

The relationship between incarcerated mothers and their children

Pregnancy in prison

If a woman is pregnant while she is in prison, she will be able to decide on her maternity care in conjunction with prison staff. She will be allowed to retain local midwives or doctors, and a midwife or similarly qualified doctor will give her an antenatal assessment. Together they will develop a health plan, which is incorporated into her Case Management Plan. The prison should offer counselling and information about pregnancy.

Antenatal and parenting programmes are sometimes held inside prison, provided there are enough pregnant women there. Alternatively, mothers will be escorted out to a programme. Mothers can involve their partners in these activities and the birth.

Asking for release

Pregnant women who are incarcerated can ask the Parole Board for early or temporary release. This application will be drafted with assistance from the Case Manager or Unit Manager, and ultimate recommendation for or against release from the General Manager of the prison.

In deciding whether to grant early release, the Parole Board will consider a wide range of factors, including the woman's security classification, likelihood of re-offending and the welfare and best interests of the unborn child(ren).

Financial support

Prisons supply basic items for incarcerated women's children. The mothers are responsible for buying clothing and food for their child(ren).

The mother can apply for child support (from the father's income) or a family assistance benefit. To be eligible for child support, the mother must be separated from the father permanently, not just while in prison. You can apply for a family assistance benefit through Work and Income (www.workandincome.govt.nz).

Keeping babies in prison with mother

Most prisons have mothers with babies units, where inmates with children under two can reside. Such units provide parenting information and support, including enabling breastfeeding. Inmates must apply to have their child(ren) in the unit.

To be granted entry into a unit, the mother must sign a parenting agreement, agreeing to have responsibility for the child and covering other matters such as the mother's agreement to attend and programmes as required and an alternative caregiver who will care for the child in an emergency or after the placement ends. The mother must also meet certain criteria. These include:

- that they were the child's primary caregiver before going to prison or likely be the primary caregiver on release;
- that the inmate has no conviction for violent or sexual offending against children;
- that the inmate agrees to undergo screening to identify any possible mental health or substance abuse issues; and
- it is in the child's best interests to be with the inmate in prison.

If mothers do not have their baby in prison, or have a child under two, mothers can apply for daily visits. This involves an agreement between the mother, prison and child's caregiver. Above all, it must be in the best interests of the child to have them visit the inmate daily. If visits are permitted, the child and mother meet in the prison's feeding and bonding facility, which contains the necessary facilities.

Note that the process to join the unit can take some time. Other people's views, including that of the child's father, will be sought. Mothers should talk to their case manager about applying.

There are also feeding and bonding facilities, which are available to remand and high security prisoners. Here mothers with babies under nine months can bond with their child daily, for up to 12 hours. The facility is set out like a small house, with kitchenette, bedroom and courtyard.

For more information about the mothers with babies units see [here](#).

