

Immigration Detention Visitation Supplement

Orientation and training is particularly important for immigration detention visitation volunteers because many of them will know little to nothing about immigration detention. An educating yet inspiring orientation is just what a new volunteer needs to be a confident and successful visitor! Read the Materials section of Chapter IV for more ideas about things to include in the training.

Talk About Immigration Detention

It's important to give visitation volunteers a brief overview of the United States immigration detention system. Don't overwhelm them with the details, but you might want to discuss who is impacted and reasons people are detained, define basic immigration terms, and discuss recent changes in policy, such as the growth of family immigration detention. You might explain that there are 34,000 individuals in detention on any given night in more than 250 facilities around the country. You can find all of this and more on LIRS's Volunteer Training PowerPoint, which you can access by emailing visitation@lirs.org.

Describe the Experience

Visiting someone in detention can be a new and intimidating experience. However, new volunteers will feel safe if you give them accurate expectations about what the experience will look and feel like. Describe the facility's security and layout and what the visitor's room will look like. Invite a seasoned volunteer to reflect on and share their experience. You may also want to give them a few basic conversation prompts to use in an awkward silence. For example, asking about the individual's week, describing the weather or news, or discussing favorite books and movies.

Need to Know

There are a few things visitation volunteers absolutely need to know. These include what to bring (e.g. a government-issued photo ID), what not to bring (e.g. cameras), and confidentiality rules to protect the person being visited. Encourage volunteers to share their story of visitation, but make sure they change the name, country of origin, and any other identifying pieces of information about the person in detention. Your visitors might run into problematic situations, so describe scenarios such as allegations of abuse by facility staff or urgent needs of the detainees that should be told to you as the ministry leader.

How to be a Good Visitor

Orientation is the perfect place to establish key ideas and habits in new visitors. You might cover some basic dos and don'ts, such as not proselytizing or praying. You also may want to explicitly state what a visitation volunteer *is*: a listening and compassionate friend, and what a visitation volunteer *is not*: a social worker, mental health professional, lawyer, or source of financial support. Lastly, encourage the volunteer to be consistent. Explain the importance of the relationship that forms and the value of a regular compassionate presence.

LIRS Resources

LIRS has a Volunteer Training PowerPoint and talking points that we would be happy to share with you. Some of the slides ask you to put in information about the facility and the detainees your ministry visits, all of which can be found online at ice.gov/detention-facilities.

What Else?

You might find that visitation isn't for everyone. Some people who attend your orientation might not be ready or interested in visiting. This is a great opportunity to share other ways to get involved in volunteer opportunities to uphold the dignity of immigrants in detention. Such as:

Become a pen pal	If your program doesn't offer this service, email us the interested volunteer's contact information at visitation@lirs.org . We would be happy to facilitate!
Educate others	LIRS offers resources to host a Bible study or movie screening. Email us at visitation@lirs.org for more information.
Invite others to visit	Ask volunteers to tell their friends or Bible study group about immigration detention. Or, invite volunteers to make a presentation at their church.
Advocate with LIRS	Visit the LIRS Action Center at lirs.org/action .
Community care	Individuals released from detention need compassionate assistance, too. This may take the form of a backpack or bus station ministry. If there isn't either ministry in your community, email us at visitation@lirs.org . We would be happy to help start one or connect interested individuals with opportunities to support community care initiatives around the country.