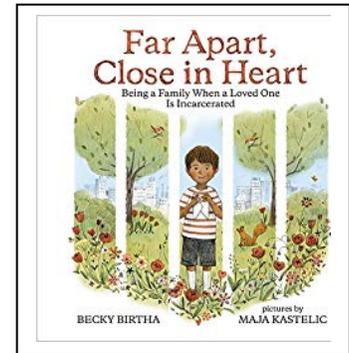


Far Apart, Close in Heart

By Becky Birtha

Children can experience many emotions when a parent is incarcerated. They may be angry, sad, lonely, or scared and sometimes their friends may act differently toward them. In this book, children learn that even when it feels like everything is going wrong, there are things they can do to cope with and manage big feelings. Sending letters, talking to trusted adults about their feelings, and visiting a parent in jail can help keep the parent close in the child's heart.



Discussion and Questions:

- In the book, one child has questions that they only want to ask their parent. Who is someone that you can go to and ask questions?
- A child in the book says they feel sad because it feels like their parent broke a promise. Explain to the child that a promise is when someone does what they say they will do. Have you ever made a promise to someone? Were you able to keep it?
- Feelings come in many forms. The book highlights many emotions that each child was feeling (e.g., embarrassed, mad, sad). While reading the book, ask children if they remember a time when they felt this way, pointing out and defining the various emotions. Encourage children to make faces to reflect the specific feelings mentioned during the book reading.

Activities:

• Emotion Wheel

- Using an emotion wheel (similar to the one at the link below), identify the emotions on the wheel and how they might look and feel. On a large whiteboard or several poster sized papers, draw an outline of a child's body.
- Invite a child to spin the wheel and draw how a person's face might look if they felt that emotion. Children could draw how their body responds to the emotion (i.e., anger = clenched fists; excited = big smile and waving hands).
- Alternatively, the wheel can be spun and when it stops on a certain emotion, encourage the child to act out the emotion on which the spinner stopped.
- Additional information, including downloadable and printable emotion wheels, can be found at: <https://childhood101.com/helping-children-manage-big-emotions-my-emotions-wheel-printable/>

• Make-a-face

- For this activity, prepare sets of different eyes and mouths demonstrating eye and mouth expressions for different emotions, and a blank face/head using different shades of multicultural construction paper. Ensure that every child has a complete set of eyes and mouths.
- Children should choose a blank face and a set of eyes and mouths. Call out an emotion (e.g., happy, sad, angry) and encourage children to use the eyes and mouths they have to show what that emotion might look like.
- Encourage children to suggest an emotion so everyone can create that emotion with their paper faces.
- Additional information can be found at: <http://www.elsa-support.co.uk/make-a-face-activities/>



• How Words Feel

- This sensory activity helps young children recognize how spoken words can impact others' emotions and become familiar with the impact words people say can have on the feelings of others.

- Encourage children to explore a variety of soft and rough textures (e.g., felt, silk, fleece, feathers vs. burlap, tulle, sandpaper, dry sponge) by passing them around the group. As children touch different textures, ask them if they think the material they are holding is comfortable (positive) or uncomfortable (negative). Repeat this step a few times while the children continue to pass the materials and experience different textures. The goal is to help children first, recognize textures can elicit physical feelings that are positive and negative before understanding that spoken words between people can also lead to positive or negative emotional feelings.
- Next display a large piece of paper or poster board, that has been prepared with a T-chart. Using corresponding feelings faces, label one column “Positive” and the other “Negative.” Invite children to tape/glue/pin a texture to the column they think best describes the texture.
- If children have different opinions on whether a texture is “positive” or “negative,” you could discuss how people may have different feelings about the same thing and reassure them that it is okay when that happens. You could also offer to place the texture in both column or along the dividing line of the T-chart.
- Next, with a prepared set of cards that include words/phrases such as “please,” “thank you,” “well done,” “do you want to play,” “I’m sorry” as well as negative words and phrases such as “go away,” “I’m not your friend,” “you can’t play with us,” and “I hate you.” Ask the students if each word/phrase feels positive or negative to them. Invite children to tape/glue/pin the word/phrase card under the column where they think it belongs – “positive” or “negative.”
- Continue the discussion with the group about “positive” words that might help someone feel better when they are sad or miss someone who may be far away like the way the characters in the story.
- Additional information can be found at: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/760404718306459115/>
- **Letter Writing**
 - In the book writing letters to loved ones is suggested as one way to feel close to someone far away. Writing letters looks different for children depending on their age and development. This should be considered when introducing this concept. Many young children draw pictures as a way to connect with others, prior to being able to write. They could also use stamps or finger paints to create a piece of artwork. Adults can ask a child to tell them about their picture. The adult can write this description on the page and read it aloud before the child delivers it to their loved one.
 - Additional strategies and activities for writing letters can be found at: <https://www.themeasuredmom.com/how-to-get-kids-to-love-writing/>