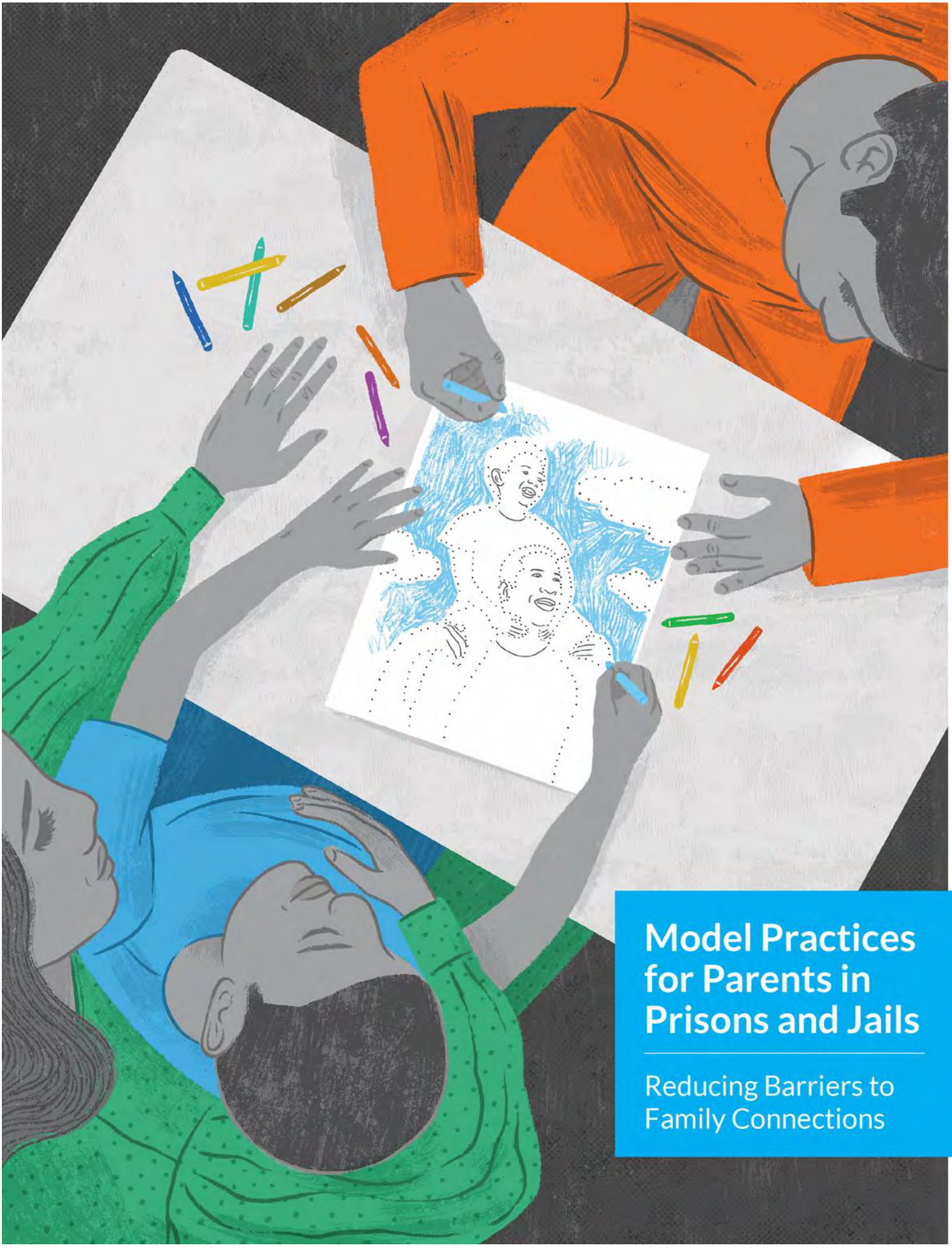

Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails

Reducing Barriers to Family Connections

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July 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have found that 2.7 million children in the United States have a parent serving time in prison or jail at any given time, while more than 5 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point during their lives.[1] Parental incarceration is often stressful and traumatic for children as it can create or contribute to economic and social disruptions in their lives. In many cases, children may lose a source of financial or emotional support, be forced to move in with another parent or caregiver and switch schools, and change other daily routines after their parent is incarcerated. Further compounding the issue, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be poor, dealing with parental divorce or separation, and exposed to violence in their home or community.[2]

Parental incarceration may also lead to fear, uncertainty, anxiety, frustration, and confusion among children as they navigate correctional institutions and policies when trying to communicate or visit their parents. For example, phone calls with parents in prison and jail are often expensive; correctional facilities' visiting guidelines can be difficult to understand or follow; children may be living far from where their parents are incarcerated; and search procedures and encounters with uniformed officers during correctional visits can be daunting and emotionally draining.

Incarceration also inhibits a parent's ability to fulfill their familial responsibilities. Incarcerated parents should be recognized as having responsibility to their children, wanting to be involved in their children's lives, and helping make parenting decisions. Yet, incarceration disrupts familial ties and makes it difficult for incarcerated parents to maintain or mend relationships with their children. In part, this is because correctional facilities have policies and practices that govern contact between incarcerated people and people on the outside. These policies and practices can present barriers to parents' ability to interact and communicate with their children and the individuals and systems that affect their children such as co-parents, caregivers and other family members, teachers, and counselors.

Though many of these policies and practices are in place to ensure the correctional facility is safe and secure, the existing body of evidence suggests that policies that encourage parent-child contact offer benefits that do not compromise a facility's safety or security. For instance, several studies conclude that policies that provide incarcerated people opportunities to communicate and interact with their families, through visits and other methods, improve their well-being and adjustment to the correctional environment and lower misconduct and violence in the facility. Increased communication and interaction with family members also lower recidivism rates for incarcerated people after release.[3] Further, studies have not demonstrated that family visits increase the amount of contraband in facilities. Children also benefit by

being in contact and communication with their incarcerated parent; evidence suggests this can mitigate the trauma and stress of parental incarceration. Therefore, correctional administrators have an opportunity to minimize the barriers that prevent incarcerated parents from interacting and communicating with their families while maintaining safe and secure facilities.

Although policies that support parent-children relationships during parental incarceration have clear benefits, they also have several implementation challenges. Policies that regulate interactions between incarcerated parents and their children vary widely, and few institutions have implemented comprehensive practices aimed at improving parent-child communication, contact, and relationships.[4] For example, while all facilities have policies governing visits, not many have implemented family-centered contact visiting programs with additional supportive services. One reason for the shortage of these practices is the lack of evidence-based guidelines for correctional administrators to follow. Many administrators also have limited resources, space, and staff to devote to such practices.

In addition, administrators may face challenges securing buy-in and support for these practices from their frontline officers and program staff, as well as from the incarcerated parents, their children, and caregivers.[5] Correctional officers may not understand the potential benefits of implementing parent-focused practices and instead see families and visitors as contraband risks. Incarcerated parents might choose not to participate in a practice like visiting for fear of exposing their children to the correctional environment. Likewise, caregivers may not want the child to spend time inside a prison or jail or may simply want to keep the child away from their incarcerated parent.

To address these challenges, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), in collaboration with the Urban Institute and Community Works West, have developed a set of model practices to facilitate parent-child communication and contact during parental incarceration. The objective of this document is to detail a set of practices that correctional administrators can implement to remove barriers that inhibit children from cultivating or maintaining relationships with their incarcerated parents during and immediately after incarceration. These practices also involve children's co-parents and caregivers. To accomplish this objective, we suggest that correctional administrators (1) consider that children need and want to have a relationship with their incarcerated parents and vice versa; (2) allow incarcerated parents to take responsibility for their children; and (3) provide opportunities for families to communicate, interact, and bond. By implementing the practices outlined in this document, we believe administrators will reduce the stress and confusion children experience when their parent is incarcerated while sustaining or maximizing safety and security in the facility.

The objective of this document is to detail a set of practices that correctional administrators can implement to remove barriers that inhibit children from cultivating or maintaining relationships with their incarcerated parents during and immediately after incarceration. These practices also involve children's co-parents and caregivers. To accomplish this objective, we suggest that correctional administrators (1) consider that children need and want to have a relationship with their incarcerated parents and vice versa; (2) allow incarcerated parents to take responsibility for their children; and (3) provide opportunities for families to communicate, interact, and bond. By implementing the practices outlined in this document, we believe administrators will reduce the stress and confusion children experience when their parent is incarcerated while sustaining or maximizing safety and security in the facility.

WHAT IS IN THIS DOCUMENT?

This document contains a set of practices intended to guide correctional administrators in their efforts to support parent-child relationships. We believe these practices hold promise for benefiting incarcerated parents and improving the lives of their children and families overall without compromising the safety and security of the correctional facility. This set of practices was created in collaboration with a subject matter expert committee selected for this project. Box 1 has more information on our process for selecting practices and drafting this document.

The practices included in this document are suitable for a wide range of correctional facilities, including both prisons and jails across the country, with varying capacities, population sizes, and budgets. The practices form a comprehensive set, but do not outline every possible practice. Rather, the practices selected for this document were identified in consultation with the subject matter expert committee to have the greatest potential to yield benefits for incarcerated parents, children, families, and correctional facilities. Most of the practices are also relatively low cost and straightforward to implement. The document includes practices that facilities can implement from the time a parent enters the facility to the time immediately after they leave. Examples of practices described in this document are parenting classes, family notification strategies, parent-child visiting policies, and reentry planning.

Note that the practices outlined here provide guidance to correctional administrators on the types of changes that they could make within their facilities to remove barriers to parent-child communication and contact. But, this document does not prescribe specifically how administrators should create or implement these practices. For example, the chapter on visiting highlights broad changes an administrator could make

to their visiting guidelines and procedures that would allow parents to interact with their children in positive, prosocial ways. The chapter does not, however, include language that can be directly incorporated into an agency's visiting policy.

BOX 1. PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING MODEL PRACTICES

1. **Scan of practice and review of the literature.** We culled journal articles, reports, and other published and unpublished documents to better understand practices that have been implemented in correctional facilities across the country and whether these practices have resulted in positive changes among parents, children, or correctional systems.
2. **Interviews with members of the subject matter expert committee.** We held 90-minute interviews with each of the experts to discuss their experiences and perceptions of various programs, policies, and practices related to parent-child contact and communication during incarceration. Committee members included researchers, correctional professionals, service providers, policy advocates, and individuals directly affected by parental incarceration. They identified dozens of practices that could improve parent-child communication and interaction in correctional systems.
3. **Synthesis of information.** We used the information from the scan of practice and the expert interviews to draft a set of model practices.
4. **Review and finalization.** The subject matter experts reviewed the draft, then held a convening with federal partners to discuss the feedback. Committee members reviewed and finalized the final draft.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS DOCUMENT?

This document was created for people who can change and create policies and practice within a correctional system such as individuals who make decisions about how to dedicate space and resources within a facility, individuals who make decisions about the agencies or organizations outside the correctional facility with which to partner and collaborate, and those who can design and manage policies and programs that reduce barriers to parent-child communication and contact. Therefore, this document targets correctional administrators (e.g., wardens, department of corrections directors or commissioners, sheriffs, and other officials) and organizations that work closely with correctional institutions or families of incarcerated parents. Though not our primary audience, we also hope this document will be of general interest to policymakers, professionals, and researchers interested in these issues.

How is this document organized?

This document has 10 chapters, each of which contains a group of topically related practices to consider. The first two chapters—*Partnership Building* and *Training and Core Competencies*—are foundational to the eight practices outlined in the remainder of the document. Anyone interested in adapting the guidelines to their facility should use these chapters as the basis on which to build a set of family-centered practices. Read in order, the remaining eight chapters span the correctional system, from intake to reentry: *Intake and Assessment*, *Family Notification and Information Provision*, *Classes and Groups*, *Visitor Lobbies*, *Visiting*, *Parent-Child Communication*, *Caregiver Support*, and *Family-Focused Reentry*. If implemented together, the practices offer correctional administrators a comprehensive approach to support parent-child communication and contact in their facilities while emphasizing safety and security.

Though the chapters in this document complement one another, each one contains a separate, related group of practices. For example, chapter 7 describes several practices related to visiting, including reviewing visiting guidelines and procedures, making physical changes to visiting rooms, and offering contact and noncontact visits. Yet, the practices outlined in chapter 7 are also connected to the practices outlined in other chapters such as 6 (Visitor Lobbies), 8 (Parent-Child Communication), and 9 (Caregiver Support). Our intention is for these practices to be implemented together, building on the foundational practices outlined in chapters 1 and 2. Each chapter in this document outlines a group of practices, describes their importance, and lists tips and resources that may help with their implementation.

Within the chapters, we provide a resource indicator (see example at right) for each model practice that illustrates the estimated level of money, space, and staff an administrator might need to implement the practice. Because we understand that the availability of these resources varies substantially across facilities, the indicator is intentionally broad. Rather than specifying how much money, space, or staff an administrator should allocate for a practice, we simply indicate whether one should expect the resources to be relatively low, medium, or high.

We also include a readiness checklist at the beginning of each chapter. This checklist highlights a few resources or items a facility should have when implementing the practices in the chapter. For example, one item on the checklist in chapter 7 is that facilities have space in which to create a child-friendly contact visiting room.

Notes

1. David Murphey and P. Mae Cooper, *Parents behind Bars: What Happens to Their Children?* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2015); and The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility* (Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).
2. Murphey and Cooper, *Parents behind Bars*.
3. Joshua C. Cochran, "The Ties That Bind or the Ties That Break: Examining the Relationship between Visitation and Prisoner Misconduct," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 40 (5): 433–40, 2012; Karen De Claire and Louise Dixon, "The Effects of Prison Visits from Family Members on Prisoners' Well-Being, Prison Rule Breaking, and Recidivism: A Review of Research since 1991," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 18 (2): 185–99, 2017; Grant Duwe and Valerie Clark, "Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 24 (3): 271–96, 2013; and Meghan M. Mitchell, Kallee Spooner, Di Jia, and Yan Zhang, "The Effect of Prison Visitation on Reentry Success: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 47:74–83, 2016.
4. Heath C. Hoffmann, Amy L. Byrd, and Alex M. Kightlinger, "Prison Programs and Services for Incarcerated Parents and Their Underage Children: Results from a National Survey of Correctional Facilities," *The Prison Journal* 90 (4): 397–416, 2010.
5. For instance, many parents refuse to see or communicate with their families while they are incarcerated because they are ashamed of their situation or because they do not want their children exposed to a correctional environment (Jocelyn Fontaine, Samuel Taxy, Bryce Peterson, Justin Breaux, and Shelli B. Rossman, *Safer Return Demonstration: Impact Findings from the Research-Based Community Reentry Initiative* [Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015].)

CHAPTER 1. PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

Consider having the following in place before building partnerships:

- ✓ knowledge of community-based organizations, local institutions, or government agencies that would be valuable partners
- ✓ buy-in from corrections leadership to seek out and establish core partnerships
- ✓ participation in local collaboratives or coalitions of justice-related agencies and community organizations (e.g., reentry coalitions, working groups, task forces)
- ✓ resources to execute contracts and agreements with service-providing organizations

It is critical to engage the support of local organizations and institutions and government agencies or entities when implementing many of the parent-focused practices in this toolkit. Correctional staff will play a large role in establishing, overseeing, and carrying out these practices, but it is unreasonable to expect them to implement each one alone. For example, a community-based service provider may be better suited than a correctional officer or other facility employee to teach a parenting class or moderate a caregiver support group. Thus, the practices outlined in this chapter should be seen as foundational for all of the model practices outlined in this document. Developing core partnerships with external entities is necessary for instituting and maintaining successful, comprehensive practices for parents in your facility.

This chapter outlines three practices:

1.1 Identify potential partners

1.2 Determine scope and nature of partnerships

1.3 Implement collaborative partnerships

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Strategic core partners can bring new perspectives and ideas as well as diverse skill sets, technical expertise, and resources to the development of practices aimed at improving parent-child communication and interaction in your facility. Partners may also help your facility implement more comprehensive and sustainable practices and ensure the continuity of services following an incarcerated parent's release from custody.[a] *For example, partnering with local universities, community colleges, and trade schools can create educational and career pathways for parents during their reentry process.*[b] *Establishing partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations, local institutions, and government agencies or entities can help bring credibility to your chosen practices, marshal community support, improve service provision and implementation, and help you secure additional funding.*[c]

a. Anna Crayton, Liz Ressler, Debbie A. Mukamal, Jesse Jannetta, and Kevin Warwick, *Partnering with Jails to Improve Reentry: A Guidebook for Community-Based Organizations* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010); and Amy L. Solomon, Jenny W. L. Osborne, Stefan F. LoBuglio, Jeff Mellow, and Debbie A. Mukamal, *Life after Lockup: Improving Reentry from Jail to the Community* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2008).
b. US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *Partnerships between Community Colleges and Prisons: Providing Workforce Education and Training to Reduce Recidivism* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
c. See J. Yoon, and J. Nickel, *Reentry Partnerships: A Guide for States & Faith-Based and Community Organizations* (New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2008); and Annie E. Casey Foundation, Family to Family Initiative, *Partnerships between Corrections and Child Welfare* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001).

Word from the expert

Families impacted by incarceration may also have contact with various other public systems, from the public school system to the child welfare system and beyond. The competing mandates and expectations associated with involvement in each of these systems can be extremely taxing on families. When systems collaborate to close gaps in services, however, there's an opportunity to create a web of support for families that can strengthen or maintain family bonds. Research tells us that strong family bonds are a powerful protective factor for children, and for public safety more broadly. When you form core partnerships that support the maintenance of family bonds in families that are stressed by arrest and/or incarceration, you're also helping to increase public safety and reduce recidivism.

Nell Bernstein,
Author and journalist,
Former director of the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership

1.1 IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS

While every correctional facility administrator will have access to different external resources, your facility may be able to partner with many types of organizations, institutions, and government agencies or entities, including the following:

- **Community-based organizations.** A helpful first step is to take stock of any community based-organizations that have already demonstrated a commitment to supporting families impacted by incarceration. These organizations may include local businesses, nonprofits, and other service providers. Such organizations may have a unique understanding of the needs facing incarcerated parents and their families, along with an interest in collaborating on the implementation of these practices. Further, staff from these organizations may know other organizations or key contacts in the community that could also serve as potential partners in the establishment of these practices.

- **Local institutions.** Developing partnerships with local institutions such as colleges and universities, churches, and public libraries may be one way of obtaining free or low cost supplies and materials required to carry out parent-child practices and programming in your facility. In addition, these local institutions may offer teachers, interns, or volunteers to help implement and maintain these programs and practices. Partnering with community colleges or trade schools can also provide parents with a path to educational attainment and sustainable employment upon their release from your facility.

- **Local government agencies and entities.** You may also consider partnering with local government agencies and entities. Partnering with such agencies as child welfare, probation/parole, the district attorney's office, and local school districts may help close gaps in providing support to incarcerated parents and their families. For example, working with probation and parole agencies will ensure that parents can continue receiving services after they are released. Likewise, school districts are uniquely positioned to provide services and support to school-age children of incarcerated parents. Additionally, many government agencies and entities can bring independent funding streams.

1.2 DETERMINE SCOPE AND NATURE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborative partnerships can take on many different forms. While some external entities may offer a one-time donation, others help facilitate ongoing programming. Table 1 on page 11 provides examples of the services and resources that core partners may be able to offer.

Once you have determined the scope of your partnerships, it is important to consider the specific nature of the partnerships you would like to develop:

- **Informal partnerships.** These partnerships may include a working knowledge of outside entities and a willingness to share resources in support of instituting family-centered practices.
- **Formal partnerships.** These partnerships may include specific service, funding, and/or data sharing agreements, along with memorandums of understanding. Formality may allow for quantifying or measuring service delivery and partnership engagements by holding partners accountable and standardizing practices.

Table 1. Scope of Partnerships

Potential partner(s)	Potential services	Potential resources
Community-based organizations and local institutions (e.g., nonprofits and local businesses, churches, and public libraries)	■ Provide trainings for correctional staff ■ Organize and maintain a clothing exchange closet in the facility's lobby ■ Organize resource fairs for families at the facility ■ Paint the lobby and/or visiting room to be more child-friendly ■ Coordinate and facilitate parent-child contact visits ■ Help families navigate the facility's visitor lobby ■ Coordinate and facilitate coached phone calls ■ Facilitate parenting classes and/or groups in custody and in the community ■ Help incarcerated parents record their voices as they read books to their children ■ Provide child care at the facility or within the community ■ Provide one-on-one therapeutic support for incarcerated parents and/or their family members ■ Provide free or low cost transportation for visiting families ■ Provide teachers, interns, and/or volunteers	■ Free or low cost donations of books, games, paint, toys, food, diapers, and furniture for the child-friendly lobby, visiting room, or onsite child care center ■ Free or low cost donations of clothing for clothing exchange closet in the facility's visitor lobby ■ Information regarding supportive family and reentry services for the facility's visitor lobby ■ Funding streams to support programming that government agencies may not be able to access
Colleges and universities	■ Provide student interns and volunteers to assist with program operation or coordination ■ Provide graduate students in counseling, psychology, or social work programs to help facilitate classes, groups, and so on ■ Offer evaluation support and build analytic capacities ■ Create a pathway for parents to complete an educational program after leaving the facility	■ Clinical resources ■ Resources to evaluate programs ■ Classrooms and educational programs for parents reentering society
Child welfare agency	■ Update incarcerated parents regularly regarding their child welfare cases and coordinate case conference meetings with incarcerated parents ■ Provide court-ordered, supervised parent-child contact visits ■ Train facility staff	■ Information or pamphlets concerning supportive child and family services ■ Additional funding streams
Parole or probation department and district attorney's office	■ Support incarcerated parents in reentry planning before release ■ Train facility staff	■ Information concerning reentry services and general conditions of community supervision to families ■ Additional funding streams through federal grants and city budgets to support programming in and out of custody
Local school district	■ Provide parent-teacher conferences via video when visiting or in custody ■ Provide teachers or staff to support parenting class curriculum development and delivery	■ Free or low cost donations of class curriculum, materials, and school supplies for incarcerated parents to use with their children in the contact visiting room ■ Additional funding streams

1.3 IMPLEMENT COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

There are many ways to initiate collaborative partnerships. One widely used method is to create and send out a request for proposal (RFP) that clearly describes the objectives and desired outcomes of the proposed partnership. Doing so may increase the likelihood of attracting interest from service providers that are well-suited to meet the needs of the incarcerated parents and their children and the goals of the facility. However, an RFP may only be appropriate if money is set aside for the partnering agency to fulfill a clearly defined set of services.

A less formal approach to initiating a partnership is to participate in a local coalition that focuses on the impact of incarceration on families. This way you may be able to build knowledge of and connections to service providers. If a similar coalition is already established (e.g., one focusing on reentry or criminal justice issues broadly), consider creating a working group for children and families of incarcerated parents through this coalition. These working groups and coalitions may include representatives from local nonprofits and government bodies, advocates, researchers, and other community stakeholders who are committed to advancing policies and practices that meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents. These coalitions may also offer opportunities to create and participate in subcommittees or working groups centered on developing new parent-child practices in jails and prisons.

Once you have initiated collaborative partnerships with external organizations and agencies, you need to cultivate these relationships to help ensure their long-term success. Maintaining collaborative partnerships may require the following:

- Meeting regularly
- Articulating expectations, roles, responsibilities, and resources
- Sharing resources including information, knowledge, expertise, and trainings
- Engaging partners in decisionmaking and direction setting when appropriate
- Revisiting goals and objectives and tweaking them as needed
- Reviewing progress

Nurturing the development of partnerships will likely improve the provision of programming and practices for parents in your facility and help you continue to meet your objectives.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Consider adopting a fee-for-service model when defining the terms of the partnership. This may help ensure that the quality and consistency of the services provided are maintained.

For more information, please see the following resources related to developing partnerships and coalitions focused on incarcerated parents and their children:

- ✓ *Partnering with Jails to Improve Reentry: A Guidebook for Community-Based Organizations:* https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/29146/412211-Partnering-with-Jails-to-Improve-Reentry-A-Guidebook-for-Community-Based-Organizations.PDF
- ✓ *Partnerships between Community Colleges and Prisons:* https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/prison-cc-partnerships_2009.pdf
- ✓ *Reentry Partnerships: A Guide for States and Faith-Based and Community Organizations:* https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/docs/reentry-partnership.pdf
- ✓ *Partnerships between Corrections and Child Welfare:* http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/pdf/PartnershipsBetween.pdf
- ✓ *From Rights to Realities: Ten-Year Review, San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership:* http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/73a5ec_fb2363c4f8f94e768212f875eca485ac.pdf
- ✓ San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership: http://www.sfcipp.org/
- ✓ Alameda County Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership: http://accipp.org/
- ✓ New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents: http://youth.gov/collaboration-profiles/ny-initiative-coip
- ✓ Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative: http://ctcip.org/

CHAPTER 2.
TRAINING AND CORE COMPETENCIES

Consider having the following in place before implementing staff training:

- ✓ an understanding from corrections leadership about the importance of staff training on family- and children-focused practices
- ✓ a training division or unit that can create or incorporate new modules in staff training
- ✓ resources to purchase training curricula or a contract with a training facilitator

This second foundational chapter for the model practices outlined in this toolkit focuses on the core competencies on which your staff should receive training, particularly staff that interact often with parents and their families, work in the visiting room, conduct security searches on visitors, answer phones, and work at the lobby's front desk. The competencies highlighted here are prerequisites for implementing parent-focused programming and interacting with the children, caregivers, and other family members of incarcerated parents.

This chapter outlines four practices:

2.1 Build staff buy-in on the importance of family-centered practices

2.2 Improve understanding of family needs and behaviors

2.3 Develop specific skills among staff

2.4 Implement core competencies into training

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Staff in prisons and jails often interact with the children and families of incarcerated parents such as during visiting or reentry planning. This can be stressful for some children, especially if they see negative interactions between their family members and the staff.[a] With appropriate training in how best to engage with families and children, staff have a unique opportunity to make lasting, positive impressions and reduce the trauma children experience in correctional environments. In particular, understanding and responding to families' concerns and confusion when a parent is incarcerated can improve the visiting experience for parents, children, and staff. After receiving appropriate training centered on the needs of families and child well-being, staff can continue implementing safety and security measures while interacting with families in a prosocial, supportive way.

a. Joyce A. Arditti, "Child Trauma within the Context of Parental Incarceration: A Family Process Perspective," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 4 (3): 181–219, 2012.

Word from the expert

From my experience as a corrections administrator, the culture of an agency and facility climate may often present barriers to implementing positive changes in visitation and other family-centered practices. Staff education and training are critical when an agency attempts to shift a culture from a punitive philosophy to more of a restorative and supportive environment that prepares offenders for transition and reentry. It's a slippery slope at times, due to the nature of the environment in which we work. We have an obligation to ensure that our staff and offenders are safe, but we also have a moral responsibility to prepare offenders for transition back into our communities. Both of these primary goals can be accomplished simultaneously, but staff must understand their role in the day-to-day interactions they have with the offenders. Staff have to understand why the changes are necessary, which will require education that includes lengthy discussions of best practices and how those practices will positively impact the lives of offenders and the working environment inside the prisons. As often as possible, involve staff in the decisionmaking and planning processes before implementation begins, which will build support and create champions among the workforce. Another great tool is to utilize key staff (champions) on the training facilitation team(s). This gets to the core of changing the culture inside the facility. When staff attend a training session that their peers are facilitating, it will often bring more credibility to the conversation and discussions, and help in gaining buy-in and understanding.

Dr. Wendy D. Williams,
Deputy Commissioner,
Alabama Department of Corrections

2.1 Build staff buy-in on the importance of family-centered practices

A key core competency for staff in your facility is their understanding of why visiting and other parent-focused programming is important for many families, communities, and correctional facilities. To accomplish this, staff training could include an overview of the following:

- The scope of parental incarceration, including the number of children with incarcerated parents in the country and in the facility's state, region, or local community
- The growing body of evidence of the harmful effects parental incarceration can have on children and the trauma, confusion, anxiety, and frustration that children face when their parent is in prison or jail
- The potential for parent- and child-focused practices to help strengthen or maintain family relationships
- The benefits these practices can have on safety and security in the facility, including better rule compliance among parents, reduced misconduct, and improved reentry outcomes

Building this type of knowledge is an important first step in helping facility staff understand the role that parenting programs play within the correctional setting. Training, then, should result in improved staff buy-in and support as they will place more value on parenting programs and become more receptive to working with families.

2.2 Improve understanding of family needs and behaviors

In addition to building an understanding of the importance of family-centered programming, staff could build competencies around the needs and behaviors of incarcerated parents and their family members. For example, staff training could incorporate the following:

- **Cultural sensitivity** to help staff better interact with parents and family members with diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The demographics and experiences of these people may affect the family's internal dynamics, structure, communication, and parenting practices.
- **Information on basic childhood and adolescent development**, the unique experiences and circumstances of children with incarcerated parents and their caregivers, and what to expect from

children and caregivers during visits. These competencies may help staff interact more age appropriately with children, work alongside caregivers, and better understand how to handle certain possible situations. For example, while visiting, a child may have an emotional response to seeing their parent in prison- or jail-issued clothing, seeing their parent behind a barrier where they cannot touch them, or hearing the loud sounds and alarms in a correctional facility. Training can help staff detect these situations, understand the circumstances that might result in disruptive behaviors among visiting children, and determine how best to respond to these behaviors within the context of their role as a correctional officer (e.g., by deescalating the child's stress level, using child-friendly words and body language, offering aid to their caregiver, and so on).

- **Regular updates on the child and family resources available in the community.** Then, when staff are working with parents and/or their families and identify any particular needs, they can refer them to local resources for support and services.

2.3 Develop Specific Skills Among Staff

Correctional facilities can be stress inducing for people interacting or communicating with their incarcerated family members, especially if they are not familiar with the protocols and procedures for visiting, making phone calls, exchanging mail, and so on. Many children experience a host of negative emotions when their parent is incarcerated, including depression, anger, anxiety, fear, and trauma. To mitigate these issues and provide opportunities for parents and children to build ties through interaction and communication, consider developing the following specific competencies and skills among your correctional staff who work closely with incarcerated parents or their children:

- **Customer service and communication skills.** This training is well suited for the correctional facility staff assigned visiting duties and who interact with family members coming to the facility. Training employees how to interact with clients is common among corporations and even other government agencies. Basic customer service—including attentiveness, patience, clear communication, knowledge of relevant information, ability to "read" customers, and use of positive language—can go a long way in improving a family's visiting experience.

- **Trauma-informed care.** Correctional environments and practices may remind incarcerated parents or their children of past traumas. For example, correctional facilities have a constant presence of authorities, frequent discipline, a lack of privacy, restricted movement, and pat-downs and searches. These could trigger trauma-related memories and threaten the stability of individuals,

thereby reducing overall safety in the facility. Providing instruction on trauma-informed care—that is, recognizing the trauma people experience and responding to trauma symptoms—can enhance staff members' ability to effectively manage behavior, creating a safer facility.

- **Self-care and addressing correctional fatigue.** In addition to the stress some children and families experience, correctional officers and staff are exposed to numerous stressors and hazards in their work, including dangerous environments, constant alertness and hypervigilance, and long hours and physically taxing work conditions. As a result, staff may experience correctional fatigue that manifests as complications in job performance, personal relationships, and physical and psychological health. Correctional fatigue can make it difficult for staff to effectively work with incarcerated parents and children. Therefore, it is valuable for staff to receive training on ways to improve self-care and manage job-related stressors.

2.4 Implement Core Competencies in Training

After identifying the core competencies you would like to build in your staff, you need to develop a plan to implement these into your staff training. You could incorporate these concepts and competencies in training in a few of the following ways:

- You may find "off the shelf" training curricula or programs that suit your needs. For example, there are programs specifically designed to teach correctional professionals how to implement trauma-informed care.
- You may adapt a curriculum or program created for other settings. An example of this might be a customer service training module that has been implemented in a business or other service industry.
- You may need to design and implement a new training approach or program. This might be done in conjunction with your agency's training division or by reaching out to local experts and organizations.

When selecting, designing, or implementing training for your staff, consider using an interdisciplinary team to facilitate it. Correctional staff buy-in will increase if they feel their perspectives and experiences are represented and considered by those conducting the trainings. It is therefore important to offer trainings facilitated by correctional staff in addition to clinicians, advocates, direct service providers, and so on. Further, offer trainings regularly to increase information and skill retention, provide opportunities for new correctional staff to receive trainings, and help ensure that the content reflects current information and best practices.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Partner with local nonprofit organizations or colleges that can provide training in cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed care, basic customer service (workforce development organization), and so on.
- ✓ Integrate training components that draw on staff members' own experiences with parents and with being a parent themselves. This can make the process more relatable and improve buy-in.
- ✓ Children with multiple risk factors may have developmental delays and therefore cannot be compared to other kids of the same age. For example, some officers might think that a child's behavior is "not typical" for a child that age, but this is not always a reasonable comparison. Thus, training could include information about how development is not linear, how children develop at different rates, and how the stress of an incarcerated parent can affect the developmental process.

For more information, please see these examples of training resources:

- ✓ *Why Trauma Matters: A Training Curriculum for Corrections Personnel Working with Female Offenders:* http://www.healthrecovery.org/images/products/25_inside.pdf
- ✓ *Using Trauma-Informed Practices to Enhance Safety and Security in Women's Correctional Facilities:* https://www.bja.gov/Publications/NRCJIW-UsingTraumaInformedPractices.pdf
- ✓ *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach:* https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf
- ✓ National Institute of Corrections' Corrections Stress: Peaks and Valleys: https://nicic.gov/corrections-stress-peaks-and-valleys
- ✓ *Tip Sheet for Prison/Jail Staff and Volunteers: Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent:* http://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents/federal-tools-resources/tip-sheet-prison-staff-volunteers
- ✓ Sesame Street provides videos and other resources for children to learn about incarceration: https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/incarceration

CHAPTER 3.
INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT

Consider having the following in place before implementing intake and ongoing assessments:

- ✓ an intake process that includes an interview or orientation where people entering the facility are provided information about rules, expectations, and available programming
- ✓ policies allowing parents to have a free phone call upon intake to take care of any imminent issues with their family members' health and well-being
- ✓ staff who understand the importance of intake and ongoing assessments to identify parents' needs
- ✓ staff who have received training on the particular intake and assessment instruments used with parents
- ✓ program staff or other nonuniformed employees who can administer assessments and questionnaires

The practices in this chapter focus on how intake and ongoing assessments during a parent's incarceration can support parent-child contact and communication. Telling parents at intake which resources are available to them will encourage them to plug in to an appropriate program or class when they enter the facility. Further, collecting information from parents about their family relationships will help staff identify needs and deliver targeted services.

This chapter outlines four practices:

3.1 Tell parents about resources and gather information about immediate parental needs at intake

3.2 Administer ongoing assessments

3.3 Prioritize parents based on need

3.4 Use nonuniformed staff to administer assessments

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Identifying incarcerated parents' needs and connecting them to the appropriate programs and services are a critical first step as they enter the facility.[a] *This includes asking about immediate parental needs and gauging parental interest in family-focused programming at intake, as well as administering an ongoing assessment during the parent's stay in the facility to hone in on areas in which program staff might provide support. For example, parents might request information on visiting guidelines, parenting education and child rearing, or how to deal with the stress and fear their children feel as a result of their incarceration.*[b]

a. Steve Christian, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009).
b. Kerry Kazura, "Family Programming for Incarcerated Parents: A Needs Assessment among Inmates," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 32 (4): 67–83, 2001.

Word from the expert

Correctional jurisdictions are just beginning to establish protocols for asking intake questions about an incarcerated individual's parenting role. This can help in the development of relevant programs and practices that support parent-child-family relationships, provide numbers for confirmation of the need for services, and promote the well-being of children. When a parent is newly incarcerated, however, they are vulnerable and may fear exposing themselves and their families by answering these questions. Having a case manager or community partner ask more in-depth questions after some trust has been established may yield more information. This is especially true when the questioning process is explained as a way of understanding the incarcerated parent's needs as a parent as well as the needs of his children and family, in order to provide services to the parent and resources for the family.

Ann Adalist-Estrin, MS,
Director, National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated,
Rutgers University–Camden

3.1 TELL PARENTS ABOUT RESOURCES AND GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT IMMEDIATE PARENTAL NEEDS AT INTAKE

At intake, staff should inform parents about any programming and services available to them such as parenting classes, parent-child contact visits, free phone calls, and so on. Staff should also be clear about the rules of using these services. For example, your program could require that parents enroll in or take a parenting class before they receive contact visits with their children or other family members. Communicating these rules clearly to parents allows them to help their families prepare for visiting, making phone calls, sending mail, and so on. Staff may also hand out a brochure or flier explaining these resources and rules for parents to take to their cell or living unit.

In addition to providing information about available resources, staff should ask people the following questions during intake interviews or facility orientations:

- Do you have any children?
  - » How many do you have?
  - » How old are they?
  - » Are they cared for by a single guardian or parent, or are they in different homes?
  - » Do any live out of state?
  - » Is their caregiver a co-parent, grandparent, other relative, friend, foster care, etc.?
- Are you interested in any parenting resources or programming?
- Do you have any urgent or pressing concerns regarding the safety or well-being of a child, caregiver, or other family member?

Parents may not want to disclose this information to a staff member from the facility out of fear or distrust. Thus, it is helpful to explain the importance of these questions and the benefits parents may realize for answering them. For example, staff can recommend available parenting services and help parents enroll their children and families on the visitor list. Recording whether someone is a parent also makes it easier to accommodate later requests to participate in a phone conference with a child's teacher or school, take part in a parent-child holiday program, or sign up for any program geared to parents. Finally, correctional officials can use information gathered at intake to inform transfer decisions that would move parents to facilities closer to their families. This proximity would help facilitate visiting and ease some of the financial and emotional burdens many families experience during parental incarceration.

If parents disclose any immediate concerns about their child, staff should ask whether a free phone call would help alleviate those concerns. If so, parents should be allowed to check in with their child or the child's caregiver. Otherwise, staff can provide parents with information about resources and community services to pass along to those on the outside.

3.2 Administer ongoing assessments

As part of a parent-focused program or service, staff should conduct ongoing assessments to identify and make recommendations about individuals' parental and familial needs. For example, mothers or fathers who lived with their children or were a primary source of emotional support before incarceration may simply participate in family contact visits or other family-centered services. Parents who have a strained or nonexistent relationship with their child may take advantage of ancillary services such as coached phone calls, parenting classes, or therapeutic help to support them before, during, or after contact visits. Likewise, some parents may want to focus on mending issues with co-parents or caregivers through relationship classes or counseling. When conducting an assessment, consider the following:

- **Family structures.** It is important to ask if the incarcerated person is a parent, how many children the incarcerated individual has, the age of these children, where they live, and what the parent's family responsibilities and relationships were before incarceration.
- **Specific needs of mothers and fathers.** Assessments should also acknowledge the differing needs of incarcerated mothers and fathers. While the questions on the assessments would not necessarily vary between men and women, questions for mothers may focus on relational roles and child and family responsibilities, whereas questions for men may focus more on noncustodial roles and formal or informal support.

3.3 Prioritize parents based on need

Some parents in your facility will need family-centered programming and support more urgently than others. For example, some parents will be required to take a parenting class as part of an open case family court or Child Protective Services (CPS) case. Further, any parent at imminent risk of having their parental rights terminated, either as part of CPS or family court or because of other legal circumstances, should be prioritized for access to services and resources. Thus, it is crucial to include questions about parents' legal standings with their

children on any assessment to help them meet their parental obligations and minimize the families separated as a result of incarceration. Based on these questions and with their permission, some parents will have priority access to two programs:

- **Supervised contact visits with their child(ren).** These are often required by CPS and must be accommodated in the facility.
- **Parenting classes to help address parenting techniques and provide parenting tools and strategies.** Parenting classes, along with supervised visits, are often a court-ordered requirement for parents with open CPS cases and can demonstrate the parent's effort and dedication to resolve their case and reconnect with their child(ren). Such effort is often what judges look for when considering rulings on custody, visiting, and maintaining parental rights.

In addition to CPS or family court cases, staff in your facility should identify which parents have open family support orders. Some parents return from prison with thousands of dollars in child support debt, which can be a substantial barrier to finding a job, reconnecting with their children, and successful reentry to the community. To address this, program staff or case workers in your facility should connect these parents with the child support agency and offer help in modifying their orders.

3.4 USE NONUNIFORMED STAFF TO ADMINISTER ASSESSMENTS

Consider using a civilian or nonuniformed staff member to administer intake assessments. This may include a case manager, a staffer in a community-based organization running a parenting program in the facility, a clinical staff member, or another staff member who has fostered relationships with the parents. These factors are important in making incarcerated people feel they can be open and answer questions accurately and without fear of judgment or harmful repercussions. Further, this approach can help ensure accurate information is being collected.

Facility staff responsible for administering these assessments should be trained on the following:

- The specific instrument or questions they will administer
- Explaining to people why they are being asked about their family and children and the importance of collecting this information
- Information and resources on your facility's family-centered policies, practices, and programming
- Presenting assessment results to parents sensitively and nonjudgmentally

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

If you are interested in measuring changes in attitudes or other outcomes in your parents, consider incorporating questions from a parenting inventory in your assessments.

For more information, please see these examples of risk and intake assessments:

- ✓ *Women's Risk Need Assessment*: http://www.uc.edu/womenoffenders.html
- ✓ LGBTI Populations: Intake – Creating a Culture of Safety [internet broadcast]: https://nicic.gov/library/027998
- ✓ *Guide for Incarcerated Parents Who Have Children in the Child Welfare System:* http://youth.gov/feature-article/guide-incarcerated-parents-child-welfare-system
- ✓ *Children in Foster Care with Parents in Federal Prison: A Toolkit for Child Welfare Agencies, Federal Prisons, and Residential Reentry Centers:* http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/COIP-Tookit.pdf

CHAPTER 4. FAMILY NOTIFICATION AND INFORMATION PROVISION

Consider having the following in place before improving notifications and information sharing:

- ✓ a phone number—or willingness to create one—for families to call when looking for information about an incarcerated parent
- ✓ a website that can provide information about facility rules and regulations to family members
- ✓ a list of local and statewide family-focused resources that can be offered to visitors
- ✓ collaboration with the IT department or a selected vendor who will update the facility website

This chapter focuses on practices that improve how important information concerning your facility, visiting policies, and the status of incarcerated parents is communicated to family members and visitors. These simple, low cost practices can facilitate smoother visits and reduce the stress and uncertainty people experience when trying to communicate with their family member in a correctional facility.

This chapter outlines three practices:

4.1 Notify families about parent's status

4.2 Create or update facility website

4.3 Provide information at the facility

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Family members preparing to communicate or visit with an incarcerated parent can be confused or frustrated by the lack of readily available information about the facility's policies and procedures. Facility websites are often difficult to navigate and provide limited information, while staff who answer calls at facilities may not be prepared or able to provide additional, useful information to families.[a] When facilities provide clear, accurate information about visiting guidelines and other relevant policies, families are better able to plan accordingly. This information should be easy to read, child-friendly, and posted visibly in the entry of the facility and on the facility's website.[b] Facilities should also post clear directions, transportation options, and relevant information about the surrounding area.

a. Rebecca J. Shlafer, Ann Booker Loper, and Leah Schillmoeller, "Introduction and Literature Review: Is Parent–Child Contact during Parental Incarceration Beneficial?" In *Children's Contact with Incarcerated Parents: Implications for Policy and Intervention*, edited by Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, 1–21 (Cham, CHE: Springer International Publishing, 2015).
b. Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, ed., *Children's Contact with Incarcerated Parents: Implications for Policy and Intervention* (Cham, CHE: Springer International Publishing, 2015).

Word from the expert

When my mom was moved to a medical unit in another facility, I had no idea where she was. I called the prison where she had been and they would only tell me that she was "not there anymore" and kept transferring me to other people. When I finally figured out where my mom was, I learned the medical unit had restrictive policies on phone calls and sending letters. The whole process was really scary for me because I didn't know if my mom was okay or where she had been moved. It was also hard for my mom, who would get depressed when she couldn't see or speak with me. Letting people know when and to where their family member is being transferred is important for the well-being of both the parent and their families.

Alisha,
Former child of an incarcerated mother

4.1 NOTIFY FAMILIES ABOUT PARENTS' STATUS

A significant source of stress and concern for children and families of incarcerated parents is not knowing a parent's status. For instance, families may not know when a parent has been transferred to another facility or has become ineligible to receive phone calls or visits (e.g., for disciplinary or administrative reasons). It can be scary for children when they have not heard from their parent, are unable to contact them, and do not know if they are safe. It is also frustrating and confusing for families who show up at a facility for a visit, especially after traveling a long distance, but are turned away because the facility is in lockdown or the parent has been moved to a medical or administrative segregation unit and is not allowed to receive visits.

Facilities can improve notification to the children and families of incarcerated parents in several possible ways, including the following:

- **Allowing parents to call their children** if they are going to be transferred to another facility or moved to a housing unit that affects their eligibility for visits, phone calls, or other forms of communication. While this is not always feasible (e.g., if a parent is being immediately moved to a disciplinary unit), there are many opportunities to allow parents to make a brief phone call to their children and update them on their status and health. This would be particularly valuable when a child is expecting a scheduled visit or phone call.
- **Creating a centralized phone number** that families can call to check on the status of the incarcerated parent. Families who call the number should be informed of (a) whether the parent is eligible to receive a visit or make a phone call during a particular week and (b) whether the parent is in a medical facility, along with a general description of his or her condition. This information can be disseminated succinctly and directly without compromising the facility's safety and security or violating federal privacy laws.
- **Providing updates through an online portal** that children can log into. The portal could be password protected to ensure only family members are allowed to view these updates. Like the centralized phone number, updates in this portal can be succinct and focus on a parent's current location and status. The portal could be automated by syncing it to internal administrative databases and records management systems.
- **Developing an automatic notification system.** Facilities can create a system that automatically notifies children and families via a text, phone call, or email when parents are transferred to another facility or when their status changes and makes them ineligible for visits, phone calls, and so on. This

could be modeled after the numerous Victim Information and Notification Exchange systems used across the country. The notification system could also be integrated in online visiting appointment systems.

4.2 CREATE OR UPDATE FACILITY WEBSITE

Your website is an opportunity to reduce confusion or disappointment when visitors are unaware of your facility's policies or recent updates that affect visits. Your website should detail everything a family member and child needs to know for their visit. Table 2 presents some key components related to communication and visiting policies and procedures that should be addressed.

It is important that the website has clear directions and information concerning family-friendly visits. For correctional agencies that have an IT department, you can update a facility's website to host a page that includes everything someone would need to know to visit a family member in your facility. Ideally, this website or web page would be translated into the language(s) most commonly spoken by the families of the people housed in your facility. Further, the web page should use simple, nontechnical language and consider the variance in literacy levels among visitors. Facility websites can also be created to be child friendly or have a separate page that explains procedures and "what to expect while visiting" in simple, age-appropriate language.

You must decide whether to dedicate a specific page on your website or build an entirely new website to facilitate this information provision. With either choice, you will want to ensure that the information visitors need is easy to find through an internet search. If possible, the link to visitor information should be on the home page of your facility's website.

Table 2. Key Components of a Facility Website

Domain	Components
Mail policies	▪ Types of mail permitted (e.g., letters, postcards) ▪ Photos and other items allowed in mail or packages ▪ How to properly address mail (e.g., including the incarcerated parent's identification number)
Phone call policies	▪ Costs of calls and how to pay for them ▪ How to access free or subsidized calls (if available) ▪ Permissible times for making and receiving calls ▪ Restrictions for receiving calls (e.g., when an individual is in disciplinary segregation)

Domain	Components
Online visiting appointment system	■ Prearranged visit times or appointment booking ■ Flexibility in times families can access and use the system ■ Automatic updates via text, email, or telephone concerning the visit or a change in the parent's eligibility for the visit
Visiting schedule	■ Days and hours of visits ■ Special visit days (e.g., family days) if available
Facility/visiting rules and regulations	■ Process for adding a family member or other person to the approved visitor list ■ Visitor approval/vetting process (e.g., background checks) ■ Check-in procedures ■ Items not permitted in the facility ■ Items permitted in the visiting area (e.g., diapers, strollers) ■ Dress code ■ Minimum ages of children for an unaccompanied visit and rules about who can accompany a child during the visit ■ Types of visits offered (e.g., Plexiglass, contact, video) and their length ■ Rules on behavior and contact with incarcerated people ■ Which individuals are required to bring identification, and acceptable forms of ID ■ Availability and cost of lockers ■ Bathroom or changing room policies once the visit has started ■ Policies specific to children who are visiting (e.g., how they are allowed to touch and interact with their parent during the visit) ■ What time visitors should arrive before the start of a visit and what happens if they arrive after the expected arrival time
Pictures of lobby or visiting room	■ Visiting and waiting spaces ■ Child-friendly activities in those spaces
Visit cancellations	■ Updates on facility statuses that affect visits (e.g., the facility is on lockdown) ■ Specific individuals' housing locations and status (e.g., disciplinary segregation) ■ How to check if a person is eligible on a particular day for a visit (e.g., a phone number to call)
Transportation information or schedules	■ Where to park/parking map ■ Bus or subway/metro routes ■ Transportation options provided by the facility or partnering agencies (if available) ■ Driving instructions and pictures of the facility, parking lots, and entrance to visitor lobby
Local child and family resources or services	■ Links or names of places where caregivers can receive support ■ A list of child care, early intervention, and other programs for children ■ A list of books and other resources appropriate for children with incarcerated parents (e.g., *Sesame Street* toolkit), as well as the places caregivers can find these resources
Local places to eat or rest	■ Restaurants ■ Hotels ■ Areas to rest before or after long drives to/from the facility (e.g., libraries, parks, malls)

4.3 PROVIDE INFORMATION AT THE FACILITY

To improve the visitor experience, it is important to provide the following information at your facility:

- **A printed, hard copy of the information posted on your website.** Some visitors may not be able to view the website beforehand, so you want to make sure they can receive the information they need as quickly as possible.
- **Signage in the lobby** to help orient visitors. The signage can include:
  - Where to check in
  - How to use the lockers, how much they cost, and what coins are needed
  - How visits work
  - Where to find the bathrooms, and rules around bathroom use during visits
  - Other facility rules and regulations relevant to visitors and families
  - Available public transportation near the facility (e.g., bus or subway route maps)
- **Information on nearby places to eat and rest** and maps of the local area. Last minute situations at the facility may prevent family members from visiting. Some families may spend multiple days visiting a facility, especially if they have traveled long distances or are attending special family visiting events. Or, depending on the nature of the visit, caregivers may be unable to visit along with the child(ren) (e.g., the visit is strictly for the incarcerated parent and child). Thus, it is helpful to have information available on places where families can eat and rest before heading back home or where caregivers can spend their time while children visit with their parents.
- **Information on resources caregivers and children can access for support while the parent is incarcerated** such as public benefits (food stamps, Medicaid/Medicare, etc.) and social support. Staff in your facility can pass out printed lists of these community resources that include descriptions of the resources, names of the organizations, addresses, phone numbers, and so on.

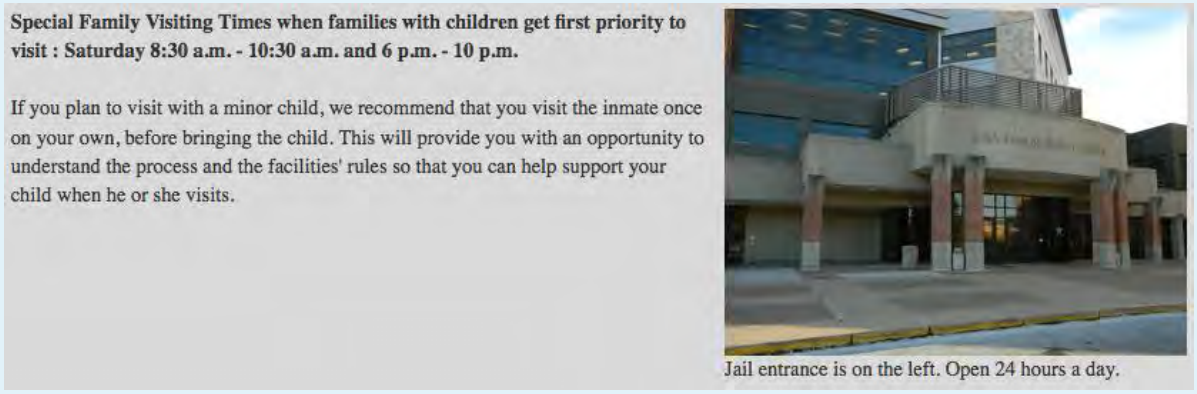
Again, be sure to use nontechnical language; translate materials into visitors' languages; and consider varying literacy levels when developing information and materials for distribution. You should also respect the privacy of families when sharing information. For example, do not announce canceled visits in front of other families in the visiting room.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ For facilities that do not have a website or a person dedicated to IT, leverage local high school or college students to build a website. This service could be provided as a courtesy, for a small fee, or perhaps for school credit.
- ✓ Use your centralized phone number to direct visitors to your website for additional information about visits. This call line is an opportunity to point visitors to helpful information on your website or social media accounts that would provide up-to-date information but may not be intuitive or easy to find.
- ✓ Print out the information available on your website so visitors who do not have computer or internet access can take it home and use it as a reference.
- ✓ Inform families and/or their incarcerated parents before any planned facility lockdowns (e.g., for maintenance, system updates), especially if lockdowns will affect visiting and phone call schedules.

For more information, please see the examples of lobby signage, websites, and resources that other correctional facilities have used:

- ✓ Washington County, Minnesota, created a website just for families with children that includes prioritized visitation hours and pictures of the facility.

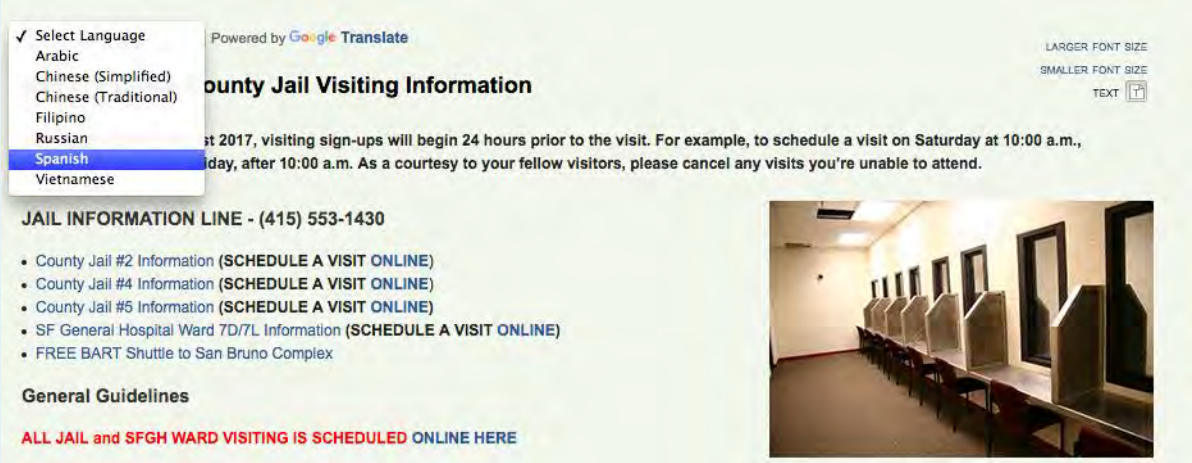


- ✓ The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections added a child resource center to its website that lists information on Head Start and other available social services.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES, CONT'D

- The Connecticut Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative's website uses child-friendly ways to describe the visiting process.

- The San Francisco Sheriff's Department website includes jail visiting information in seven languages other than English.



OTHER RESOURCES

- *A Handbook for the Families and Friends of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Prison Inmates:* http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Curriculum/305EngagingIncarceratedParents/Ap/Ap06_HndbkFrFmlyFrnds_%20Final.pdf
- *Understanding the New Jersey Department of Corrections Prison System: A Resource Guide for Family Members of the Incarcerated:* http://www.state.nj.us/corrections/pdf/OTS/InmateFamilyResources/UnderstandingNJDOCPrisonSystem.pdf
- *Texas Department of Criminal Justice's General Information Guide for Families of Offenders:* https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/General_Information_Guide_for_Families_of_Offenders.pdf
- *Arizona Department of Corrections' Constituent Services Informational Handbook:* https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/guidebook_2013_inter.pdf

CHAPTER 5.
CLASSES AND GROUPS

Consider having the following in place before implementing classes and groups:

- ✓ staff who understand the needs of parents in the facility, and who use their understanding to inform how best to tailor and implement the classes and groups
- ✓ space in the facility in which to facilitate classes or groups
- ✓ a partnership or contract with a community-based organization to facilitate the classes and groups
- ✓ resources to purchase a curriculum and the related materials (e.g., workbooks, pencils, DVDs)

Offering classes and groups that aim to improve parent-child relationships can give incarcerated parents an opportunity to gain additional information, skill sets, and support as they communicate and interact with their children and their children's caregivers.

This chapter outlines two practices:

5.1 Identify parent-focused classes and groups

5.2 Select, design, and implement classes

Word from the expert

With involvement in the criminal justice system, marriages and relationships fail, children are left with absent parents, and societal stability suffers. This is why a program like Engaging the Family [ETF] is offered to our population. Significant others of the inmate participants are invited to come into the facilities to join the group sessions. The family is educated on how to effectively communicate, identify anger issues, determine procedures for conflict resolution, increase their financial literacy, develop active parenting skills, discuss roles and expectations, as well as make decisions and set goals—all before the inmate returns home. We find that the ETF co-participants provide needed support and external motivation for behavioral change and can be the greatest ally to the correctional system by ultimately aiding in the reduction of recidivism.

Wendi White, MA,
Engaging the Family Supervisor,
Office of Substance Abuse Programming & Addiction Services,
New Jersey Department of Corrections

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Classes and group-based services geared to incarcerated parents may focus on child development, parenting techniques, and building relationships with co-parents or caregivers. These services may equip parents with skills and knowledge related to communication, play, discipline, and problem solving. Improving parenting skills may help parents become stronger sources of support for their children and reduce their feelings of stress and depression, increase their confidence and knowledge, and improve their adjustment in the facility.[a] *Parenting classes may also improve parent-child contact and caregiver communication during incarceration.*[b] *Parenting classes often draw on curricula designed specifically for incarcerated parents, such as* Parenting Inside Out *or* Inside Out Dads, *though some facilitators adapt these curricula to meet the needs of parents in their facility.*[c] *This practice is particularly common in jails, where parents often stay for short periods.*[d]

a. Steven Block, Christopher A. Brown, Louis M. Barretti, Erin Walker, Michael Yudt, and Ralph Fretz, "A Mixed-Method Assessment of a Parenting Program for Incarcerated Fathers," *Journal of Correctional Education* 65 (1): 50, 2014; J. Mark Eddy, Charles R. Martinez, and Bert Burraston, "A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Parent Management Training Program for Incarcerated Parents: Proximal Impacts," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 78 (3): 75–93, 2013; Ann B. Loper and Elena H. Tuerk, "Improving the Emotional Adjustment and Communication Patterns of Incarcerated Mothers: Effectiveness of a Prison Parenting Intervention," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 20 (1): 89–101, 2011.
b. Loper and Tuerk, "Improving the Emotional Adjustment and Communication Patterns of Incarcerated Mothers"; Monica L. P. Robbers, "Focus on Family and Fatherhood: Lessons from Fairfax County's Responsible Fatherhood Program for Incarcerated Dads," *Justice Policy Journal* 2 (1): 1–27, 2005.
c. Jocelyn Fontaine, Lindsey Cramer, and Ellen Paddock, "Encouraging Responsible Parenting among Fathers with Histories of Incarceration: Activities and Lessons from Six Responsible Fatherhood Programs" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017).
d. Alison L. Miller, Lauren E. Weston, Jamie Perryman, Talia Horwitz, Susan Franzen, and Shirley Cochran, "Parenting while Incarcerated: Tailoring the Strengthening Families Program for Use with Jailed Mothers," *Children and Youth Services Review* 44:163–70, 2014.

Word from the expert

As a young and inexperienced father, I stressed over whether or not I was parenting as best I could, especially from the difficult position of jail. One Family offers parenting classes for fathers, soon-to-be fathers, and future fathers. They create a wonderful environment to learn proper parenting strategies and techniques. For example, I've learned how to identify and process my children's emotions as their behavior or attitude altered with my incarceration.

Lamar,
Incarcerated father and One Family parenting class participant

5.1 IDENTIFY PARENT-FOCUSED CLASSES AND GROUPS

Many classes and groups can help improve or maintain incarcerated parents' relationships with their children. The following list includes different types of classes and groups that may serve this purpose in your facility:

- **Parenting classes.** Provide parents the opportunity to expand their understanding of child development and learn and practice effective and appropriate communication, discipline, problem-solving, and other parenting techniques, as well as learn about the impact of trauma and stress on children and the strategies for parenting from prison or jail.
- **Parenting support groups.** Provide parents the opportunity to share their own experiences, give and receive encouragement and feedback, and develop a sense of community with other parents. This may include alumni groups for graduates of the parenting classes or grief and loss groups for parents who have lost children.
- **Relationship classes.** Provide parents the opportunity to reflect on their past and current familial relationships (e.g., romantic, co-parenting, parental) and learn effective communication, problem-solving, and anger management techniques.
- **Restorative justice classes and circles.** Provide parents the opportunity to learn and apply the principles of restorative justice, including the central view that crime causes harm and that justice should focus on repairing that harm. Restorative justice classes help parents develop a solid understanding of this theoretical framework, while restorative justice circles provide a supportive space for parents to put this theory into practice with their children and families. Circles often involve significant preparation during which participants are encouraged to reflect on their past behavior and any harm they have inflicted on others as well as any harm they have endured. During circles, participants can express how they have been impacted by the harm caused, take accountability for their behaviors that have caused harm, and work toward healing. Circles that include family members provide families the opportunity to address and repair ruptured relationships and build family cohesion.

5.2 SELECT, DESIGN, AND IMPLEMENT CLASSES

Whether designing a parent-focused class or selecting an off-the-shelf curriculum, it is important to consider the following factors:

- **Whether the curriculum is evidence based** (shown through replicated, systematic research to consistently improve client outcomes). Some funders might require you to use a curriculum that is considered evidence based while discouraging you from adapting the curriculum to meet the specific needs of your incarcerated parents.
- **Whether the curriculum is appropriate for the population being served.** Consider selecting a curriculum that was created specifically for incarcerated parents, not just for parents broadly. Incarcerated parents face a host of unique issues that are not found in the general population (e.g., parenting with limited direct communication and interaction). Further, select a curriculum that deals with the problems facing incarcerated mothers and fathers specifically, is trauma informed, and is culturally and practically relevant to the parents in your facility.
- **The length and flexibility of the curriculum.** You should select a curriculum that is appropriate for incarcerated parents and can be easily modified when necessary. If your facility houses incarcerated people for short periods or frequently moves incarcerated people from one housing unit to another, you may want to select a curriculum that can be completed in a brief time frame. Or, you may choose a longer curriculum that can be easily condensed or modified and/or has modules that can be completed out of order without compromising the fidelity of the model.
- **Whether the curriculum is recognized and approved for parents who have an open CPS case** and are required to take parenting classes as part of their reunification plan.

Once your facility has selected a curriculum, consider the following recommendations when determining who can access the classes and under what circumstances:

- **Allow caregivers, partners, or co-parents opportunities to enter the facility** to complete a class or participate in a restorative justice family circle along with the incarcerated parent when appropriate (e.g., there are no active restraining orders or other legal barriers). Though this participation is not appropriate for all classes or groups, it can be useful and may help incarcerated parents and caregivers more easily identify, address, and resolve issues they may be facing and ensure that parties are working together to provide the best support for each other and the children. Alternatively, caregivers can take a similar class in the community.

- **Offer classes and groups as a support to healthy parent-child-caregiver relationships** and not as a barrier or restriction to children's ability to have contact visits with their parents. For example, enrollment in a class or group should not be a prerequisite for participation in parent-child-caregiver contact visits but a service that parents can access voluntarily.
- **Offer classes and groups that are facilitated both in your facility and in the community.** Work with your community-based partners to determine which classes are available in the community and offer those in your facility. Caregivers, co-parents, and partners can access those classes or the resource material alongside the incarcerated parents, and parents can continue their participation in the class upon their release.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Partner with local nonprofit and community-based organizations to facilitate classes and groups.
- ✓ Make class materials available to parents on program wait lists so they can access resources and information while they wait.
- ✓ Consider administering a survey (e.g., the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory or the Parenting Stress Index) at the beginning and end of a class or group to measure changes in parents' attitudes or perceptions around parenting.

The following are examples of class curricula and additional resources:

PARENTING CURRICULA

- ✓ 24/7 Dad (National Fatherhood Initiative): http://store.fatherhood.org/24-7-dad-programs/
- ✓ InsideOut Dad (National Fatherhood Initiative): http://store.fatherhood.org/insideout-dad-programs/
- ✓ Parenting Inside Out: http://www.parentinginsideout.org/
- ✓ Love and Logic: https://www.loveandlogic.com/parents/what-is-love-and-logic-for-parents
- ✓ Active Parenting Publishers: http://www.activeparenting.com/category/Parenting

RELATIONSHIP STRENGTHENING CURRICULA

- ✓ Walking the Line (PREP): https://www.prepinc.com/content/curricula/walking-the-line.htm

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ✓ Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF): https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage/about
- ✓ *Parenting Stress Index*: https://www.parinc.com/Products/Pkey/333
- ✓ *The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory*: https://www.nurturingparenting.com/images/cmsfiles/aapionlinehandbook12-5-12.pdf

CHAPTER 6. VISITOR LOBBIES

Consider having the following in place before modifying the visitor lobby:

- ✓ staff to manage, or oversee, activities in the lobby who are well trained and prepared to work with children of all ages
- ✓ enough space within or next to the visitor lobby to create a child- and family-friendly area
- ✓ a list of local and statewide family-focused resources that can be offered to visitors
- ✓ partnerships with nonprofit, faith-based, or community-based organizations to donate supplies and materials for the lobby (e.g., books, toys, games)

This chapter describes practices for creating a child- and family-friendly visitor lobby. The pro tips at the end of the chapter provide guidance on how to use available resources and access low cost or free resources to improve your facility's lobby.

This chapter outlines two practices:

6.1 Create a welcoming environment

6.2 Make visitor lobbies child and family friendly

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Creating a child-friendly lobby is a critical component of removing the barriers to parent-child communication and minimizing the fear and anxiety children experience when visiting a parent. Many visitor lobbies look and feel like an extension of the correctional institution, and the space is typically uninviting, constrained, noisy, and crowded. Children and families often face long waits for their visit to start without warning or explanation for the wait time.[a] *Further, children can be confused and traumatized by the security procedures used when they enter the lobby of a prison or jail, including metal detectors, search dogs, frisking, and searching.*[b] *Making the lobby child friendly—such as by painting bright colors, providing toys and books, and so on—can help reduce this trauma among children.*[c]

a. Joyce A. Arditti, Jennifer Lambert-Shute, J., and Karen Joest, "Saturday Morning at the Jail: Implications of Incarceration for Families and Children," *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 195–204; and Megan Comfort, *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
b. Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper, and Leslie D. Shear, "Children's Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 65, no. 6 (2010): 575–98.
c. Bryce Peterson, Lindsey Cramer, Emma Kurs, and Jocelyn Fontaine, "Toolkit for Developing Family-Focused Jail Programs: Children of Incarcerated Parents Project" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015); Lindsey Cramer, Margaret Goff, Bryce Peterson, and Heather Sandstrom, *Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails: A Synthesis of Research and Practice* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017).

Word from the expert

For the past two years we have handed out satisfaction surveys to our families with children visiting an incarcerated parent. The surveys were handed out over a 30-day period. We were very pleased with the response. Based on the survey data, visitor satisfaction has increased greatly with many of the family-strengthening implementations we have made. We learned some of the frustrations that visitors ranked high (lockers that don't work), and we received some great new ideas such as putting a rug on the ground for children to play on or expanding child-preferred visitation hours. All in all, reaching out to our visitors is a great idea. Staff work was minimal, and the changes we have made continue to make a positive impact on our families coming into our jail to visit a loved one. It's easy, and it's the right thing to do if you want to make real change.

Commander Roger Heinen,
Washington County Jail,
Stillwater, Minnesota

Word from the expert

Soon after we started making changes in the lobby of the jail, I recall one visitor specifically acknowledging the characters on the wall. He remarked, "It's nice to see that they're thinking about the kids coming through here. These kids didn't do anything wrong. They deserve to feel like it's okay coming here to see their parents."

Rebecca Shlafer Nealy, PhD,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Pediatrics, Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health,
University of Minnesota–Twin Cities

6.1 CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

The lobby should be a welcoming environment for visiting families. To help families make their way through the facility lobby with relative ease, consider the following:

- **If your facility has a television in the lobby, lower the volume and set the channel** to a child-friendly program or an informational presentation. This is a simple way to improve the experience of families.
- **Make information regarding visiting procedures, rules, and/or visitor resources clear, easily accessible**, and designed to reflect the diversity of the families visiting your facility. For example, provide written materials and signage in the lobby that use simple, nontechnical language, are translated into the primary language(s) spoken by visiting families, and consider variances in literacy levels. Doing so can help mitigate the confusion and anxiety often experienced by visiting families and, in turn, increase the likelihood that caregivers and children consistently follow facility rules and expectations.
- **Use additional staff or volunteers who have demonstrated cultural sensitivity** and can speak the language(s) of visiting caregivers and children to assist families in the lobby whenever possible. Ideally, these people should be nonuniformed staff or volunteers who have training or experience working with children and families.

6.2 MAKE VISITOR LOBBIES CHILD AND FAMILY FRIENDLY

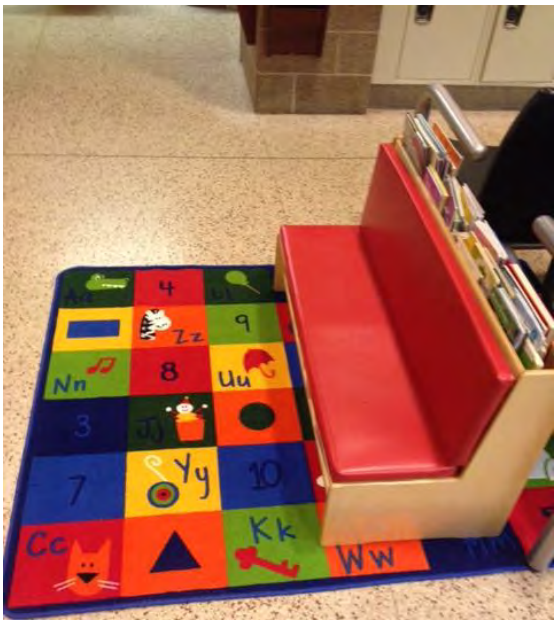
Making physical changes to the visitor lobby that address the basic needs of families, the developmental needs of children, and help connect families to supportive resources and services can greatly improve the experience of visiting children and caregivers.

- **Understanding the basic needs of families.** Caregivers and children should have easy access to an indoor space year round to avoid exposure to the elements, larger bathrooms that include a changing table, a temporary clothing exchange closet for visitors who arrive wearing unapproved clothing, a working water fountain, a vending machine with snacks and juice, free user-friendly lockers in which to store their belongings, and a landline to make free local calls in case of an emergency. For visiting families, correctional facility environments can be stress inducing, and the

installation of these updates or changes in your lobby will help diminish some of this stress and improve the quality of their visiting experience.

- **Considering the developmental needs of children.** A family-friendly lobby should also provide children with developmentally appropriate stimulation, which can decrease the stress and anxiety they often experience in correctional facilities. Some items to include in the lobby include age-appropriate books, toys, games for various ages, and mats and furniture for children. Brighten up the lobby with colorful murals, a new coat of paint, children's posters, and child-friendly photographs. When children have access to an age-appropriate space, it may help reduce their fear or anxiety before a visit and create a more welcoming atmosphere.

- **Connecting families to supportive resources.** Many families who come to correctional facilities to visit an incarcerated parent are stretched thin emotionally and financially and may benefit from exposure to local organizations and agencies that support caregivers and children impacted by incarceration. The installment of brochure stands and/or bulletin boards in visitor lobbies can create more opportunities for families to learn about and access local resources and services when visiting the correctional facility and resources within the community. These materials may include information regarding public transportation to and from the facility, local places to eat and rest for caregivers who cannot participate in contact visits along with their children, and supportive family services. Organize family-focused resource fairs in the lobby during visiting hours where representatives from local organizations and agencies can speak to caregivers about available services. Make available printed resources or materials about public benefits and social supports (e.g., food stamps, Medicaid/Medicare).



Children's rug to play with toys and read on the ground in Washington County, MN. Source: Washington County Jail.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- If you have coin-operated lockers in your facility's visitor lobby:
  - put signage in the parking lot reminding caregivers to bring coins with them to the lobby
  - offer free coins to caregivers in need
  - consider replacing coin-operated lockers with non-coin-operated lockers
- If your lobby has enough staff and space, create two separate visitor check-in lines: one for individuals and the other for caregivers and children. If space does not permit, prioritize the check-in of caregivers and children so children do not have to wait for an extended time before receiving a visit.
- Partner with local nonprofits, agencies, and organizations (e.g., libraries, schools, churches, and youth service organization) for free or low cost donations of children's books, games, toys, and furniture, as well as assistance painting the visitor lobby, organizing onsite resource fairs, and maintaining a clothing exchange closet.
- For feedback on how your facility's visitor lobby can be improved for families, regularly offer caregivers the opportunity to fill out an anonymous survey regarding their experience. This could be overseen by a "family/friends advocate" or the staff person who typically handles family member complaints.
- Many concepts in this chapter could be expanded to other spaces at the facility that affect children such as parking lots.

For more information, please see the following resources:

- Allegheny County, PA, Family Activity Center: https://www.alleghenycounty.us/jail/visitors/visitor-waiting-area.aspx
- Washington County, Minnesota, Social Visitor Survey: http://www.co.washington.or.us/Sheriff/Jail/ContactInmate/upload/Social-Visitor-Survey-WCJ-131-v-2-10.pdf

Family-friendly lobbies in (from top) Alleghany County, PA; San Francisco County, CA; and Washington County, MN. Sources: Jail staff.

CHAPTER 7. VISITING

Consider having the following in place before implementing visits:

- ✓ space in which to create a child-friendly contact visiting room and/or family-friendly non-contact visiting booths (e.g., space to paint a mural, add posters, and/or furniture)
- ✓ buy-in from the administration to integrate child- and family-friendly visiting policies and practices (e.g., parent/child contact visiting, use of child-sensitive search practices, pre- and post-visiting support for both children and parents)
- ✓ supplies for family visits such as age-appropriate books, games, toys, puzzles, play mats, and so on
- ✓ partnerships with community-based or nonprofit organizations to facilitate visits
- ✓ correctional staff trained on how to interact with children and families during visits

The practices in this chapter focus on ways that correctional administrators and practitioners can design, implement, and promote child- and family-friendly visits in prisons and jails. Visits can improve overall safety in a facility by improving the adjustment of incarcerated parents and decreasing levels of misconduct and violence. Contact visits offer the greatest potential benefit for children and parents, especially when they are implemented as part of a larger parenting or family-focused program infused with therapeutic support for parents, children, and caregivers.

This chapter outlines five practices:

7.1 Review visiting guidelines and procedures

7.2 Make physical changes to visiting space

7.3 Offer contact visits

7.4 Make noncontact visits more family friendly

7.5 Supplement contact and noncontact visits with video visits

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

An important source of the trauma and anxiety children experience when their parent is incarcerated is not being able to see, hear, or touch their parent. One way correctional facilities can reduce these negative emotions is to implement well-designed child and family visits.[a] *Visits can be beneficial for children when they can have contact with their parent, see that they are safe, and spend time together engaged in regular family activities (e.g., playing games, conversing, sharing a meal).*[b] *These visits help mitigate children's feelings of abandonment and anxiety; improve their well-being, emotional adjustment, and self-esteem; and allow families to build on existing relationships or repair strained relationships.*[c] *Play activities are an important component of child development and offer ideal opportunities for parents to interact and engage with their children.*[d] *While there are some security concerns among correctional administrators associated with visits, research has not found that family visits increase the amount of contraband coming into facilities. In fact, family visiting can improve safety and security within the facility: people who receive more visits have improved mental and emotional well-being, as well as lower rates of institutional misconduct and recidivism.*[e]

a. Lindsey Cramer, Margaret Goff, Bryce Peterson, and Heather Sandstrom, *Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails: A Synthesis of Research and Practice* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017).
b. Creasie Finney Hairston, *Focus on Children with Incarcerated Parents: An Overview of the Research Literature* (Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007); Rebecca J. Shlafer, Ann Booker Loper, and Leah Schillmoeller, "Introduction and Literature Review: Is Parent–Child Contact during Parental Incarceration Beneficial?" In *Children's Contact with Incarcerated Parents*, edited by Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, 1–21 (Cham, CHE: Springer International Publishing, 2015); and Melinda Tasca, Kevin Wright, Jillian Turanovic, Clair White, and Nancy Rodriguez, "Moving Visitation Research Forward: The Arizona Prison Visitation Project," *Criminology, Criminal Justice Law, and Society* 17 (1): 55–67, 2016.
c. Joyce Arditti, "Parental Imprisonment and Family Visitation: A Brief Overview and Recommendations for Family Friendly Practice," in *CW360: Children of Incarcerated Parents*, edited by Traci LaLiberte and Elizabeth Snyder, 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008); Jeffery Fraser, "Children with a Parent in Prison: Contact Has Its Benefits but Outcomes Depend on Many Factors," Children, Youth & Families Background Report 129 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development, 2011); Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper, and Leslie D. Shear, "Children's Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 65 (6): 575–98, 2010.
d. Kenneth R. Ginsburg, "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds," *Pediatrics* 119 (1): 182–91, 2007.
e. Joshua C. Cochran, "The Ties That Bind or the Ties That Break: Examining the Relationship between Visitation and Prisoner Misconduct," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 40 (5): 433–40, 2012; Karen De Claire and Louise Dixon, "The Effects of Prison Visits from Family Members on Prisoners' Well-Being, Prison Rule Breaking, and Recidivism: A Review of Research since 1991," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 18 (2): 185–99, 2017; Grant Duwe and Valerie Clark, "Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 24 (3): 271–96, 2013; and Meghan M. Mitchell, Kallee Spooner, Di Jia, and Yan Zhang, "The Effect of Prison Visitation on Reentry Success: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 47:74–83, 2016.

Word from the expert

When we as jail administrators support children of incarcerated parents, not only do the children benefit from contact with their parents, but we also improve the overall safety and security of the jail by reducing stress among the parents and incentivizing them to do the hard work of becoming effective parents. Because jails are often located in close proximity to the communities where children of prisoners live and go to school, jail-based family-strengthening programs provide a unique opportunity for incarcerated parents to learn parenting skills and to build healthy relationships with their children through frequent supported visiting. The fact that people may be in jail for only a short time should not be a deterrent to establishing these programs. Time spent learning to be an effective parent, however short, pays great dividends in the health and well-being of children impacted by incarceration.

Sheriff Vicki L. Hennessy,
City and County of San Francisco Sheriff's Department

Before and after pictures of the visitation areas in San Francisco County, CA (top), and Alleghany County, PA (bottom). Sources: Jail staff.

7.1 REVIEW VISITING GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

When thinking about implementing child and family visits, it is important to first review the policies and guidelines you have in place for visits. While reviewing the guidelines, identify ways they can be modified to ease the burden on families coming to visit an incarcerated parent. This includes the following:

- **Ensure eligibility criteria for receiving and attending visits are not overly restrictive** for the incarcerated parent and their family members. If your current rules require all minor children to be accompanied to the facility by an immediate family member or legal adult guardian, consider expanding this to other family members or guardians. For example, try working with the children's incarcerated parents and legal guardians to identify a pool of individuals who are permitted to bring children to facilities or accompany them on visits. You may also consider lowering the age at which children can visit their parent unaccompanied. Regarding eligibility criteria for parents, consider allowing incarcerated parents who are in segregation or in medical units to receive visits. Eligibility criteria that are less restrictive help reduce the barriers for parents who want to receive a visit and increase children's access to their parents.

- **Adopt a broad definition of "family"** to include extended family members and allow them to attend contact and noncontact visits. Family members may include co-parents, partners, children, siblings, grandparents, children's caregivers, and aunts and uncles. You may also consider allowing people other than children's legal guardians or parents to accompany children to visits. Similarly, facilities should work to frequently update an incarcerated parent's list of approved visitors so it is accurate and helps reduce the likelihood of denying or canceling a visit due to visitors' names not appearing on the approved list.

- **Establish a clear and regular schedule for visits.** For example, visits could be more frequent (e.g., daily), but shorter (e.g., 90 minutes), and/or less frequent (e.g., weekly or bimonthly), but for longer periods (e.g., 2 to 3 hours). Consider offering visits during evening hours, on holidays, or during weekends when children are out of school and caregivers or family members typically are not working. If your facility does not offer separate times for family members to visit, consider prioritizing some of the regular visits for children so they do not have to wait in line to enter the facility and can quickly move through the search procedure. This helps family members develop routines and reduces anxiety about the next time they will see each other.

- **Use child- and family-friendly search procedures** to reduce any anxiety families may experience about the entrance and search process at your facility. If legally feasible, these procedures may

include using noncustodial staff (e.g., program staff or family advocates) to conduct the search using child-friendly and age-appropriate techniques. For example, when conducting a search of smaller children, staff should kneel so children are less likely to feel intimated or threatened. Staff should also model the search procedures for children and use child-friendly language. This might look like a staff member pulling his or her own pockets inside out, then asking children to make "bunny ears" with their pockets.

- **Have only nonuniformed program staff in the room during the visit**. If this staffing arrangement is not possible, consider having uniformed staff posted near the walls or outside the room. This will help reduce the stress families feel while visiting incarcerated parents.
- **Prioritize the physical and emotional safety of children**. If contraband is found on a child, they should not be questioned without an adult present, and they should not be left alone without a guardian. Further, train and help prepare staff to manage emergencies—medical or other—that may arise during visits. Another traumatic event for children is seeing their parent in handcuffs or shackles. Recognizing the importance of safety and security, parents should not be handcuffed or shackled in front of their children. It is also important to move parents to a separate room when being searched before and after visits, so children do not watch it happen.
- **Clearly explain and consistently follow the guidelines and schedule for family and child visits to family members before visits.** It is also helpful to post the visiting rules and schedules on your facility's website and in the lobby of your facility so parents are aware of what to expect. Further, when the visiting guidelines are followed and implemented consistently for all families, they will understand and respect the guidelines. If the guidelines are implemented inconsistently, families will not know what to expect from one visit to the next, which can create anxiety and a lack of respect for the visiting procedures.

When conducting a search of smaller children, staff should kneel so children are less likely to feel intimated or threatened. Staff should also model the search procedures for children and use child-friendly language. This might look like a staff member pulling his or her own pockets inside out, then asking children to make "bunny ears" with their pockets.

7.2 MAKE PHYSICAL CHANGES TO VISITING SPACE

Prison and jail environments are stressful for children and family members, filled with loud noises, armed officers, and invasive search procedures. Modifying your facility's visiting room can significantly reduce stress for children and family members visiting an incarcerated parent. These modifications can also encourage meaningful interaction between parents and their children. Modifications to both contact and noncontact visiting spaces can include the following:

- **Painting the walls of the visiting room** or painting murals on the walls to help brighten the room and make it more welcoming for families. You may also consider installing sound-dampening materials on the walls to minimize the noise in the room and turning down the volume on the television (if one is in the visiting room), creating a calm visiting environment.
- **Decorating the visiting room with soft, comfortable, child-friendly furniture.** Providing parents with a rocking chair and a diaper changing table to use with babies and young children may also be helpful for encouraging contact and interaction.
- **Providing age-appropriate books, games, toys, play tables, arts and crafts, and play rugs for the children.** These items can be available in different areas of the room, or you can set up a "play area" for each family. You may also consider creating a "chill space" for older children to read, relax, or talk with their parents. It is also important to make sure the toys are properly assembled and clean.

7.3 OFFER CONTACT VISITS

Contact visits allow parents and children to freely interact, touch, and talk with each other. Contact visits can assure children their parent is safe and help build, repair, or maintain parent-child relationships.

- **Contact visits should be complemented by wraparound services that support children, parents, and family members while a parent is incarcerated.** One way to accomplish this is to offer contact visits as part of a larger family support program that may include parenting classes, coached telephone calls, case management, letter writing, and other activities. Visits offered alongside parenting classes also can be used to practice concepts and skills parents learn in class. Including visits in a family-focused program allows program staff to build rapport with

parents, understand their situation, tailor services to each parent's needs, and offer guidance and solutions. Ideally, program staff should provide support and work with parents:

  - » Before visits to ensure they are prepared to interact with their child in a positive way
  - » During visits to support and help them navigate difficult conversations or situations
  - » After visits to debrief and reflect on the experiences shared during the visit and plan for future visits

- **Contact visits can often be unstructured and allow for parents to freely interact and converse with their children.** Contact visits should also provide parents with materials and opportunities to engage in regular parenting responsibilities and activities, which can strengthen parental identity and encourage parent-child bonding. For example, consider providing:
  - » Toys, books, crafts, and games so parents can read to and play with their children during the visit
  - » Healthy snacks, water, or juice for families to share a meal
  - » Diapers and baby wipes so parents can change their young children and infants
  - » School supplies (e.g., calculators, rulers, pens, pencils, papers) and space where parents can help their children with homework and school assignments

- **Parents and children (and caregivers) can take family photos together during the visit**. You may even allow incarcerated parents to wear a different colored shirt while taking the picture. The parent and child should each receive a copy of the picture so they can have a keepsake of their time together.

- **Program staff should incorporate child-friendly techniques for ending the contact visit.** For example, parents and children should end the visit with a "goodbye ritual" that helps them reach a level of closure. You can design a closing activity such as singing songs or reading books, or allow each family to create their own ritual. Again, it is stressful for children to witness their parents being handcuffed or searched, so searches should be conducted in a separate room after the visit ends. These strategies will help ensure a safe exit process for parents and children, while reducing the trauma children experience.

In addition to standard contact visits, you can provide extended family visits. These visits allow children to stay with their parents for a longer period or potentially overnight. For example, "family visit days" encourage the entire family to attend a contact visit with the incarcerated parent and participate in family-friendly activities for an extended period (e.g., a half- or full day). These visits can be scheduled to occur regularly (e.g., once a month, one weekend per year) or around special holidays (e.g., Mother's Day, Father's Day).

7.4 MAKE NONCONTACT VISITS MORE FAMILY FRIENDLY

In most cases, contact visits are the preferable type of visit for families. However, your facility may have limited space, resources, or buy-in from staff and leadership. If that is the case, consider making noncontact visits more family friendly. Noncontact visits provide another opportunity for children to see their parents and allow family members to see and talk to each other through a barrier or Plexiglass partition. However, it is important to understand that noncontact visits can be traumatic to children because they cannot understand why they cannot touch their parent. With some modifications, you can reduce some of the trauma children may experience during noncontact visits:

- **Prioritize larger visiting rooms or booths for families.** This will provide additional space for children and family members during the visit. It may also create privacy for the family, helping them feel at ease.
- **Encourage parents and children to engage in activities regardless of the barrier or Plexiglass.** Provide books, toys, and games on the nonsecure side of the visiting space so children are occupied or engaged during the visit. Further, consider providing the same books and toys on the secure side so parents can read to their children or play with the same toys.
- **Allow families to develop a "goodbye ritual" to help them end and leave the visit in a healthy way.** It is also helpful to sing songs or read books to children as parents are escorted from the visiting area.

7.5 SUPPLEMENT CONTACT AND NONCONTACT VISITS WITH VIDEO VISITS

In addition to contact and noncontact visits, video visits allow family members to see and communicate with incarcerated parents through video conferences. However, these types of visits also have the potential to exacerbate the stress and frustration children and families experience during visits because children cannot touch or see how their parent is doing in person. Video visits can also be expensive, experience unreliable connections, and have poor quality. Given these challenges, video visits are best suited for improving parent-child bonding under the following circumstances:

- **Video visits should supplement, rather than replace, other forms of visits.** Having video visits alone can be frustrating for children as it eliminates their ability to see and touch their parent in person.

- **Arrange for families to conduct video visits from their own home or from central, offsite locations, not from the lobby of the facility.** Offering video visits from remote, convenient locations can reduce some of the barriers to in-person visits such as distance and cost of travel. Video visits from the family's home provide opportunities for children to speak with their parents in a safe, comfortable location without the stress of visiting a facility, being searched, and interacting with uniformed officers.

A young boy video visits with his mother. Source: The Osborne Association.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Understand that children may act out, misbehave, or be rambunctious during visits. This is normal behavior among children, and it may be exacerbated by them feeling anxious or stressed when seeing their parents. Train correctional staff to respond to these behaviors appropriately and without harshly reprimanding the children; this could include activities such as playing or drawing pictures with them.
- ✓ Continually revise visiting guidelines based on feedback from families to ensure procedures remain family friendly.
- ✓ Provide signed letters to children explaining their absence from school if they are visiting during a school day; children can use the letter to try to get the absence excused.
- ✓ Reduce barriers to visiting by providing caregivers with transportation assistance or child care.
- ✓ Partner with a community-based organization to provide therapeutic parent-child "goodbye visits" for incarcerated parents who are being transferred from jail to prison. These visits offer parents an opportunity to prepare their children for this transition and plan for how they will keep in touch.
- ✓ Partner with local nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, schools, or community groups to receive donations of visiting supplies, paint, toys, books, games, food, diapers, and so on.
- ✓ Provide parents and children with washable or dry erase markers that can be easily removed from the Plexiglass so families can play games such as tic-tac-toe during noncontact visits.
- ✓ Be creative about space. If space is limited, temporarily transform a classroom or multipurpose room into a child-friendly visiting room. Consider using a pushcart filled with children's books and toys that can be moved into various rooms.
- ✓ If there are no restrooms for children to use in the visiting room, allow children to take restroom breaks as needed and to reenter the visiting room after the break.
- ✓ Consider scheduling extra correctional staff on visiting days to help manage the increase in visitors to the facility.
- ✓ Allow incarcerated parents to take ownership of the visiting space by painting murals on the walls, organizing the books and toys, or preparing the space for visits. Incarcerated parents can also take the responsibility for picking up items and reorganizing the toys and games used during visiting.
- ✓ Partner with your local child services agencies to ensure parents with active child protective orders have access to court-ordered visits.

For more information about child and family visiting, explore the examples below:

- ✓ PB&J Family Services: Programs for Families Impacted by Incarceration: http://pbjfamilyservices.org/programs/
- ✓ Allegheny County Jail Collaborative: http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/About/History/Jail-Collaborative.aspx
- ✓ Community Works/San Francisco County Jail: One Family and Parenting from Prison: http://communityworkswest.org/program/one-family/
- ✓ The Osborne Association: FamilyWorks: http://www.osborneny.org/programs-down/reconnecting-families/familyworks/
- ✓ Youth.gov tip sheet for incarcerated parents or caregivers on how to prepare a child for visiting a prison: http://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents/federal-tools-resources/tip-sheet-parents-visits
- ✓ NIC video visiting guide: https://community.nicic.gov/blogs/nic/archive/2015/01/12/new-in-the-library-a-guide-to-video-visiting-in-corrections.aspx

Before and after pictures of the visitation area in Washington County, MN. Source: Washington County Jail staff.

Details of visiting rooms in (clockwise from top) a San Francisco jail, Sierra Conservation Center in Jamestown and CSP Solano (California state prisons), Bedford Hills Correctional Facility Children's Center, and Alleghany County (PA) Jail.
Sources: Jail staff (San Francisco and Alleghany County). Friends Outside (Sierra Conservation Center and CSP Solano), and Osborne Assocation (Bedford Hills).

CHAPTER 8. PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

Consider having the following in place before facilitating parent-child communication:

- ✓ space and supplies for communication (e.g., phones, stamps, envelopes)
- ✓ identified staff or partnerships with community-based organizations to help facilitate communication between parents and children
- ✓ reviewed policies related to sending and receiving mail and packages
- ✓ corrections-friendly kiosks and/or the appropriate technology to allow incarcerated parents and their family members to send and receive emails

In addition to visiting (which is covered extensively in chapter 7), correctional facilities should offer multiple opportunities for incarcerated parents to communicate with their children through activities such as letter writing, phone calls, and electronic communication (i.e., emails). These communication methods allow parents and children to freely interact and build or maintain relationships, and they provide parents with opportunities to exercise their rights as parents to be involved in important conversations about their children (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, case conferencing with service providers).

This chapter outlines four practices:

8.1 Offer parents free or subsidized phone calls with their children

8.2 Provide parents with opportunities to communicate with individuals and systems that affect their children

8.3 Revise policies for mailing letters and packages

8.4 Consider electronic communication

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When a facility does not offer contact visits or when a child is unable to visit an incarcerated parent regularly (for example due to geographic distances, a lack of caregiver buy-in, or legal restrictions), other forms of communication can encourage children and incarcerated parents to maintain their relationships. Telephone calls, letters, mail, and electronic communication offer children many opportunities to connect with their parents and are low cost supplements to visits. Many parents like these modes of communication because they allow them to engage in their parental responsibilities while their children are at home.[a] With telephone calls, communication occurs in real time and allows the parent to respond to the child's needs and concerns immediately.[b] In comparison, letters and emails provide parents with more time to carefully plan for and compose their thoughts.[c]

a. Lynda Clarke, Margaret O'Brien, Hugo Godwin, Joanne Hemmings, Randal D. Day, Jo Connolly, and Terri Van Leeson, "Fathering behind Bars in English Prisons: Imprisoned Fathers' Identity and Contact with Their Children," *Fathering* 3 (3): 221–41, 2005.
b. Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, ed., Children's Contact with Incarcerated Parents: Implications for Policy and Intervention (Cham, CHE: Springer International Publishing, 2015).
c. Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper, and Leslie D. Shear, "Children's Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 65 (6): 575–98, 2010.

Word from the expert

Coached phone calls are a unique service we offer as part of our Family Support Program. During free phone calls with their children, parents receive support from program staff. This may involve staff helping parents think of questions to ask their children or offering parents encouragement and guidance through difficult conversations. Parents come away from these calls feeling like they are better equipped to have positive communication with their children.

Amy McNicholas Kroll,
Administrator of Re-entry Services,
Allegheny County Jail

8.1 OFFER PARENTS FREE OR SUBSIDIZED PHONE CALLS WITH THEIR CHILDREN

One critical mode of communication between incarcerated parents and their children is phone calls. However, phone calls can be prohibitively expensive, making it difficult for parents to regularly speak with their children. Therefore, your facility should consider offering parents subsidized or free phone calls with their children. When implementing these phone calls, the following factors are important to consider:

- **Determine a schedule for facilitating free phone calls.** This schedule can include how long calls should last and how frequently parents may place calls. You may consider offering these calls as part of a larger family-focused program in your facility. For example, when incarcerated parents attend a parenting program, they receive a free phone call to their children.

- **Consider having class facilitators, counselors, case managers, or other program staff members from family-focused programs coach parents before, during, and after the phone call.** Program staff should build rapport with parents, offer advice based on the parents' and family members' specific needs, and help parents apply the lessons and skills learned during parenting classes in the calls. Program staff should work with parents before, during, and after the call to help parents apply the parenting skills taught in the classes:
  - » Before the call, a program staff member can help parents plan for the conversation, prepare age-appropriate topics for discussion, and be ready to provide parenting advice. For example, parents could use the phone calls to learn about how their kids are doing in school, any upcoming events or celebrations in their children's lives, how things are going with other members of the family, and any other topics the child feels comfortable sharing. Also, staff can teach parents that phone calls should be brief with young children, although they should be longer with older children because the calls are an opportunity for the parent to express his or her interest in the child's life. Further, parents should be advised that phone calls are not the appropriate time to discipline or reprimand their children. It is also helpful to advise caregivers to not expect this during these phone calls.
  - » During the call, staff can support parents and give them ideas on how to navigate difficult conversations or situations that arise.
  - » After the call, staff can debrief with parents, help them reflect on the lessons and takeaways, provide feedback, and plan for future conversations.

8.2 Provide parents with opportunities to communicate with people and systems that affect their children

In addition to free phone calls with their children, parents should be given free or subsidized phone calls with the individuals and systems that affect their children. Examples of these types of phone calls include the following:

- **Co-parents and caregivers.** When in the best interest of the child and in the absence of legal barriers (e.g., no-contact orders), incarcerated parents should regularly communicate with co-parents and caregivers to better understand the issues their children are facing and help make decisions about how to address those issues. If both parents are incarcerated, allow them to communicate with each other via phone as it relates to the welfare of their children.
- **Teachers and school officials.** When possible, parents should also communicate with their children's teachers, counselors, and other officials about progress or struggles in school. Incarcerated parents should also have the opportunity to participate in parent-teacher conferences or meetings with school officials through phone calls, video conferencing, or in-person meetings. Another way to promote communication between teachers and incarcerated parents is to allow teachers to visit parents. Also, consider identifying or creating space in your facility for in-person meetings with teachers or school officials.
- **Child welfare and child support case workers.** Finally, if there is an open CPS or child support case, parents should receive regular updates from the child welfare or child support case worker and participate in case conference meetings.

8.3 Revise policies for mailing letters and packages

Sending mail is another way for families to communicate. Despite limitations around what can be sent in letters and packages, there are several ways to improve mailing practices while maintaining safety and security within the facility:

- Allow children to send their parents photographs, letters, postcards, and drawings.
- Provide "connection packets" that include puzzles, "Did you know?" quizzes, growth charts, activity pages, or coloring pages that parents and children can do together via mail.

- Allow parents to record their voices reading a book and send the recording and book to their children for free.
- Allow parents to record a "video diary" and send it to their children.

Further, parenting or family-focused programs can facilitate sending mail between incarcerated parents and their children. You may also want to partner with a nonprofit or community-based organization to help facilitate and provide resources for sending mail or packages (i.e., organizations may pay for postage or shipping costs). Through their participation in programming, parents can receive free stamps, envelopes, or postcards to further encourage them to communicate with their children. Also, you can integrate all the communication methods into the available program services. For letter writing and sending packages, program staff can help parents think about what to include. Staff can teach parents letter-writing skills and help parents process and respond to communications they receive from their children and families.

8.4 CONSIDER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

In addition to mailing services, you may consider allowing parents to send emails or other forms of electronic communication.

- Several vendors have created corrections-friendly methods of sending electronic messages. For example, you could install a kiosk in your facility's housing units through which parents could send and receive email from their children and other family members. This kiosk may bolster communication by increasing the number of messages parents and children can exchange.
- Children may be more comfortable sending emails or electronic messages than writing and mailing a letter. However, like phone calls, electronic messaging services can be expensive, so you should consider allowing parents to send messages to their children for free or give parents access to email if they are participating in a parenting or family support program.

Install a kiosk in your facility's housing units through which parents could send and receive email from their children and other family members. This kiosk may bolster communication by increasing the number of messages parents and children can exchange.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Incorporate opportunities for communication with children and family members into parenting or family-focused programming.
- ✓ Partner with local school districts to allow incarcerated parents to use video visits to attend parent-teacher conferences, or bring teachers into the facility to meet with parents.

For more information about other opportunities for communication, explore the resources below:

- ✓ *Communication Tips for Incarcerated Parents and Their Families*: http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/cpl107-communicationtips.pdf
- ✓ Examples of video messages incarcerated parents sent to their children: https://themessagesproject.org/videos/
- ✓ Example of faith-based organization helping incarcerated parents to record their voices as they read books for their children (Stories from Mom and Dad): https://www.gracecathedral.org/jail-ministry/
- ✓ Resources on how to support inmates with children with CPS involvement: https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/supporting/support-services/prisoners/
- ✓ Resources to help children, parents, caregivers, and child welfare agencies improve communication:
  http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res-YouthParents.htm
  http://www.sfcipp.org/resources
  http://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/incarceration
  https://www.oregon.gov/doc/inmate-programs/Pages/behavioral-change-programs.aspx

CHAPTER 9. CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Consider having the following in place before offering caregiver support:

- ✓ partnerships with community-based organizations to provide caregiver support groups, programs, activities, and respite care
- ✓ knowledge of available resources in the community to which you can refer caregivers
- ✓ program curricula that are gender specific, trauma informed, and/or culturally relevant for caregiver classes and groups
- ✓ resources, space, and staff buy-in for offering caregiver support and activities, should you offer such support in your facility

The practices in this chapter focus on supporting caregivers and alleviating the stress they sometimes experience. Caregivers include parents, other family members (grandparents, siblings, spouses, partners), friends, or foster parents that provide material and emotional support to children during their parent's incarceration. This task is stressful and daunting by itself, but it can be even more difficult when the caregiver is responsible for taking the child to visits at prisons or jails and paying for letters or phone calls between the incarcerated parent and their children.

This chapter outlines five practices:

9.1 Involve caregivers in programming in facilities

9.2 Provide free or low cost transportation to and from facility

9.3 Partner with a community-based provider to offer child care

9.4 Connect caregivers to support groups

9.5 Offer separate programming for caregivers

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Caregivers take on the responsibility of child guardianship and are often an important source of support for children during their parent's incarceration. In some cases, caregivers may also be coping with feelings of loss, anxiety, and separation from the incarcerated parent. Caregivers often shoulder additional costs associated with the parent's incarceration such as court fees, the costs of transporting children to prisons or jails for visits, and collect calls from the incarcerated parent. Because they may accompany children to visits and provide the support needed for children to participate in communication with their parents, caregivers are an integral part of providing support to incarcerated parents. Thus, caregivers' needs should be considered when implementing family-focused services. When caregivers are well supported and have positive interactions with the correctional facility, they are more likely to bring children to visit or help children maintain communication with their parents.[a]

a. Joyce A. Arditti, and Jyoti Savla, "Parental Incarceration and Child Trauma Symptoms in Single Caregiver Homes," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24 (3): 551–61, 2015; Steve Christian, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009); Council on Crime and Justice, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (Minneapolis, MN: Council on Crime and Justice, 2006); Jeffery Fraser, "Children with a Parent in Prison: Contact Has Its Benefits but Outcomes Depend on Many Factors," Children, Youth & Families Background Report 129 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development, 2011); Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, and Ivana Sekol, "Children's Antisocial Behavior, Mental Health, Drug Use, and Educational Performance after Parental Incarceration: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 138 (2): 175–210, 2012; Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper, and Leslie D. Shear, "Children's Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 65 (6): 575–98, 2010; and Cheryl Swanson, Chang-Bae Lee, Frank A. Sansone, and Kimberly M. Tatum, "Incarcerated Fathers and Their Children: Perceptions of Barriers to Their Relationships," *The Prison Journal* 93 (4): 453–74, 2013.

Word from the expert

The caregivers of children with an incarcerated parent, or both parents, are our greatest natural resource for these children. When they step forward, they cannot expect many resources or assistance from public agencies and often are the only connectors for the children with the parent who is in jail or prison. We should be especially grateful to these family members, providing them with support, resources, and deep appreciation for their willingness to take responsibility for the children and the sacrifices many must make to care for their family's children during a parent's incarceration.

Dee Ann Newell,
Founder and Director,
Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind

9.1 INVOLVE CAREGIVERS IN PROGRAMMING IN FACILITIES

Involving caregivers in parenting or relationship classes and programming such as visits or coached phone calls (facilitated by case managers or program staff) can create an opportunity for the entire family to maintain or strengthen its relationships. This opportunity can result in positive child outcomes and increased family cohesion. Involving caregivers can also strengthen or maintain a positive co-parenting relationship between caregivers and incarcerated parents. For these reasons, when appropriate, consider including caregivers in parenting or relationship classes and other family-focused programs.

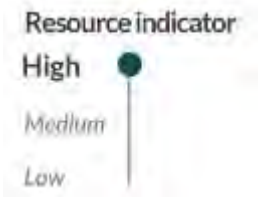
Providing opportunities for incarcerated parents and caregivers to participate in classes or programming together can help them feel more supported during the parent's confinement. In addition, caregivers and incarcerated parents can use the classes to practice healthy decisionmaking, conflict resolution, and communication skills, as well as skills for having difficult conversations. Through programming in prisons and jails, both incarcerated parents and caregivers will be given the opportunity to practice strategies learned in the classes with each other. Classes and programming designed for incarcerated parents and caregivers should have the following characteristics:

- **Facilitated and delivered by nonuniformed staff** with backgrounds in mental health, social work, family studies, or child development, to the extent possible. This will likely be a staffer from a partnering service provider or community-based organization.
- **Culturally sensitive, trauma informed, and gender specific**. The topics and approaches of the classes can be tailored to address the specific needs of parents in the program. For example, if a lot of mothers are in the program, the curriculum should be customized to address unique relationships between the mother and caregiver since the caregiver is likely not the other parent (and is usually a nonparental caregiver such as a foster parent).
- **Scheduled on visiting days whenever possible**. It is important for classes and programming to be as accessible as possible for caregivers who often experience significant challenges to getting to your facility. When programming is scheduled on visiting days, it provides greater opportunities for caregivers to both attend the class and visit with the incarcerated parent while at the facility. This schedule also allows caregivers and incarcerated parents to practice skills during visits immediately after learning skills in class. Ideally, classes could be scheduled immediately after visits, giving both parents and caregivers time to debrief about their visit and begin planning for their next one.

If it is not feasible for your facility to involve caregivers in classes or programming onsite, you can involve caregivers in programming in many other ways. For example:

- Consider providing the same program materials, such as written resources and worksheets, to caregivers that are given to the incarcerated parents in your program. Parents and caregivers could complete worksheets together over the phone or during their regular visits.
- Caregivers and incarcerated parents could mail worksheets back and forth to each other to share what they learn. If this is the best option for your facility, consider providing free phone calls between incarcerated parents and caregivers or free envelopes and postage. Further, the phone calls could be coached or supported by program staff in your facility or by staff at a partnering organization who also can help incarcerated parents make phone calls to their children.

9.2 PROVIDE FREE OR LOW COST TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM THE FACILITY



Providing free or low cost transportation to and from your facility for children and their caregivers on visiting days is an opportunity to remove significant barriers that often prevent children from visiting their parents. You can also partner with an organization to provide the transportation services or subsidize their costs. Children and their caregivers often live far from the facility where the parent is incarcerated, which is especially true for parents incarcerated in state and federal prisons. When traveling long distances to participate in a visit, families often take on associated costs, including food and lodging expenses, as well as sacrificing their time. These costs can be particularly burdensome for families who have experienced a decrease in household income because of the parent's incarceration. In addition, many families may rely on public transportation, which can make the journey from their home to the facility considerably longer, or inaccessible for those with no other mode of transportation. Providing free transportation to and from your facility allows the child and caregiver to visit the incarcerated parent when this trip may not otherwise be possible.

Information about the transportation service and its schedule should be readily available to caregivers to ensure families are aware they can access free transportation to and from your facility. Related strategies include the following:

- Post the information on your facility's website
- Provide the information on your facility's primary phone line
- Mail the information to caregivers when incarcerated parents enter your facility

- Distribute the information to local organizations and agencies that work with families affected by incarceration
- Keep copies of the information in your facility's waiting area

The transportation schedule during visiting times should be regular, consistent, and aligned with the facility's visiting schedule. To lessen confusion, make sure the schedule and details about the transportation service are clearly written and are available in the languages spoken by people who visit your facility. It is also important to notify families of any schedule changes or cancelations. If delays and cancelations should occur, caregivers and families can be notified through your facility's website or informational phone line. If your facility has the funds and technological capability, these alerts could be disseminated via email and/or text message. In addition, this transportation should:

- Be accessible to people who are physically impaired
- Provide car seats and booster seats, as needed, for young children so people of all ages can travel safely and comfortably
- Have a drop-off and pick-up location that is easily accessible by public transportation and in an area where families of parents in your facility are likely to live. If it is feasible, consider designating more than one drop-off and pick-up location to provide the transportation service to as many families as possible.

9.3 Partner with a Community-Based Provider to Offer Child Care

Not having access to child care is another potential barrier for caregivers who want to attend programming or bring children to a facility to visit their parent. Partnering with a local nonprofit or community-based organization to offer child care during programming and before, during, and after visits can remove this significant barrier, reduce stress for caregivers, improve visiting experiences, and improve safety for visitors (both adults and children), incarcerated people, and facility staff.

On visiting days, caregivers might have to go through a check-in process for their visit or handle other matters, such as commissary funds or paperwork regarding the incarcerated parent, that are not developmentally appropriate for a child to attend. In addition, caring for children and tending to their needs during these processes can be stressful and difficult for caregivers. Working with an organization to provide child care for children before the start of a visit can remove them from situations and conversations that are not developmentally appropriate and allow caregivers to focus on check-in or administrative processes.

If your facility includes caregivers in classes or other programming, offering child care can remove a common barrier to caregivers' ability to participate. Providing child care also allows caregivers the opportunity to concentrate on the class or program they are attending. If caregivers are attending programming with the incarcerated parent, the adults can have conversations that may not be appropriate in the presence of a child. When partnering with an organization to offer child care, the organization's staff should have training or a background working with children.

9.4 Connect Caregivers to Support Groups

There are different options for connecting caregivers to support groups, including referring caregivers to support groups in the community led by other organizations, partnering with a nonprofit or community-based organization to facilitate groups in your facility, or using program staff or corrections case managers to offer the groups in your facility.

Support groups for caregivers can help them repair, maintain, and strengthen their co-parenting relationships with incarcerated parents and help them address the stress and trauma they experience during a parent's incarceration. When caregivers have stable mental health, they are better equipped to provide the mental and emotional support children of incarcerated parents need. Caregivers can also face navigating difficult conversations with children about their parents' incarceration, their potentially strained relationships with their parents, and the stigma of having a parent who is incarcerated. Caregiver support groups can help caregivers learn how to facilitate these discussions in a way that is developmentally appropriate and beneficial for the child. Caregiver support groups—whether facilitated in the community or your facility—should have these characteristics:

- **Facilitated by mental health or social work professionals** who have experience working with individuals and families impacted by incarceration; these staff should be sensitive to the cultures of the families of individuals incarcerated in your facility.
- **Peer led** when appropriate
- **Offered in the caregiver's language**
- **Held in rooms that offer privacy** for participants
- **Offered in tandem with child care** whenever possible; you, or your community party, should try to ease the burden on caregivers by partnering with an organization to provide child care. Caregivers might be more likely to attend if they do not have the added task of arranging child care.

- **Scheduled directly before or after contact visiting** (if allowed), **if offered in the facility**; this would also help caregivers prepare for or debrief after the visit. Support groups and visits should be scheduled in conjunction with one another whenever feasible, based on the facility's schedule and available space.
- **Held at a meeting location accessible to caregivers;** if support groups are facilitated by a partnering organization outside the facility, the location should be accessible by public transportation and/or in the areas where caregivers live. If possible, try to offer caregiver support groups at various times and days of the week to accommodate varied work schedules.

9.5 Offer Separate Programming for Caregivers

Consider partnering with a local agency, nonprofit, faith-based, or community-based organization to provide programming, activities, and respite care for caregivers in their communities or in your facility.

Programs designed for caregivers could focus on their unique needs by providing an opportunity for them to recognize and address the stress of the parent's incarceration. Additionally, caregivers can receive support and guidance on how to provide the best support to the children in their care. Programming for caregivers can also help them debrief from their most recent visit and plan for their next one. Lastly, providing caregivers with separate programming offers them the opportunity to connect with each other and build a support network of people and families experiencing many of the same challenges. When offering separate programming for caregivers, consider the following:

- If caregiver programming is provided in your facility, consider scheduling it on visiting days. That way, caregivers can attend sessions before or after their visit. If the programming is provided in the community, consider whether the location is easily accessible by public transportation.
- If possible, try to find a location that is in or near areas where families of the people incarcerated in your facility live.
- When partnering with an external agency organization, ensure that programming is delivered and facilitated by staff who have a background in mental health, social work, family studies, or child development. These staff should speak the languages of families who visit your facilities, and the curriculum should be culturally sensitive and trauma informed.
- Offer programming for caregivers at multiple times and days throughout the week to accommodate various work schedules.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Help caregivers establish car pools to drive back and forth to the facility for visits or programming.
- ✓ Help caregivers create a phone tree to help answer each other's questions or provide general support to one another.
- ✓ Create partnerships with local colleges and universities to provide programs and child care; this is an opportunity for students in education, social work, and psychology to gain clinical hours, college credit, or experience.
- ✓ Create partnerships with local nonprofit and faith-based organizations to get volunteers and donations of materials for child care and programming.
- ✓ Create partnerships with local businesses to donate or provide discounted materials for child care and programming.
- ✓ Get creative about space. Consider trailers, storage areas, and other areas in your facility that can be easily cleaned out and transformed to host support groups or other activities.

For more information, please see the following examples of free transportation programs, child care programs, and programs inclusive of caregiver support:

- ✓ Friends Outside Visitor Center Program (child care and transportation): http://www.friendsoutside.org/visitor-center-program.htm
- ✓ Center for Restorative Justice Works: *Get on the Bus* Program: https://crjw.us/programs/get-on-the-bus/
- ✓ Assisting Families of Inmates, Inc. (transportation, children's programming, and caregivers' support group): http://afoi.org/
- ✓ Essie Justice Group (caregiver support groups): http://www.essiejusticegroup.org/

CHAPTER 10. FAMILY-FOCUSED REENTRY

Consider having the following in place before implementing family-focused reentry services:

- ✓ strong partnerships and open communication with community supervision agencies (e.g., department of probation, parole services)
- ✓ knowledge and connections to community-based reentry resources you can share with families (e.g., housing authorities, mental health treatment providers, substance abuse treatment centers, employers, educational institutions, other community-based service providers)
- ✓ space in the lobby for brochure stands or bulletin boards to provide reentry materials and related information

This section describes practices your facility can implement to support families as they anticipate and navigate the reentry of an incarcerated parent. Helping families prepare for and overcome reentry barriers can decrease the likelihood of recidivism and increase public safety.

This section covers these two practices:

10.1 Include caregivers and children in the reentry planning and programming

10.2 Provide reentry information to visiting families

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Reentry can be difficult for incarcerated parents, as well as their children and family members, because of many challenges and needs.[a] *Returning parents often rely on their families as a source of financial resources, housing, and emotional support after their release. Children may also experience a wide range of emotions, from excitement and anticipation to concern and hesitation. One way to approach the challenges of reentry is to begin planning well in advance for a parent's release and include their children and families in the process, when appropriate.*[b] *Including families and children in reentry planning will prepare them better for the parent's return and minimize some of the ambiguity children face.*

a. Jocelyn Fontaine, Samuel Taxy, Bryce Peterson, Justin Breaux, and Shelli B. Rossman, *Safer Return Demonstration: Impact Findings from the Research-Based Community Reentry Initiative* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015); Nancy G. La Vigne and Vera Kachnowski, *Texas Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2005); and Nancy G. La Vigne, Tracey Lloyd, and Sara Debus-Sherrill, *One Year Out: Tracking the Experiences of Male Prisoners Returning to Houston, Texas* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2009).

b. Jocelyn Fontaine, Douglas Gilchrist-Scott, Megan Denver, and Shelli B. Rossman, *Families and Reentry: Unpacking How Social Support Matters* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2012).

10.1 Include Caregivers and Children in Reentry Planning and Programming

During the reentry process, it is important to consider not only the needs of the incarcerated parent but also the needs and perspectives of their children and their children's caregivers; they, too, can be affected by this transition. The reentry needs of the whole family can be addressed by allowing members to be informed of and participate in the reentry planning process and programming. This includes the following:

- **Provide transparency and communication** regarding the incarcerated parent's scheduled release date, time, and location, whenever possible. This should include communication and coordination with the appropriate community supervision agency and the parent's assigned supervision officer.
- **Provide facility staff with information regarding reentry resources** that can be disseminated to incarcerated parents and visiting families verbally or through printed materials.
- **Provide opportunities for the incarcerated parent, their children, and caregivers to collaboratively create a family reentry plan**. This work may involve arranging phone calls and at least one face-to-face reentry planning session where all parties can contribute to the development of realistic reentry goals. Having a family reentry plan in writing helps ensure the entire family knows and understands the parent's reentry barriers and needs; this will help set realistic expectations for the parent's ability to reengage with their family. The reentry plan also helps families identify solutions for overcoming reentry barriers and reunify with children and family members. If family reunification is not appropriate, then the plan can focus on how the family will remain reconnected, even if they are not living together, during and after reentry.
- **Allow incarcerated parents to begin reentry planning well before their release date.** It is important that reentry planning start early and soon after a parent is incarcerated, as planning for reentry is difficult and time intensive. The amount of time spent on reentry planning should directly correspond to the amount of time a parent has been incarcerated and, therefore, separated from his or her family. Longer periods of incarceration generally require longer reentry planning processes. Allowing ample time for parents to discuss and address any barriers they may face when attempting to see or communicate with their children and families upon release (e.g., active restraining orders, sex offender registration requirements/restrictions, court custody restrictions, child support orders/arrears) can help alleviate any potential stress, confusion, and frustration experienced by all family members during this transition.

- **Allow caregivers or partners to come into the facility** to complete parenting, relationship, reentry, or restorative justice programming along with the incarcerated parent before release. Doing so will help incarcerated parents and caregivers more easily identify, address, and resolve any reentry issues they may face and ensure that both parties are working together to provide the best support for each other and their children.
- **Offer comprehensive supportive services** that are provided to families both before and after the release of an incarcerated parent. Continuity of care is key in helping families achieve and maintain their reentry goals. This support may involve partnering with community supervision agencies and officers and community-based organizations that offer activities such as relationship and parenting classes, financial literacy workshops, reentry support groups, restorative justice classes, as well as family circles, mentoring, or comprehensive case management services in facilities before release and in the community after release.

10.2 Provide Reentry Information to Visiting Families

Helping families connect to reentry services may bolster their ability to prepare for and navigate the obstacles they encounter when an incarcerated parent returns to the community. Thus, when providing reentry information and resources within a correctional facility, it is important to include family-based support resources and to make this information available to visiting family members. A few additions to your facility's visitor lobby will increase opportunities for families to learn about reentry services, including the following:

- **Installing brochure stands and bulletin boards in your facility's visitor lobby**, so families can read about reentry resources and services available in their communities. Ideally, these materials should be available in the language(s) most commonly spoken by the families of the people housed in your facility. The materials should include information regarding:
  - Sober living environments, residential and outpatient substance abuse treatment programs, and local Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous meeting schedules
  - Free or sliding-scale physical and mental health care services
  - Family case management and reunification support
  - Wraparound reentry centers and reentry support groups
  - Child care services
  - Affordable housing
  - Employment and educational opportunities
  - Location/contact information for departments of motor vehicles and Social Security offices

- **Providing staff in your facility with information regarding reentry services to pass along to visiting families** either verbally or through printed lists of resources that include descriptions of the services, names of the organizations, addresses, and phone numbers.
- **Holding reentry-focused resource fairs in the visitor lobby during visiting hours** where representatives from local organizations and agencies can inform caregivers and children about available services. While written materials can be helpful, caregivers and children may benefit from the opportunity to talk directly with service providers.
- **Providing information about parole and/or probation policies, including requirements and/or general conditions of community supervision to families**. Providing this information before release helps family members become better educated about the restrictions and conditions of community supervision and better prepared to help the incarcerated parent uphold and meet these conditions upon release.

PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES

- ✓ Understand that reentry is a difficult process; therefore, start planning for a parent's release early and well in advance of his or her scheduled release date.
- ✓ Work with community supervision agencies to identify incarcerated parents' supervision officers and connect parents with their assigned officers before release.
- ✓ Partner with local nonprofits, community-based organizations, and agencies to help organize onsite reentry resource fairs and provide incarcerated parents and families with more comprehensive reentry resources and programming.
- ✓ When deciding how to select partner organizations, it may be helpful to create a request for proposal (RFP). Disseminating an RFP that clearly describes the objectives and desired outcomes of the proposed partnership may increase the likelihood of attracting organizations that are well suited to address the reentry needs of families.
- ✓ Adopting a fee-for-service model when partnering with providers of reentry services can help ensure that the desired quality and consistency of services are maintained.

For more information, please see the following examples of reentry programming and resources:

- ✓ Root & Rebound: Roadmap to Reentry: http://www.rootandrebound.org/guides-toolkits/
- ✓ Second Chance Act: https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/second-chance-act/
- ✓ National Fatherhood Initiative's "InsideOut Dad" Program: http://store.fatherhood.org/insideout-dad-programs/
- ✓ Parenting Inside Out curriculum: http://www.parentinginsideout.org/welcome-to-parenting-inside-out/
- ✓ No Violence Alliance (NoVA) Program: http://www.cjcj.org/Direct-services/No-Violence-Alliance.html
- ✓ Keys to Change Program: https://www.fivekeyscharter.org/programs/#ktc
- ✓ San Francisco Sheriff's Department Programs Division: http://www.sfsheriff.com/division_admin_prog.html
- ✓ Coaching Packet on Engaging Families in Reentry: https://cepp.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Engaging-Offenders-Families-in-Reentry.pdf

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Community Works mission is to engage youth and adults in programs that interrupt and heal the impact of incarceration and violence. Based on restorative justice principles CWW services are a mix of direct service programming with advocacy and policy change work aimed at dismantling the barriers that formally incarcerated individuals and their families face.

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