

# How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

TODDLER—AGES 1 TO 4

## CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Anxiety that parent will be hurt.
- Fear of separation and loss of parent's protection.
- Unable to psychologically separate harm to parent from harm to self.
- Want to cling to parent to avoid separation.



## WHAT TO SAY

- Acknowledge the importance of the parent to the child:  
*"I know you love your Mom/Dad."*
- Speak slowly, in a low, comforting tone:  
*"I know you are scared, but no one is going to hurt you or your Mommy/Daddy."*

## HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child.
- Anticipate that you may have to remove the child from the parent's arms.



## WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

### RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible have them removed to a safe place.



# How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

PRESCHOOL—AGES 4 TO 5

## CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

Fear of separation and loss of parent protection:

- Unable to psychologically separate harm to parent from harm to self.
- May cling to parent to avoid separation.

Very anxious that parent will be hurt:

- May view a police officer as an action figure who can help, hurt, or take them away.
- May believe his/her behavior or wishes caused a parent's arrest.



## WHAT TO SAY

Speak to the child so that your eyes are level with the child's.

Clarify basic facts in simple language:

- Why the police are there.
- What the police are going to do:
  - *"I have to take your parent to the police station to talk about some things."*
  - *"I've called your grandmother and she's on the way over to be with you."*
- Reassure children it is not their fault.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep (i.e. "I will come back to check on you" unless you know you will).

## HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child and avoid cuffing the parents in the presence of child.
- Avoid pointing guns at child.
- Try to distract the child.
  - Offer a stuffed animal or a sweater/scarf of the parent to comfort the child.
- Anticipate that if you do use force, the child's reaction will be extreme:
  - Try to protect parent or hit officer.
  - Zone out or be non-reactive.



## WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

### RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place prior to raid.

### DV

- While you may perceive yourself as the rescuer of the abused parent, the child may only perceive you as someone using force as the abuser did and not see the difference.
- If the child had any positive connection to the batterer parent, the child may view you as harming their batterer parent.



# How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

SCHOOL AGE—AGES 6 TO 12

## CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Fear of separation and loss of parent protection.
- Concerned with issues of right and wrong, fairness and justice.



## WHAT TO SAY

- Deal with child honestly, fairly, and calmly:  
*"I have to take your parent to the police station to talk about some things. We'll let you know when you can see your parent. In the meantime, I've called your grandmother and she is on her way here to be with you."*
- Emphasize that the child did nothing wrong:  
*"You did nothing wrong. I know you love your parent. This is not your fault."*
- If you don't know the answer to the child's question, tell them you don't know but will find out.

## HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Where possible, avoid use of force on parents in presence of child and avoid cuffing the parents in the presence of child.
- Avoid pointing guns at child.
- Anticipate that if you do use force, the child's reaction will be extreme:
  - Attack officer to protect parent, run, scream, cry.
  - Zone out: be unresponsive, hide, "self-soothe" by doing something repetitively (rocking back and forth).
- Offer a stuffed animal or a sweater/scarf of the parent to comfort the child.



## WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

### RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but will escalate children's reactions.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place.

### DV

- The child may run and/or attack the officer/s making arrest to protect parent.
- Child may agree with decision to arrest batterer but feel worried about repercussions of siding with officer in the presence of the batterer.



# How To Explain A Parent's Arrest To A Child

## ADOLESCENCE—AGES 13 TO 18

### CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF ARREST

- Fear of separation and loss of parent's protection.
- Especially fearful of parent being hurt.
- May express anger toward parent and/or officer.
- May try to stand up to officer to protect parent.



### WHAT TO SAY

- Do not respond to statements of teens expressing distaste for your presence.
- De-escalate the situation by letting youth vent fear, feelings:  
*"Hey, this is a tough situation. We're going to take your parent to the police station to talk about this situation."*
- Maintain rules and structure to ensure teen feels secure:  
*"This is the way we have to do it by law. What happens next is \_\_\_ and then we will let you know in \_\_ minutes what's going to happen to dad/mom."*
- Ask teens to assist you with younger children:  
*"What's the best way to get her to come out of the corner? Could you help me?"*  
*"Is there anyone you'd like us to call now?"*

### HOW CHILDREN MIGHT REACT & HOW YOU SHOULD RESPOND

- Don't take teens' rude or obnoxious behavior personally.
- Avoid handcuffing parent in front of youth; attempt to block teens' vision of the arrest.
- Anticipate youth may ignore or evade officers out of shame, rage.
- Anticipate youth will:
  - Attack officer to protect parent, vent anger on you instead of parent, run, scream/cry/express rage, be hypersensitive to touch.
  - Zone out: be unresponsive verbally, hide, appear to be paralyzed and unable to move, "self-soothe" by doing something repetitively (rocking back and forth).
- Engage teens in dealing with the arrangements for care; offer the opportunity to help them feel in control of their situation, to whatever degree is possible.

### WHEN ARREST IS RAID OR DV

#### RAID

- Element of surprise may be necessary for effective law enforcement, but escalates the reactions of teens.
- Anticipate that some teens will try to protect themselves.
- Try to ascertain ahead of time if children/teens are present. If possible, have them removed to a safe place.
- Be aware, that teens may run or strike back at officer/s making the arrest.

#### DV

- Anticipate that some teens will want to help assaulted parent and need guidance as to how.
- Teen may agree with decision to arrest batterer but feel worried about repercussions of siding with officer.

