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DADDY'S GONE--PARENTING FROM BEHIND BARS

A crayon drawing (of Tracy) and a 3-sentence message (relayed through a third party) are the only things that Offender Tracy Lee Kendall, #875004, has received from his son during 16 years of incarceration. And, like many fathers serving time in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Tracy has a strong sense of fatherhood, but feels a desperate helplessness to be a father. Tracy just wants to show his son love, keep him out of prison, and affirm his potential to achieve his dreams.

Lack of response from his son is one of many barriers to parenting his child. Never-the-less, Tracy has found a way to hone his parenting skills. So, in the event that Tracy is able to reconnect with his son, he can give effective guidance. And, considering the high rates of incarceration amongst children with incarcerated parents, guidance is vital.

Sending letters is the closest thing to a relationship that Tracy has with his son. And the way Tracy has found to hone his parenting skills is through helping other prisoners connect, build, and maintain relationships with their children. Tracy hopes this will help them and himself be better parents.

The main barrier to being a father is that Tracy knows so little about his son. So, Tracy focuses upon describing himself and his life, encouraging his son to strive towards attaining his dreams in life, and a little about how to discern people and situations (in the hopes that his son can avoid problem people and situations before there are negative consequences).

There are 4 main barriers that Tracy observed with the prisoners he has assisted in establishing relationships with their children. The first is a lack of true rehabilitation. They often refuse to give up a criminal mentality.

And a criminal is too dysfunctional to effectively parent and too dangerous for a child to be around in the first place.

The second barrier is that many prisoners have a sense of entitlement that their child must accept them and do what they say, or the child is in the wrong. And this has been the only cause of failure in any of the relationships which Tracy has helped with. The parent pushed the child away when they attempted to force their way into their child's life or impose their will upon the child. Who can blame the child when it was the parent who indicated that committing crimes was more important than being in their child's life?

The third barrier is that many parents have difficulty articulating their thoughts and feelings to their children. And the fourth barrier manifests when other people interfere with communication or the relationship between parent and child. And in this case, the incarcerated parent must refrain from casting the other people in a negative light.

So the right attitude of the incarcerated parent consists of:

1. Ceasing to be a criminal. the child allows the parent in their life.
2. Accepting the place that the child allows the parent in their life.
3. Developing good communication skills.
4. Avoiding conflict with the child's caretaker(s).

This is a small price to pay for the opportunity to be a loving parent and a cause of realized dreams rather than incarceration.