

# Loving Someone Who is in Prison

You will be a different person because of what you experience having a loved one in prison. Television shows depicting prison won't interest you anymore. You will know too much. Telephone calls interrupted with a recording announcing the call was made from a correctional institute will become normal to you. Receiving and sending handwritten letters will also become the norm in a day when so many people have no idea what "stationery" is anymore. The saving of quarters for use in the vending machines over visits will become another new norm. Through your journey there will be things that can help you. Here are 9 tips I learned...

1. Self-care. I found it critical to intentionally plan time to exercise, get a massage, or spend time in nature. I found a public lake near my home that became my special place where I could be alone, pray, cry, journal or write letters.
2. Choose joy. Prisons are such a dark place and I found most of the officers working there to be of a negative countenance. I could have encountered them with a similar emotional stance but chose not to. It enhanced my visit to simply choose joy.
3. When you are travel to visit your loved-one, try to add some fun to the trip. Maybe there is a nearby attraction you can see during the trip or stay a hotel with a hot tub for relaxation.
4. Each time you visit, give yourself something lovely. It doesn't have to be large or expensive. Maybe treat yourself to a latte, a special chocolate treat, a caramel apple, or your favorite salty snack. Recognize that visiting can be difficult so don't just put that expectation on yourself without also rewarding yourself.
5. Talk with others who visit their loved ones. It makes a difference when you have someone in your life who understands what it is like to have a loved one incarcerated. I found even parking lot conversations helpful and uplifting. We need people in our lives who share challenges similar to what we are experiencing.
6. Journal about your experiences. Sometimes it's hard to find others to talk to because they don't understand your journey. Expressing your thoughts in writing gets the emotions out and helps you to cope.
7. It's hard not being able to "do" anything to help your loved one except visit but know it is a loving gesture that makes a difference.
8. Expect your loved ones to experience a roller coaster of emotions. When they are angry, the visit is even more challenging. I tried to remind myself that he needs someone to vent to and I can be that person for him. It is a gift that I can give him even though it is not very fun. However, when you leave it's important to not hold onto all you heard. We can't harbor all those challenges. There's nothing we can do about it anyway. Prayer was such a big part of my ability to cope with the weekly challenges. Give your loved one's problems to God.
9. Only share your story with safe people. I experienced harsh responses from people who are simply naive to the judicial system. It would have been wiser to limit who I talked to about my loved one so I could have avoided the additional heartbreak.