

What do I do if my loved one just went to jail?

Author

Northwest Justice Project

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Learn how to find and help a loved one who is in a jail in Washington.

Are jails and prison the same thing?

No.

- **Prison** is where someone goes **after** they've been through charges, court and sentencing for certain crimes.
- **Jail** or another detention center is where someone is held **before** sentencing. Jail is also where some people will serve their sentence for certain types of crimes.

If your loved one was arrested, **where** they'll be booked and held will depend on **who** arrested them and **where** they were arrested. They might go to the smaller local jail or police station for processing before being taken to the county jail. Then they'll be transferred to the county jail and held there unless bail is posted or they're otherwise released.

Bail is an amount of money a defendant can give to the court to be released from jail instead of being held there while waiting for the trial.

How do I find someone who might be in jail?

Trying to locate a loved one who might be in jail can be hard. Contact the county jail you think your loved one could be held in.

Try to internet search the name of the county and the phrase "jail inmate search." Many counties have a search portal available online like Jefferson County (<https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/174/Jail-Inmate-Search>) does. Each county might use a different phrase for what the search is called:

- Yakima County calls it the current Inmate Lookup (<https://www.yakimacounty.us/2240/Inmate-Lookup>).
- Whatcom County (<https://apps1.whatcomcounty.us/jaildata/roster.html>) and Spokane County (<https://www.spokanecounty.gov/352/Inmate-Roster>) call it the Jail Roster search.
- King County calls it the Subject Lookup Tool (<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dajd/courts-jails-legal-system/information-services-jail-detention/locate-person-jail>).
- Snohomish County calls it the Jail Register (<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/3474/Jail-Register-Bail-Information>).

If you don't have internet access, try calling the non-emergency number for the local police or sheriff to ask them about contact information for the local jails.

What information do I need to find out?

To be able to help your loved one, you'll need to know:

- Where they're being held.
- What their inmate number, arrest number, booking number, or other assigned number is. What this is called will vary by place or agency.
- Any other information you'll need so you can contact them while they're in jail.

King County Public Defense explains what you need to know after a loved one goes to jail (<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dpd/courts-jails-legal-system/jail>) no matter what county they're in.

How long will my loved one be in jail?

It depends.

If they don't post bail, they could be held until the trial. After the trial, it will depend on the sentencing if they're convicted (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.20.021>).

For some crimes, they could serve the sentence in jail. For others, they could be moved to prison. Find out what you can do if your loved one was just moved to a Washington Department of Corrections prison (<https://www.doc.wa.gov/docs/publications/500-HA002.pdf>).

Can I talk to their defense attorney?

No. When a person has an attorney, the attorney can only talk with **that person** about their case. Even if you pay for a defense attorney for your loved one, the attorney can still only communicate with your loved one about the case.

Can I get their stuff from the jail?

Probably, unless it's being held as evidence.

Ask the jail what you must do to get the property. Usually, you must provide a release form that authorizes you to pick up the property for the person in jail. The jail might make you use their specific form. You can also use a [Durable Power of Attorney form](#) to get the property.

Can I visit my loved one in jail?

Probably. It will depend on the jail's rules. Ask the jail about visitation hours and rules.

All interactions in jails are recorded and surveilled by the jail authorities.

Can I communicate with them in jail?

Most likely. Most jails have some kind of electronic mail or phone communication abilities for people being held. You should also be able to write letters to your loved one while they're in jail.

All communications with someone in jail can be recorded, reviewed and surveilled by the jail authorities.

Can I give their medications to the jail?

You can try. The jail might accept them as is. Or, depending on the jail's rules, there may be problems (<https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/article/38-my-loved-one-is-being-mistreated-in-jail-not-receiving-medication-what-can-i-do-to-help#:~:text=not%20receiving%20medication.-,What%20can%20I%20do%20to%20help?,pharmaceutical%20packaging%20with%20dispensing>).

. You might need a release or authorization form.

Some jails allow outside medications. Some will require their own prescriptions. Even if the jail requires their own prescriptions, giving the medications to the jail might help get new prescriptions faster for your loved one.

Can I help them get a name change while they're in jail?

Your loved one should be able to request a name change petition form from the county jail in which they are being held. They may need help from you to be able to complete and file the petition in the court itself. Some county District Courts will be able to process name changes for people being held in jail in their county. Those courts will work with the jail to make sure the person can attend the name change hearing if required. **Some county District Courts won't be able to do so.**

If your loved one needs help with a name change while they're in jail, they should talk to a lawyer.

What if I think my loved one is being mistreated in jail?

You can make a complaint with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds
(<https://oco.wa.gov/submit-complaint>)(<https://oco.wa.gov/submit-complaint>).

Follow the instructions (<https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/article/38-my-loved-one-is-being-mistreated-in-jail-not-receiving-medication-what-can-i-do-to-help#:~:text=not%20receiving%20medication.-,What%20can%20I%20do%20to%20help?,pharmaceutical%20packaging%20with%20dispensing>

from the National Alliance on Mental Illness about other ways to make complaints about your loved one's mistreatment in jail.

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice.
Find organizations that provide free legal help on our [Get legal help](#) page.