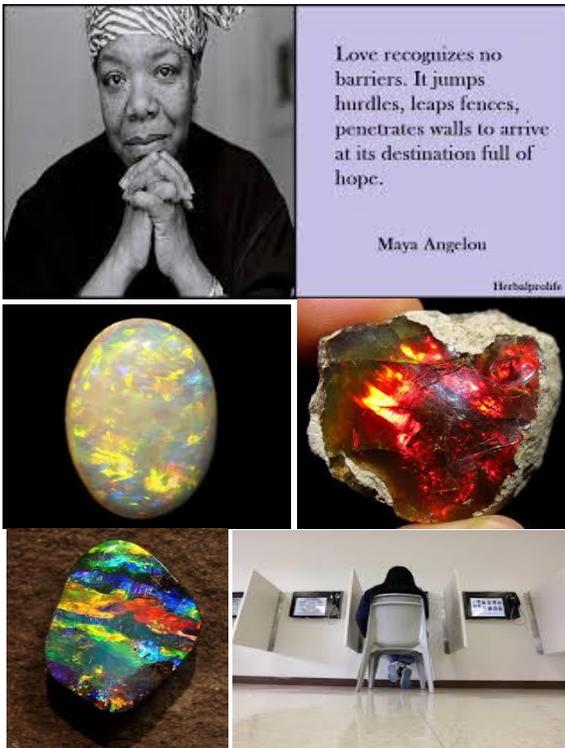


Hi \_\_\_\_\_

**Freestyle Area:**

**Planning-ahead for those painful PHONE silences when you talk to your kids & teens**



Every Opal is unique to itself & has such a depth of beauty that this world sorely needs. You are that precious Opal.

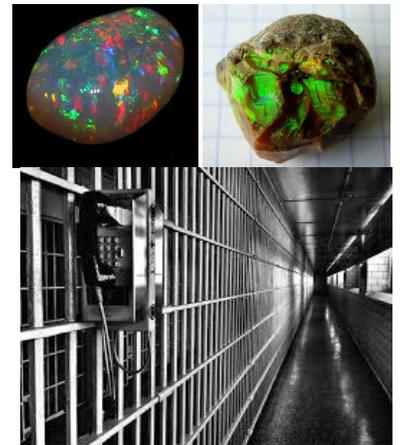
**Beautiful, Strong  
Vibrant, Precious  
&  
100% Unique**

Never doubt yourself or wish that you were someone else.

Instead, take the time to start reclaiming who you truly are.

Prison is going to be just a part of your life-story, so use it to become an inspiration to your child.

Darly Royan Paraha



**YOU WILL COME THROUGH THIS JOURNEY**

**But it's YOU who'll ultimately determine the outcome.**

**Choose Good &**

**Stand-Strong-Opal**

**Before going into prison my son and I already had a good relationship but in-spite of this there was sometimes an awkwardness to over-come in our phone conversations.**

I know first-hand how devastating it is to look forward to a planned phone call only to have long periods of uncomfortable silence. Whenever I had these disappointing phone calls it'd bum me out for the rest of the day and sometimes I couldn't shake off that feeling of flatness for a few days.

The thing is that many of us Opal parents don't share and discuss our hurts and fears about the break-down in communication with our child because the pain is so deep and intimate. Instead many Opal parents lash out in frustration and end up getting in more trouble. The saddest thing that I saw happen in prison was parents withdrawing from their kids and ceasing contact so they didn't have to feel the pain of rejection.

*The Opal Place - Our Place of Inspiration*

www.theopalplace.co.nz \* Postal: Po Box 178, Hawera 4640, New Zealand

In this article I want to share some tips, ideas and skills to help you get **PHONE CALL-FIT & 100% PRE-PARED** for your phone calls - which for most of us Opal parents is the highlight of any week.

**Question: Is it normal to sometimes have long silences when you get to phone your child / teen.**

**Answer:** Yes. Often your child will be looking for direction from you and so if you haven't planned what topics you can talk about in advance you can sometimes be over-come with any or all of the following: shyness, your brain goes blank, embarrassment, sadness and nothing comes out of your mouth – or you ask questions that your child can only reply with a yes or no to.

**Question: But haven't I forfeited (lost/given-up) my rights as a parent when I came into prison?**

**Answer:** No-way. You are your child's parent, and nothing can change that. In your mind shut out the world because the relationship that you need to focus on is between you & your child. Don't worry or buy in to what -ever anyone else may think or say – because ultimately it does not matter, only your role as parent matters.

**Question: But what if I did something really bad – why would my child want to communicate with me anyway?**

**Answer:** Life sure has its surprises. I ended up going to prison for burglary one time and arson the second time. When it came to the arson I was mortified, embarrassed, disgusted, confused and angry at myself. Sure, I was blind drunk and can't remember setting fire to my neighbors, house, but so what? At the end of the day I did it. Me. And I had to accept what I'd done and take it on the chin.

Waiting for that first phone call to be approved had me feeling all sorts of emotions. I was filled with longing to hear my sons voice but I was also embarrassed about what I'd done and how he was going to re-act to me.

The thing we need to hold-onto is that we are still the parent and it's our role to take control and lead the situation. This is the same no matter what your child's age.

**As a parent you also need to put yourself in your child's shoes and think about what some of their fears may be. They like you will have been looking forward to this phone call and they will also have mixed emotions about talking to you.**



**But ultimately what you need to understand is that YOUR child will be needing confirmation that:**



1. You are okay
2. You still love them
3. That you will still be a big part of their life
4. That you still need & want their love & support
5. & most importantly that you will use this time to better yourself.



**Question: To be honest I don't think I was a very good parent before I came into prison, so should I just withdraw from my child/teens life?**

**Answer:** Heck-no! For many of us Opal parents, life before we got to prison was pretty-dysfunctional (bad) and many of us were never taught how to be a good parent or had never experienced a 'normal loving home' ourselves. Many of us were suffering from addiction issues or un-diagnosed mental health issues which makes being a good parent very difficult.

Being in prison will give you the time to sort your shit out and step up as a parent.

**Question: My child seems to be growing away from me and I don't know what to say.**

**Answer:** Great – your child is thriving and adapting to their new life-style. That's a really good thing and it's a testament to your child's strength of character.

What'll help you maintain and build a healthy relationship with your child is to make a plan to be the best that YOU can be. If you go into prison and don't grow or evolve as a person, you're going to be in danger of retarding (holding back) your development as a person.

When it comes to relationships think of it this way. You may love someone that you're close to...but... do you like them?

Ask yourself – if that person wasn't family ...would I want to be friends with them?

Now turn this around and put yourself in your child's shoes...most likely they love you...**but do they like you?** Are you interesting? Supportive? Artistic? Well-read? & have their best interests at heart? **Or every time you talk to your child or teen are you a repetitive bore?**

**Question:** Okay I get all your advice - but how do I actually prepare for a phone call (or visit) with my child?

**Answer:** During the week actively look for interesting things to talk to your child about. If you see something interesting on T.V or in a book write it down - don't just think, oh that was funny & I'll tell my boy/girl about that...because chances are you'll forget.

As soon as any questions or topics that you know you'll want to talk pop into your brain - write them down.

& If you see something unusual write it down. Example: Once I saw a smallish greenish bird sitting up on the wire and I stopped to watch it for a while. When it broke into song I knew what it was, it was a New Zealand Native Bell-bird and I'd never seen one before. I couldn't wait to get back to my cell to write down my memory of seeing that bird.

**Yup** I know what you're thinking...like my child or teens going to want to hear about a boring bird?

Thing was my son was 17 years-old when I saw that bird & yes he had to listen to me tell him ALL (!) about it. I'm sure he was bored shit-less, but we had developed a healthy relationship via the phone and I knew that he was just happy to hear me happily talk about something positive.



*To this day my sons affectionate nick-name for me is 'Noob' - like in "oh Mum your such a geeky Noob!"*

*But you know what? I'm a proud Noob & I own that title. Heaps better than being thought of as a self-obsessed bore.*

**Question:** *How do you want your kids to think about you? With love, affection, interest or someone to be avoided?*

**Also** - Tune in to your child and start the conversation with something that you think they'll be interested in.

& Have fun introducing new and 'juicy' words. Do this so that over-time you have a key part in expanding what they know. If the word seems too hard, use it and then explain what it means - make it a fun game.

### **Other stuff**

If it helps you form a relationship with your child, picture your relationship in this way:

- Make your phone calls, visits & weekly letters a ray of sunlight in your child's life. Set out to make each contact with your child like a special jewel.
- Make your conversations safe. This means learn to listen and think before you give a reply. You'll assure your child that they can share any information with you, because you will safe-guard it, respect it and give back the kind of solid decent and loving advice that only a parent can.
- &...if you are feeling negative, emotional, angry or anything else negative - please try your best not to show this to your child - because it will serve no purpose. You won't feel better & you'll just make your child more anxious.

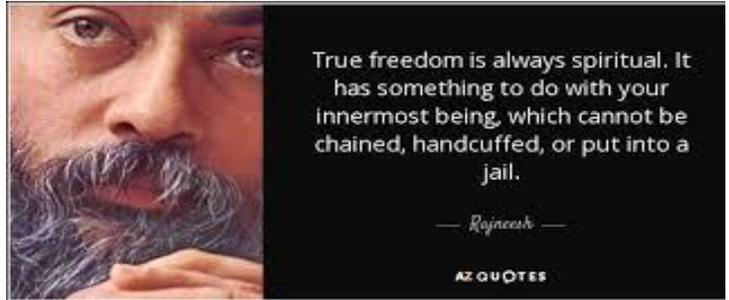
**Final thing:** Even with all the preparation in the world and all the love and acceptance, you will still:

### **Occasionally have a stink phone-call or visit. That's life.**

Try your best not to let it bum you out, but do acknowledge your feelings to yourself - don't bottle it up. What can be good is to let your emotions settle and then maybe that night write or create something for your child that expresses your love and hope for both of your futures.



change the way you see things, and the things you see will change.



**Freestyle Area:** Use this space to write down any notes or ideas that you have:

