ANGEL TREE®
A Program of Prison Fellowship

SET UP A LETTER-WRITING CLUB!

THE BENEFITS

Writing letters is often the best form of communication between children and their incarcerated parents. It is less expensive than phone calls and allows both the child and the parent to think through what they want to say to each other.

Angel Tree® has designed the letter-writing kit as a creative and fun way for children of prisoners to get together with their friends at their local church, share stories or concerns, put them in writing, and send them to their incarcerated parent.

One way to do this is for your church/organization to form a letter-writing club for the Angel Tree children you serve. Angel Tree entrusts each church/organization to decide whether or not to bring children together, and it is each church/organization's sole responsibility to make the best decision and use proper security measures for their individual program. If it is possible for your group, the children can come together once or twice a month to write letters to their mom or dad—as well as do some other fun activities! Letter-writing clubs can form some friendships and nudge children to follow through on writing to their incarcerated parents. You can also use this kit as an activity with a mentor or other caring adult.

Here are some basic steps that can help you get started and can lead to a more meaningful impact in the lives of the children.

PREPARATION

1. Pray for God's guidance and blessing. If the organization/church's decision is to hold a letter-writing club event, plan for, and implement proper security and safety measures to protect attendees during the event.
2. Engage a group of volunteers to assist in the planning so that all responsibilities do not fall to one person. **You might use the bulletin insert template included in this kit to recruit help from other church/organization members.**
3. Determine the dates and times that the letter-writing club will meet and schedule the room/location at your church/organization. We recommend meeting once or twice a month.
4. Begin contacting the families by phone or mailed invitations or flyers. We have included a flyer template that you may send to caregivers.
5. If caregivers don't respond, call to remind them about the letter-writing club and to find out if their children will attend. Ask if any of the children will need transportation to the event location and make arrangements for volunteers to pick them up, if possible.
6. When you talk with the caregivers, be sure to obtain the incarcerated parent's department of corrections (DOC) identification number and the mailing address for the prison facility. You will need this to help the children correctly address their envelopes.
7. Track responses from families so you can determine how many children plan to participate and can recruit enough volunteers to ensure the event runs smoothly.
8. Plan fun games and activities in advance that will help "break the ice" at the letter-writing party and prepare the kids for writing letters.
9. Check with each prison where an incarcerated parent is located to find out the facility's rules on mail. For example, some facilities allow photographs to be sent to prisoners, while others do not.

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DURING THE LETTER-WRITING PARTY

1. Greet the children and their caregivers as they arrive.
2. Be sure to have a letter-writing kit for each child. Also provide various writing instruments—pens, pencils, crayons, or colored markers for children who prefer to draw pictures.
3. Be sure to have stamps for the envelopes.
4. Welcome the children and explain the purpose of the letter-writing party. You might want to read from the child's instructions included in the kit: "Here's Your Very Own Letter-Writing Kit!"
5. Have a fun ice-breaker game to help the children relax.
6. Spend time discussing some things the children might want to include in their letter. Go through the various letter samples in the tablet and ask the children to choose one they want to use for their letter.
7. Explain that volunteers are there if anyone wants help or has questions while working on their letters. Tell the kids to raise their hands, and a volunteer will help them.
8. Double-check to make sure the addresses on the envelopes are correct and that the incarcerated parent's DOC identification number is included.
9. Collect all of the letters in their envelopes and assure the children you will mail them.
10. Share the Gospel with the children in a way that is appropriate to their age. A good time to do this is while everyone is enjoying snacks.
11. Have simple snacks for the children and their caregivers. Do not serve snacks until after the letter writing so there are no spills on the letters.
12. Decide on a creative and fun way to get the children to complete the letter-writing kit survey. (You probably want to wait to do the survey until after the second letter-writing party.)
13. Announce the date, time, and location for the next letter-writing party and invite everyone to come back!

AFTER THE LETTER-WRITING PARTY

1. Before you leave, gather with your volunteers to pray for the incarcerated parents. Pray that the letters will be delivered with no complications. Pray that the parents will respond positively to the letters and quickly write back to their children.
2. Mail the letters.
3. Get together soon to plan your next letter-writing party!
4. Don't forget to mail surveys back to Prison Fellowship®.

   Angel Tree
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