. I was confused. I really didn't know or understand what I was doing there. I was sitting in the chair. The judge walked in. My grandma stood. Every other grownup stood up. They did a whole lot of talking. Then they said they were going to take a break. Well, that's what my grandma said. I wanted to talk to Momma and give her a kiss but they would not let me.

We were there a long time. Then they said something and my mom cried. My grandma cried. Then I cried. For a long time I never knew why or what happened to my mom. All I knew was that she was gone.

—By Dawn



—Dawn

When my mother was in jail I lived with my grandmother. I couldn't live with my dad because he ran at the time. Later he gave himself up and he's in jail now. All this started when I was seven. Now I'm 12.

Living with my grandmother was hard because we had no running water and no P.G.&E., but it was the best place to be because my grandmother loved me and talked to me a lot. The two people who were most important to me during all this were my grandmother and my mother. My grandmother loved me and cared for me. My mother wrote me letters and said she'd be home and not to worry.

I was really happy when my mother came home. My mom is really trying. She is working hard at putting her life back together. My

mom told me she wasn't going to go back again and I believed her and she hasn't. Since that day I have stayed with her every day.

Having a parent in jail is something you can't ever forget, and I don't want to forget. It's something to make me know how my children will feel, if I have children in later years, how my children will feel if something happens to me.

I'm never going to go to jail. I've learned something from all this. I wouldn't want to put my children through this and I wouldn't want to put myself through this. I'll use this as an example. I try my best to stay home and not get into trouble.

THE SADDEST TIME IN MY LIFE WAS WHEN MY MOM WENT TO PRISON



I am Sandra, a 12-year-old girl who lives in Broderick, California. In the fall I will be going to Golden State School in the seventh grade. I live at home with my mom and dad and two brothers, Cesar who is older than me and David who is younger than me. I was born in Watsonville, California, and lived in Ohio for a few years when I was very young. My family moved to Broderick in 1975.

My dad originally comes from Mexico and my mother from Texas. They met when they were very young and both were migrant laborers working in the strawberry fields. Now my mother is a word processor who works for the state and my dad

is a welder. Jobs are hard to find, though, so now he's working as a laborer at a canning plant because there are no welding jobs.

My family is very important to me. When I think of my happiest times and my saddest times they all are part of my life with my family. My family helps me a lot; when I need them, they're there. For instance, last year my brother Cesar went to visit in Ohio for four months. At first I was happy to see him go; I thought it would be fun being the oldest. But then after he was gone I was really lonely and it made me sad not to have him around.

I think the saddest time in my life was when my mom went to prison. I was nine years old then. It was hard for me because she used to do a lot for us; it was hard not to see her every day. She was only gone for three months, but it was awful. The only good part was going to the Children's Center. They used to help me a lot by saying that things would be okay. They gave me confidence that things would be okay.

When my mom came home from prison it was the happiest day of my

life. I miss the people at the Children's Center, but having my mom home is the most important thing.

I was lucky when my mom was in prison because my dad was home to take care of me. But when my mom came home and my dad didn't have a job it was hard because they would be fighting 'cause my dad wouldn't have anything to do all day. Sometimes my dad would drink a lot because he was so depressed he didn't have a job and then my mom and dad would fight a lot. Finally, last month my dad got a job as a laborer even though he's really a welder. Now he won't drink as much and will make his time worthwhile. I love my dad a lot and that's why I'm so happy he has a job.

When I grow up I want to be a secretary, a word processor, like my mom. I want to go to college because when you go to college you can get a better job and it's easier to get a job when you have good grades from college.

—Sandra



JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE BREAKS THE LAW DOESN'T MEAN SHE'S NOT A GOOD PARENT

We drove my mother up to the jail when she went. It was sad—in part that she would be away, and part that it was happening. It was real different than just going away on a trip because I knew she couldn't just come back when she wanted to. It was good we could take her to the jail. It made her going seem real.

The prison at Pleasanton looks more like a boarding house than a jail. That made me feel better. At the time I thought I was having the roughest time, but then I thought, "Well, everyone feels hurt about it because someone they love won't be around." I never talked to anyone about it. We tried to put it out of our minds.

My mom wasn't in a cell. She



was in her own room which she could lock and still have some privacy. We could visit her and have fun. It was good when I went to the Children's Center because I saw lots of other kids and it made me think about how it was happening to other kids, too. It helps to know other kids with parents in prison because then I know my mother isn't the only one.

The halfway house was a lot better. When she was in the halfway house we could talk about it. It was too hard to talk about when she was in prison. It still makes me upset to talk about it.

I don't think it was wrong for them to put my mother in jail, because she did something wrong. If you do something wrong you should be punished. But they could have given her some other kind of punishment. I don't think it's right to separate a parent from a child.

Maybe she stole to get money for the child. You could be a good parent and be a criminal. Just because someone breaks the law doesn't mean she's not a good parent.

In a way, it was harder for my mother than for me. She was always thinking about me and the family and setting a good example. If you ask me, she does set a good example. She gets me to school on time, she talks to me, she works hard, it's easy to talk to her. She is setting a good example.

I'm going to try not to ever go to jail. I want to have my freedom. I want to be able to go where I want. In fact, I'm probably going to be a policeman. I'd like to have adventures and to help out. If I were a policeman and arrested a parent I could talk to the kid and tell them, "I know how you feel because this happened to me."

—Michael



IT'S TOO HARD TO FORGET ABOUT A MOTHER

My mother's been in jail for eight years, since I was six years old. I've always lived with my family and they've always taken real good care of me, but still I wish I had lived with my mother. It's too hard to forget about a mother. You just watch TV shows and it makes you think about your mother.

I love my auntie. It took courage for her to raise me. But still it's strange being with relatives. You always feel you have to pay back.

The hardest thing for me is trying to figure out why—why did my mother do this? Why wasn't she caring for me and my sister? Nobody ever wanted to talk with me about it, and I was scared to ask too many questions. I was afraid to ask anything because I was scared how bad it would be.

I would listen when my auntie was talking on the phone and try to



figure out what was going on. If someone had told me more when my mother went to jail maybe I would understand more than I do now. Now, when someone tells me things, I don't really understand because no one told me all the things I wanted to know when they were happening. A book like this would have helped me a lot and told me a lot about other people and how they feel so I wouldn't feel like I was the only one who had a mother in prison.

Mostly when I'm feeling bad I go to my room and write. I write a lot just to help me feel better.

—Nyeletta



I DON'T TELL ANYONE ABOUT MY DAD BEING IN JAIL

Right now I'm living with my mother, her boyfriend and two of my brothers. I have two other brothers but they aren't home right now. They're at the Youth Authority. Even though my dad wasn't living with me when he went to jail it was hard because he used to come over every night and we would go places and do things.

I visit my dad pretty often. At

first we used phones and then he would come out in regular clothes. Once we took a picture of all of us. I don't remember the trial at all.

Mostly I don't tell anyone about my dad being in jail because they might tease me. I did tell my best friend about it. I was spending the night at her house and I told her about my problem. She didn't tell anyone.

I don't think I'll ever go to jail. I don't do anything. When I grow up I want to be a store manager or a cashier.

I hate it when my dad goes to jail. I don't want him in jail no more. It's hard for me when he's in jail. I can't see him everyday like someone's supposed to.

—Juanita

I DON'T WANT TO LIVE WITH STRANGERS

Nothing much happens in my life. I get into lots of fights with my little brother. He's always turning on the television when I want to sleep. I'm living in a motel room with my mother and her boyfriend and my brother. We got kicked out of our last place. I can't

go to school because the school bus doesn't come this far. I'm just hanging out. There really isn't anything to do anyhow.

My dad just got out of jail. At least now maybe I'll get to do something. Maybe he'll take me someplace. Unless he just goes back

to jail again.

I know my life's messed up, but I don't want to leave. I don't want to live with strangers. At least this is my family.

— Armando

FEELINGS

I WAS ANGRY AND UPSET

The kids you just met have a lot to say about what it means to have a parent in prison. They didn't agree on everything because they have had different experiences. But they all said one thing: It's hard to have a parent in prison. This book won't change that, but it will give you some ideas about how to handle different situations. At the least, you'll see that you're not alone.

Do you remember when you first learned that someone in your family was arrested? Sandra does. She remembers feeling angry with herself, as if she was in part to blame for her mother's arrest.

"The night that the cops picked my mom up," she says, "we were going to go for a pizza, but my brother and I did not feel like going so we didn't. Later I thought that if we would have went they wouldn't have caught her so soon."

Jay recalls how he felt in a similar situation:

"One night when I came home from baseball practice there were all these cop cars around my house. When I went inside my mom was handcuffed and my sister and brother were standing there crying. My mom said, 'Jay, don't go in your room,' but I looked in and my room was a mess. So I yelled at the cop, 'You're gonna have to clean my room up,' and my mom told me just to be quiet.

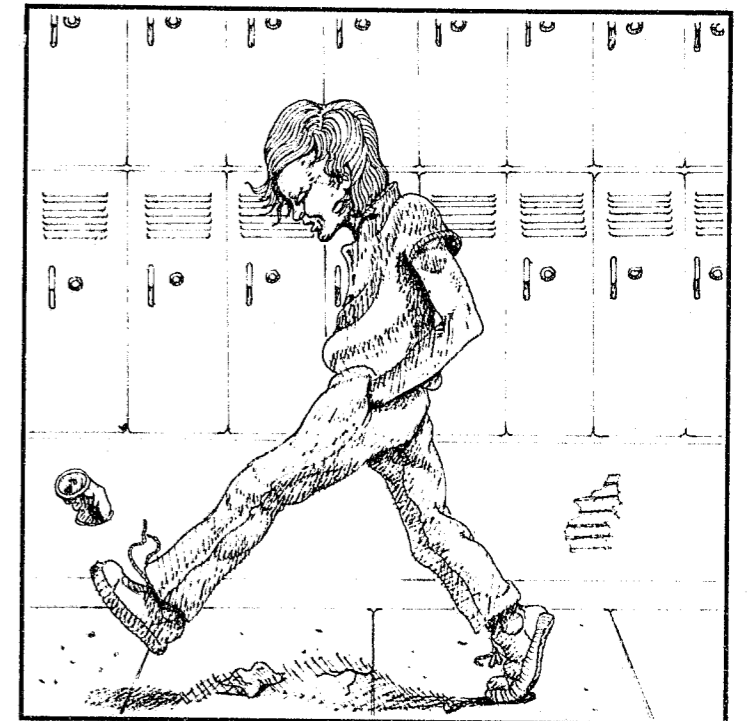
"They wouldn't even let me near her for the following reason: They said I might take something off her or put something on her. Towards the end of the search they let me give her a hug. Then she was escorted to the car where they left.

"They might have left the house and taken my mom, but the anger was still there for both the police and my mother. This incident happened when I was 12."

Most people feel angry and sad at the same time—but it can be very confusing. Why are you angry? What can you do about it?

In this situation, there are lots of people to be angry at. You could be angry at your mother's friends, angry at the rest of your family, your mother, yourself or the police. Maybe you're angry at one person today and someone else tomorrow. Sometimes you're angry and you don't know why.

It's okay to be angry—and sometimes you need to tell people you're angry with them. Armando remembers a time when he got angry at his mother.



"This happened at home in the front room," he recalls. "There was a junky old couch and a TV. My mother was there. I was 16 at that time. I was feeling angry and upset. My mother was yelling at me and I was yelling back at her. Then I walked out. I felt glad when I walked out."

Tish also remembers some angry days:

"I felt like I was going crazy. My aunt, she looked like she was happy to see me get mad. We were in the living room at the time and I felt like grabbing her and hitting her over the head with something just to get her off my back.

"The reason I was mad was because I did something wrong and she started saying, 'You're going to be just like your momma. You're going to be a wrongdoer and when she comes home you are going to want to go with her and she's going to let you do anything you want. When she goes back to prison you aren't going to have nowhere to go because don't nobody want you.'

"After a while, I bursted out with tears and said, 'You

just shut up. You don't know. You always think I'm going to follow behind her footsteps. I am sick of you comparing me and her. Just because I'm her daughter you think I'm going to follow her footsteps.' And I ran into my room and slammed my door.

"Finally, later that night she came and apologized to me and said, 'I know I shouldn't have reacted like that. I love you and I just don't want to see anything happen to you.' From then on, we have been coming together even closer."

Armando and Tish needed to get angry and then be alone for a while—until they were ready to pick up and start again. Being angry helped them figure things out.

For some kids, it's not so easy to get angry—especially it's not easy to be angry at a parent who is going away to prison. Kids worry that if they get angry the parent might just stay away—and they don't want that. Instead of getting angry, some kids get depressed.

Juanita says, "I don't want my dad in jail no more. It's hard for me when he's in jail. I can't see him every day like someone's supposed to."

Dawn was seven years old when her mother was arrested. She remembers, "One day they took her and I went to my grandmother's. They said she had shot someone. I really didn't understand it. I thought she had left."

Two years after his mother went to jail, Michael is

"still embarrassed. It's mostly embarrassment that it's my mother who went to jail. Most people have fathers in jail, and with the father you can always think up stories to tell people about how they did it. But when it comes to your mother, it's too hard. When people would ask me where she was, I'd just say, 'It's none of your business.' When I moved to live with my auntie, I'd just pretend she was my mother."

Janell is still confused about her feelings. Even now with her mother back home, Janell has lots of different feelings. Sometimes she feels like this:

"I don't like staying with her a lot. I can't get along with her. I can't live with her because she's always screaming about something, and telling you that you're wrong about something when you're right. She thinks she's always right."

Other days Janell says:

"It's lonely living without your mom. I could be totally different now if I'd lived with my mother during all those years. When my mom had a job I loved living with her. We had a wonderful time!"

It's important to remember that everyone has times when they're angry, times when they're sad, and times when they're confused. This book will give you some ideas about some of the different ways you can handle these feelings.

*When my mother went to jail
Her face turned pale.
I could have died
Instead I lied.*

by Michael

TALKING WITH OTHERS

YOU NEED SOMEONE WHO REALLY CARES FOR YOU TO TALK TO

One of the hardest things to figure out when someone in your family goes to prison is what to tell other people. Most kids lie. Juanita lied because she was afraid of what other kids might say:

"I just didn't want other kids to know about it, especially the mean ones because they might run around shouting, 'Juanita's daddy's in jail; Juanita's daddy's in jail.'"

Jay says:

"I didn't want anybody to find out about this. I didn't want anybody to think my mom was a criminal. If people found out they probably wouldn't talk to me no more. Or else they'd start saying things about my mom and then I'd get into fights with them. I didn't want my friends' parents to know because now they treat me good. If they knew they'd say, 'Don't bring him over here no more, and stuff like that.'"

"I made up a story that my mom went to Mexico to visit a dying relative. Even now I haven't told nobody. I don't want to remember."

Nyeletta had this experience with a friend:

"I was at my friend's house in her room with the door unlocked. Then all of a sudden she asked me where was my mother. When I looked at her she had this funny look on her face. I didn't know what to say. I wanted to go home, but I didn't. I stayed. I was going to run out of the house, but I was too scared to move. Finally, I said, 'Just leave me alone.'"

"When I did leave I was so scared that she would talk about me to her other friends. That night I felt so uneasy, jumpy, unhappy, and a lot of sadness. The next day I was thrilled that she didn't say anything to anyone."

Kids lie about having a parent in jail because they're

embarrassed, worried about what people will think, and scared that they might lose friends. The problem with lying, though, is that it gets you into a trap. You're stuck with always having to tell the same story, and then, because of publicity and gossip, the truth sneaks out anyhow. Here's what happened to Janell.

"I was 4½ years old and I was at school and some of my friends asked me who I lived with and I said I lived with my grandparents. One of my friends asked me why I didn't live with my mother and I said I didn't live with her because I didn't want to move out of Palo Alto when she moved. She didn't really

move. She went to prison at Pleasanton. But nobody else knew that but me and my family.

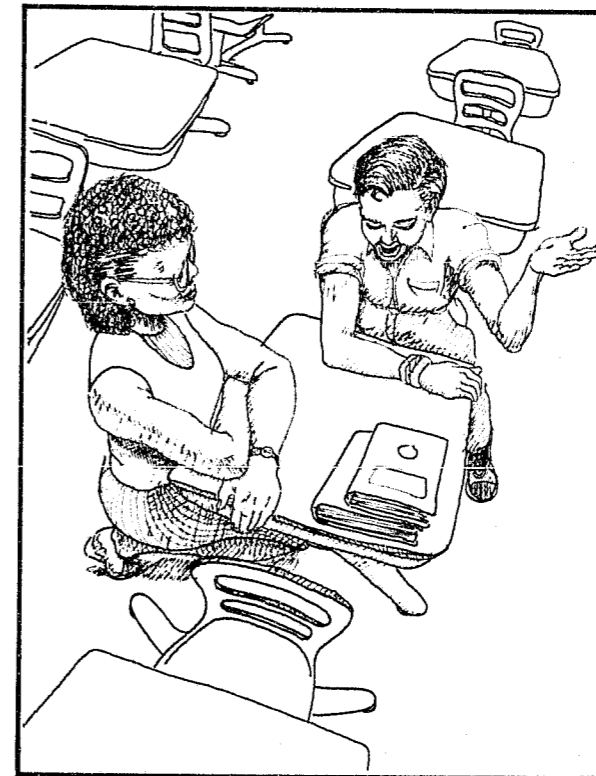
"When everybody found out I lied about my mother moving away I was in the second grade and my brother was in the fifth grade and he told one of his friends that my mom was really in jail, and he told someone else, and it just kept getting spread around and then everybody asked me why I lied about my mother going to prison. I told them I lied because I was embarrassed, and I didn't want people to make fun of me because my mother was in prison and their mothers were not in prison," Janell continues.

"After everybody found out that my mother was in prison they treated me like an outcast. I didn't like that a lot. I also lost

a lot of my friends when they found out my mother was in prison."

Sandra had a different experience.

"At school," she recalls, "there was a big group of people—all of my friends—and they all asked me, 'Where's your mom? Where's your mom?' I just said, 'Oh, she went to Mexico for three months.' I was nine years old



when all this happened. I felt scared that somebody was going to find out that my mom was in prison and they would go tell everybody. I felt sad.

"Finally, I told my friends that my mom was in prison and I felt great. It all started off when I first went to my friend's slumber party. I was feeling down because my mom was still in prison. Then finally one friend said, 'Sandra, what's the matter?' I said, 'Nothing.' Then she said, 'Tell me, I won't tell nobody.' So I told her that my mom was in prison, not Mexico. Then she said, 'How come you never told me this?' I said, 'Because I was scared.' Then she said, 'Well come on, let's go back to the party.'

"From then on, I felt great outside, but since my mom was still in prison I didn't feel so good inside."

Sometimes it's hard to know what to tell other people because you may not know very much of what's going on either. There are lots of different reasons why you may not be told, but for most kids not knowing what's going on is a real problem

Nyeletta says she was never told what was going on.

"I think my family was afraid to talk about it with us because they thought we would ask questions they couldn't answer," Nyeletta says. "I don't think any relatives knew. No one ever talked about it. We just thought she went someplace."

"Sometimes I'd hear my auntie talking on the phone about my mother. When I'd talk on the phone with my mother I'd say, 'Where are you?' I was sort of afraid to ask what she'd done because I was scared how bad it would be. I thought she had killed someone. I had nightmares over and over about her killing someone."

"One day I learned she had robbed a bank."

Michael: "I didn't know what was going on until after the trial. I don't think it was right for them to keep it from me."

Armando also had a difficult experience because he did not know enough of what was going on in his family.

"I went to school one day," he remembers, "and a bunch of guys said to me, 'Oh, your dad's going to jail again.' I said, 'No he's not. Why are you saying that.' They said it was in the paper. I left school and went home and asked my mom. She said they were right. I was really mad because I should have known first."

You may have to ask for the information—to ask the grownups what's going on. You might also ask why they don't want to tell you, and be ready to explain why you think it's important for you to know. You may not get an answer you're satisfied with the first time. Ask again.

A real problem with not knowing what's going on and with lying when you do know, is that it's hard to get help for yourself. Most kids find that if they can find just one person to talk to they do feel better.

Dawn had this experience at school:

"At first I didn't talk with anyone outside my family about what was happening because I was scared about what they might say. I just didn't want anybody talking about it. Two years later, when I was in the fourth grade, I was sad a lot and a teacher asked me why and I told her my mom was in jail. We talked a lot and she took me places. She was my friend. I still see her."

Jay had a similar experience with a teacher at his school.

"They didn't have a counselor at our school when my mom was arrested or I would have gone there to talk," he says. "I did talk to a Sister. She knew about my mom. She said, 'If you ever need any help or just want to talk come to me.' One day in school I just started crying, I didn't even know why, and the Sister came and got me and we went and talked about my mom being in jail and all. I think my mom wrote her a letter about it, too."

"You really need to find someone you can depend on. Someone who really cares for you. You need someone to talk to."

How do you find this person? Both Dawn and Jay found help at school, but there are other places you could find help. Most towns have a youth guidance center or a mental health center. They are listed in the telephone book or you can get the number from information. If you call the agency in your area, someone there will be able to suggest the next step so that you can have a good person to talk to.

Churches and libraries also have lists of agencies that will help kids. At the back of this book is a resource list that includes numbers of some groups that provide help for kids. If there is no place on the list that is near where you live, don't give up. Just keep trying until you find the help you need.

What can you do to help yourself feel better while you're trying to get help? Lots of times just getting out and doing something helps—running, jogging or some other kind of exercise. You could take a bike ride. How about drawing some pictures or baking cookies? Is there a club at school you've been thinking about joining? A book at the library you might want to read? What about going to the movies with a friend? Or just going for a long walk? When you're feeling upset it's sometimes hard to make the first move, but usually you feel better afterward.

Everybody needs help when they're in a difficult situation. Having someone from your family go to jail makes it hard on the kids. You have a lot of confusing feelings, a lot of difficult things to figure out. This is a good time to ask for help from your family, friends, teachers and other people in your community who are trained to help kids deal with problems.

VISITING

IF I WASN'T ABLE TO VISIT I WOULD HAVE FELT SHE WAS DEAD

Visiting a parent in prison is a hard thing for kids, but it's also hard not to be able to visit. Sometimes you don't have much of a choice because your parent is in a prison very far from you. Sometimes your parent may be near, but you still don't visit because there's no one to take you, or no way to get there. Also, it can be scary. Maybe you're still so mad you don't want to go. Besides, who wants to spend their weekend in a prison instead of being with friends? What would you tell your friends when they asked where you were? These are the kinds of feelings kids have when they think about visiting a parent in prison.

Jeanine remembers her first visit to her dad after he had been in prison for 3½ years.

"One weekend when I was nine years old my mom and my sister and I went to Martinez to visit my father. My father was in prison. He had been in prison for 3½ years. This was my first visit to the prison. We rode on the bus. The ride was long and tiresome. I was glad when I got there. The walls of the prison were very gray."

Why hadn't Jeanine visited him sooner? Because her mother was in prison, too, and her grandmother didn't want to take her to see her dad.

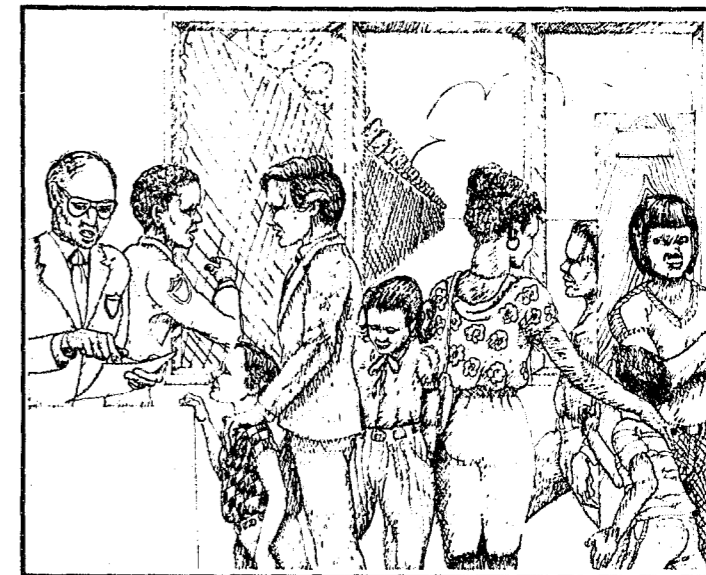
Michael visited his mother in prison often. The prison where she was held had a Children's Center where Michael and his mother could spend time together talking and playing games.

"It was good for me to visit," he says, "because we would go to the Children's Center where I saw lots of other kids and it made me think how it was happening to other kids too."

"I used to go home from the visit and when it was time for me to go to bed I would pray and then I'd be laying up in bed and start crying thinking, 'Why is this happening to ME?' Then after a while I'd think, 'Oh well, it's happening. There's nothing I can do about it.'"

"If I wasn't able to visit I don't know what I would have done. I would have felt she was dead."

Jay visited his mother in county jail and in federal prison. The jail visits were "horrible because we had to talk on phones. I hate talking on phones." Jay felt that visiting his mother was important even though he hated it because "if we hadn't visited her she would have gotten real upset." Still, he never told his friends the truth about



how he was spending his weekends—he said he was going out of town to visit his grandma.

Jay had been visiting his mother regularly for two months before he joined a baseball team. Then he couldn't visit as often. He'd stay home for practice while the rest of the family made the trip. "I worried sometimes about what my mother would think, but I needed to do my things too. She wrote that she was proud I was on a team."

Feelings about visiting can change a lot over a short period of time. For Janell, visiting at jail is the way she first remembers her mom.

"I never really knew my mom when I was little," Janell recalls. "My first big memory of my mother is when she went to jail cause most of the time I didn't see that much of her anyway. I first started to know her when I was visiting her in jail. I remember visiting her in county jail where we talked over phones. I didn't really understand it at the beginning."

What do you want to do about visiting? Think about your choices. Do you want to go? Is someone pressuring you to go? Try to first take some time to make up your mind about what you want to do and why. Remember, you don't always feel the same way—things change—but think about how you feel now. How do you think you'll

feel in a month or two?

Maybe you want to say, "No, I'm not ready to visit yet. I'm really mad at my dad for doing this and messing up my life."

Maybe you want to say, "No, I don't want to go to that place with guards and all. It scares me. What if they decide to keep me, too? What if they search me and don't let me out? What if someone finds out where I went?"

Maybe you want to say, "How come we never go visit my mom? I want to see her. I want to see where she's at. Just because you're mad at her it's not fair that I never get to see her."

To work anything out you have to talk to whoever's caring for you and make a plan together. If you don't want to go, it's good to explain why. Let the person taking care

of you know why you don't want to go. Then they can help explain it to your parent, too.

If you do want to visit, a good first step would be to find out about the visiting conditions. Will you be able to touch each other, or will you be visiting over telephones? Can you bring food or money with you? What days are for visiting? How long will you be able to visit? You can find this out by writing the person you might visit, or by writing or calling the institution. If you're in foster care you may need to get a social worker's permission before you can visit. If you live far away, you may need to save some money first.

It really should be your decision whether or not you visit.

WRITING

A SURE WAY TO LET SOMEONE KNOW YOUR QUESTIONS AND YOUR FEELINGS

One way to keep in touch with someone in jail is to write to them. Every prison allows the people to receive mail, but often a guard will read the letter before the person you're sending it to.

Why would you write? This is one good way to get answers to your many questions. You can ask what the prison looks like, what your father wears, what he does all day, if he is allowed visitors, and any of the other things you're concerned about.

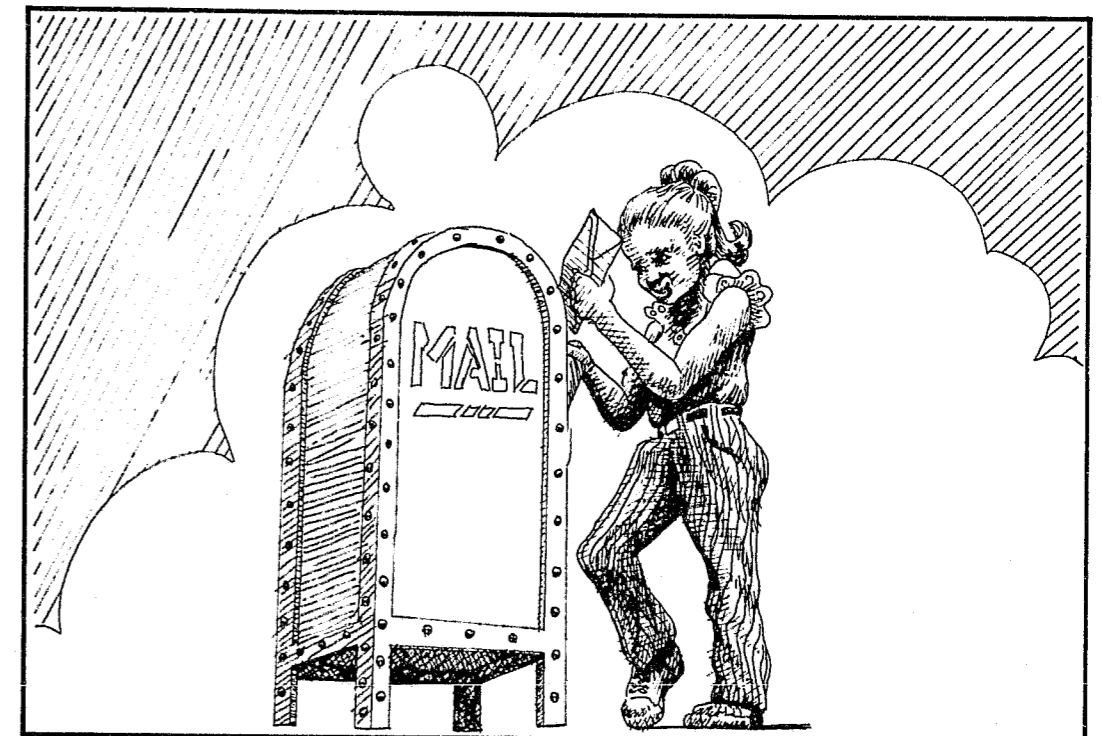
Letters are also a good way to tell someone how you're feeling. Are you still angry that you didn't know what was going on? Are you feeling better now that

you've been in the new school for a couple of months? Maybe there's not a lot your dad can do to actually change things for you, but letting him know what you're doing and how you're feeling is one way of keeping him involved in your life.

In addition to letters, how about sending some drawings or photographs? You don't have to be an artist to make a birthday card or an "I'm missing you" card. A photograph is a good way to show your mom how much you've grown. Sandra used to send her mother some of her school work papers so that her mother would know what she was doing in school.

Are you one of those people who hates to write? Not every letter needs to be long and full of details. A short note from you or a card that you sign will let the person you send it to know you're thinking of him or her. Maybe the person taking care of you would help you write the letter if you explained it was important to you.

Once you have something to send, you need to know where to send it. Ask someone how to find that out. The



person taking care of you will probably be able to tell you. If not, is there some other person in your family you can ask? If you don't find out the first time, ask again.

Some kids find that writing is a way to think through their problems and work out some of their anger. Nyeletta is a writer. When she's feeling angry and confused she sits and writes. Sometimes she writes poetry; sometimes she writes stories.

"Writing is one way I can say things that I might not really want to say at all," Nyeletta says. "I just sit down and write and write until I feel better. Mostly no one sees the things I write. I do it just for me. But I've written lots and lots of poems. They make me feel better."

If you're comfortable writing you might try using Nyeletta's idea of writing letters you don't plan to send, letters that just talk about your feelings, your side of things.

Many kids find it isn't easy to write a letter, but it is a sure way to let someone know your questions and your feelings. You might want to at least give it a try.

HANDLING HOLIDAYS

SOME PEOPLE FEEL TERRIBLE DURING THIS TIME OF YEAR

Many people—grownups as well as kids—have a hard time during the holiday season. Beginning in October there are lots of TV shows, commercials, books and articles telling people what a wonderful family time of the year it is; but for many people that's just not how it is. They may not have a family member in prison, but other things make them upset—things like divorce, death, sickness and being poor. Then there are the many, many kids who, just like you, have somebody from their family in prison.

Some people feel terrible during this time of year because they don't have enough money to buy those fancy presents that get advertised. Other people feel upset because their families aren't like all those happy people on TV.

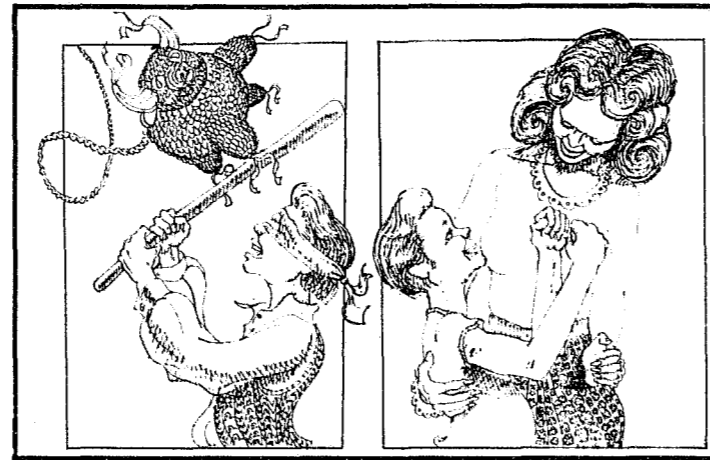
Kids whose parents don't live together—and there are lots and lots of them—have to deal with where they're going to be during the holiday. Who makes the decision about where the kid will be? What about kids who have had a parent die? Most of those happy two-parent families with healthy, happy kids and no worries about where the money is coming from exist only in one place—on TV—yet they keep making the rest of us feel like our family isn't quite right.

Nyeletta remembers feeling this way sometimes in school too:

"A kid would forget their lunch and then their mother would bring it in for them and everyone would be talking about their mother. Then one day I forgot my lunch and my auntie brought it in and everyone said, 'Oh, is that your mother?' and I had to say, 'No, she's my auntie.' I wish it had been my mother, just like everyone else."

Kids don't like to be different from everybody else, especially when the families portrayed on TV, in books and movies are made to seem like the right way for a family to be. But stop, take a look around you at the kids and families you know. Don't you know other kids who don't live with two parents? Don't you know other kids who have a hard time getting along with the people they live with?

How can you help yourself feel better about yourself and your family, especially around holidays and celebrations? One way is to make plans that make sense, and to do that you have to try to figure things out early.



Can you have a "good birthday" when your mother's in prison?

"Not really," says Sandra, "but I know people tried. We went to visit my mother and the people at the Children's Center did lots of nice things for me. I got a book, Charlotte's Web, and they made me cards. But still I wanted my mother to be home."

Is your birthday a good time to visit? Only you can decide. Maybe it's more important to you to stay home with your friends that day and visit your mother a different day. Maybe she can call you on the phone that day.

What about on your dad's birthday? Do you think you'll be able to see him? Why not plan to mail him a birthday card the week before. Then on his birthday you can at least feel pleased that he'll be hearing from you—a very important person.

What about holidays like Mother's Day and Father's Day? Everyone in your class looks like they're busy making fancy cards and presents and all you can think about is, Who am I going to give this to? My grandmother, who I'm mad at and isn't my mother anyway? Or my mother, who's in jail and so I won't be able to give it to her? You can handle this problem in lots of ways, depending on your mood and your feelings about your teacher. What about saying, "Mrs. S., shouldn't we also be making stepmother cards since lots of us live with stepmothers?" or "I'm going to have to make two cards since my grandmother also takes good care of me." Or you may feel like just going along with the crowd and making something that you can enjoy and feel good about. If you can't send the project to your mother you can send her a letter describing what you made. Or if you're still feeling angry you can always keep the card for a time when you're feeling better.

It's really important to remember that you're not the only one having these problems. Maybe you don't know other kids who have someone in their family in jail, but you certainly know other kids whose families are "different."

OPEN LETTER TO FAMILIES

HOW YOU REACT AND HANDLE THESE PROBLEMS WILL MEAN A LOT TO THE CHILDREN YOU'RE CARING FOR

This manual mostly is written for kids ages 8 to 18 who have a family member in jail or prison. It talks about some of the issues kids have to deal with when a parent gets locked up, introduces you to some youth who have dealt with these problems, and lists some programs that can help families dealing with parental imprisonment.

But a manual for youth also has to address how the family as a whole faces the crisis of a parent going to prison. What does a grandmother tell her 5-year-old grandson when he asks, "Where is my mommy?" How does she deal with her own feelings of anger at her daughter while listening to her grandson's pleas to visit?

When a family member goes to prison it's hard on everyone. It may mean the family has less income; many families have to go on welfare. Lots of time and attention usually goes toward the person who's being sent away, and there may not be as much time to spend on "the family." The kids get angry—they didn't ask for this mess. They also get scared—about what changes this may mean in their life. All this keeps building up like a pressure cooker so that by the time the parent actually leaves for prison the family may breathe a sigh of relief. But this sense of relief usually doesn't last for long.

Questions begin piling up. The kids want to know what's really going on but they may be too scared to ask directly. Instead, they sneak around, picking up bits and pieces of information from here and there to put together a story. They need a story because friends are beginning to ask questions. Maybe the kids are putting on pressure to visit, or maybe the adult wants the kids to visit but the kids say they're not going near "that place, no way." You settle in for a long period of separation, and lots of changes take place—slowly at first, but after a while the family has a new way of functioning.

Then another change takes place. Maybe it's a furlough or maybe the sentence is over. Whenever the imprisoned person returns home, lots of feelings are let loose. This may be a time of new custody arrangements. That 5-year-old child your daughter left in your care has grown into a teen-ager, and you don't feel like just handing her over. Mother coming home is exciting, but how will you get along after all this time?

Most of this manual examined how kids deal with these issues, but as the adult caring for these children you play an important part in their lives. How you react and handle these problems will mean a lot to the children you're caring for. We hope that by reading about how some other children dealt with these problems you too have found some helpful ideas for your family.

GETTING HELP WITH YOUR PROBLEMS

We hope each community agency that uses this book will attach its own list of local support services to this section. Kids who are using this book to find help need current, specific information about resources in their own area.

Numerous agencies have counselors for kids with problems or who are worried about what's going on in their lives. If you want help thinking through some of your problems, and there's no one at your school, church or temple, or in your family who you can talk to, these agencies will help you find a good counselor. Call the agency in your county and tell them where you live and the kind of help you are looking for.

Throughout California

Friends Outside, a self-help group of volunteers and prisoners' families, can be a good resource for finding help in your own community. The following counties have programs for children.

Contra Costa:	(415) 228-0644
Monterey:	(408) 758-9421
Riverside:	(714) 687-1200
San Luis Obispo:	(805) 543-3888
Santa Clara:	(408) 295-6033
Stanislaus:	(209) 522-2209

In the San Francisco Bay Area

These agencies should be able to find you a counselor who will help you with your problems.

Alameda County:	
Child and Family Services	(415) 874-5126
San Francisco County:	
Children & Youth Services	(415) 558-5336
Contra Costa County:	
Friends Outside, Children's Project	(415) 228-0644
Marin County:	
The House	(415) 456-4200
San Mateo County:	
Family Stress Services	(415) 877-8585
Santa Clara County:	
Friends Outside	(408) 295-6033

Books You Might Want to Read

My Mother and I Are Growing Strong/Mi mama y yo Nos hacemos fuertes by Inez Maury. Order from New Seed Press, 1665 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, CA., \$3.50 plus \$1 postage. This bilingual paperback tells the story of a young girl and her mother coping with the father's imprisonment. All of the kids who worked on this project read this book. Michael reviewed the book and said:

"I liked this book because it had funny parts, emotional parts, and . . . it's just good. My favorite part was where it said, 'My mother and I are growing brave.' It makes me feel better because I see about other people having this happen, too."

Nyeletta also reviewed the book. She wrote:

"This book would help a lot of children understand why their parent went or why they had to go to jail or prison. It would help them see that even if your parent went to jail or prison you can still love them, and live with them when they come out of jail or prison. Jail or prison is just a name for a place where they keep people who do wrong things. Jail and prison is just a lot of letters to scare people, but not me anymore."

When Can Daddy Come Home? by Martha Whitmore Hickman. Order through a local bookstore or from Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tenn. \$9.95 plus postage. Also reprinted in March 1984 Ms. magazine, which is generally available at the public library. This excellent hardcover book follows a mother and son through the father's arrest, sentencing, imprisonment and parole board hearing.

Material Prepared Specifically for Prison Parents

Prison MATCH Parenting Handouts: A series of handouts covering the following four topics: "Telling a Child You're in Prison," "Writing to Your Child," "Planning a Visit With Your Child," and "Celebrating While You're Away." Developed by Prison MATCH's community and inmate staff, this series uses a child development approach in dealing with some common concerns of prison parents. Order from Prison MATCH, 1515 Webster St., #403, Oakland, CA 94612, \$2 for set of four handouts includes postage.

END