

Parenting Connection

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The National Incarcerated Parents and Families Network™

Since our last newsletter, I have been getting new information on other organizations that deal with Parenting for incarcerated men and women. I obtained this from a program in Pennsylvania.

The National Incarcerated Parents and Families Network is a Non-profit Organization established in 2004. Our goal is to work with Incarcerated Mothers and Fathers, Adults and Juveniles, and their Families, and provide a support network

PARENTING FROM BEHIND BARS (www.incarceratedparents.org)

“Parenting From Behind Bars Phase I” is a character-based educational and support program developed in collaboration with various Department of Corrections staff, prior offenders, faith-based, community, local, state and federal agencies. This curriculum is designed to assist incarcerated Parents, both adult and juvenile, in developing skills to become more involved, responsible and supportive parents while incarcerated. The program is also designed for incarcerated parents, once trained and certified, to facilitate program and to mentor to other inmates or peers. This program will be delivered in nine weekly sessions in a small group format. Within the structure of the nine (9) week program, the primary focus is on the following issues:

- **Understanding “self” and decision making**
- **Accepting the responsibilities of being incarcerated – rules and regulations**
- **Promoting responsible parenting, while incarcerated**
- **Empowering Incarcerated parents to assume emotional, moral, spiritual, psychological responsibility for their children.**
- **Understanding Child Support and taking financial responsibility of your children**
- **Positive relationships**
- **Effects of both positive and negative communication**
- **Effective and positive mentoring**
- **Transitioning back into the community**

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Essential to the success of the program was recognizing that both Fathers and Mothers play a very important role in the positive growth of a child. Without a father figure to emulate, basic fathering skills such as self-discipline, nurturing and consistency are foreign concepts for most men in prison. Absent mothers are important also. The work of mothering can

have enormous benefits; the beneficiaries of this work are not only the mother and child, but families and society as well. Mothers are also as important to the growth of their children. Therefore, the challenge was to construct an effective curriculum that met the needs of male and female, adult and juvenile populated correctional institutions. To address this challenge, I utilized the knowledge and experience I received in visiting the many institutions across the United States and the many conversations with inmates and correctional staff, both male and female. I also enlisted the many “relationships” that I have established over the years in working in this field to assist me in creating a curricula that will make a difference and reduce recidivism among both, male and female, adult and juvenile offenders. These “relationships” are with various individuals who are now, and have been on the “front line” of the fatherhood/parenting movement. A major input in the development of these curricula was the input received from various, currently incarcerated offenders.

The barriers and isolation of a correctional institution compounds the issues of being a positive mother or father in supporting children. Some men and women have a life’s sentence and may never have the opportunity to experience parenting as a paroled or free person. The “hope” is not lost; children may still receive the benefits of a supporting parent even though the parent is behind bars. Children may still grow and become a productive citizen in society and parents can still positively influence the growth of a child.

Ultimately the children, the families and communities will reap the greatest benefit: both parents who have an active and consistent role in the well being and development their children. Therefore the curriculum and program has been designed to address the affects of parent absence due to incarceration, while promoting the positive aspects of both, motherhood and fatherhood/parenting.

Removing barrier and resistance is essential to the success of the program, therefore each support group may be co-facilitated by trained and certified peer leaders in small groups of 10 – 15 inmates under the supervision of the Maine Department of Corrections staff/or the Parenting From Behind Bars Phase I Program Coordinator. Through the use of trained and certified peer leaders the Parenting From Behind Bars at the State Correctional Facilities can accommodate up to 50 participants per twelve week session, in small groups, within an institutional classroom setting.

The participants know that the peer leaders can and do relate to their struggles, which establishes a small group rapport beneficial to learning and growth by everyone involved as well as addressing the unique needs of incarcerated parents. Since peer leadership is comprised of fellow inmates who experience the same feelings of guilt, anger and helplessness, inmate facilitators assist in maximizing the impact of the issues being discussed.

Our long-term goal is to instigate a shift in paradigms. We believe that a positive investment of education, time and peer leadership will produce responsible fathers who are less likely to draw upon the resources of local, state and federal tax dollars. The results will be families who contribute to their community, reversing the cycle of poverty and dependency due to absent parents.

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You Have a Choice About the Kind of Parent You Want to Be!

Each child has a unique and special personality. Each child within the same family is different from one another. As children grow, fathers help to shape their children's future. Through positive fathering, you can create a safe, loving environment that helps build your child's self-esteem. Positive fathering helps children learn respect for themselves and for others. There are no simple formulas for meeting the challenges of being a parent, but you do have a choice about the kind of father you want to be for your children.

LISTENING

1. Learn to listen. Begin at birth to rock and hold your baby. Sing and talk to them. Listen for what baby is saying to you.
2. As your baby grows, talk to your baby and repeat the sounds that baby makes.
3. Sing to your baby. Make up nonsense songs or sing songs of your childhood. Play music and sing along. Turn the radio or stereo
4. on so your child is accustomed to sounds.
5. Read and talk to your child every day. Children learn language by hearing language being spoken.
6. Really listening to your child gives them a message that what they have to say is important and that you value their opinion.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

You have the ability to love, nurture and care for your children and to help them learn and grow. You can do a good job of parenting and you can help your child feel good about themselves.

How you treat your child will have a huge impact on your child's fragile sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Children are taught their feelings of self-worth by parents, grandparents, teachers, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. If you feel competent and capable, you will be a better parent and will pass the legacy on to your children.

1. Think about how you can appropriately compliment your child. General praise such as, "You did a great job at that". Focus on praise where you child needs encouragement. For example, praise a shy child for an outgoing behavior.
2. Encourage our children to think about what they like about themselves. Focus on our child's strengths and appreciate your child just for being themselves.
3. Listen carefully to your child. Really listening to what your child has to say gives them the message that they are important and that you value what they say.
4. Children need challenges and opportunities to feel competent. Encourage them to feel good about their successes.
5. Recognize that all feelings are okay. Children need to be taught that it is fine for them to feel all their feelings, but that there are appropriate ways to express feelings. Some basic feelings are anger, sadness, excitement and joy. When people are hurt, either emotionally or physically, they need to recognize that they feel sad and that they can cry. It is okay.

EXPLORING

To "explore" means to investigate, examine, explore every possibility. This is exactly what children do. They taste, touch, smell and examine everything. This is how they learn. However, it is a parent's responsibility to keep them safe.

Ideas Include:

1. ***The world of nature.*** Take them to museum, zoo, parks, woods and backyards.
2. ***The world of imagination.*** The world of make believe.
3. ***The world of places.*** Go on mini-field trips and places of business and country sides. Explore the opposites of where you live. If you live in the city, go to the countryside, and vice versa.
4. ***The world of books.*** Libraries are a wonderful place to explore.
5. ***The world of food.*** Offer a variety of foods. Let them try new and exciting tastes and textures.
6. ***The world of water.*** Children love to play with water. Make bathtub boats out of sponges. Add some soap and enjoy. Play outside with hoses and sprinklers in hot weather and enjoy the out-of-doors.

Above all love your child for who he/she is and not what you want him/her to become!

Membership Tops 50

As a result of the articles on the Special Interest Groups published in the July 2006 issue of the *CEA News & Notes* newsletter, the Parenting SIG added four new members. Two of the people joining the Parenting SIG are from Connecticut, one is from Ohio, and one is from Washington.

The addition of the new members brings the Parenting SIG total membership to 51, representing 14 states.

If you have not yet joined the Parenting Special Interest Group, contact jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com. If you know any other educators who teach parenting programs in correctional settings, share this newsletter with them and urge them to join CEA and the Parenting SIG.

Region III & IV CEA Conference Workshops Target Parenting Issues

Workshops relating to Parenting were an integral part of the program at the Region III & IV CEA Conference held in Wisconsin Dells on May 11-12. Four workshops drew a total of exactly 100 participants. Another 10 people attended the Parenting Special Interest Group Roundtable at the end of the conference. The workshops presented were:

Parenting Education for Men: Formal and Informal Programs Provided by Volunteers

Research indicates that maintenance of family connections is related to offender success upon re-entry. At least 44% of incarcerated men have minor children. Twenty-one conference participants attended a workshop presented by Sarah Quinn Program Coordinator and Donna Mahr Volunteer Coordinator with Community Connections of Oregon, WI. They described how they work in partnership with Oakhill Correctional Institution to provide male inmates with parenting education, individual growth, and family support. They detailed a variety of techniques and methods to enhance and sustain parenting relationships from prison.

The First Years Last Forever

The brain is an amazing and complex organ that allows each of us to think, feel, and act. The brain systems that regulate these activities are largely shaped by experience. Deborah Schmid, Early Education Specialist with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, provided the 29 workshop participants with an overview of the biology of the brain, including a discussion of the critical windows of development and how all of this affects later learning and behavior.

Strengthening Family Bonds with Family Literacy

Tracie Green and Annette Thompson, teachers at the Mansfield Correctional Institution in Ohio, demonstrated how to start and successfully run a Family Literacy Program and an Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. They showed the 12 workshop participants how they build and help maintain family bonds, how they compliment the re-entry initiative, and where to obtain support, funding, and supplies during financially difficult times. They also discussed some issues that may arise and how to address or solve them.

Drug Endangered Children

The Drug Endangered Children program in Wisconsin began in late 2004. DEC is a multidisciplinary approach to protecting children found in dangerous drug environments. Children living in drug environments are living in dangerous situations and more often experience severe neglect and the potential for physical and sexual abuse. Special Agent in Charge Cynthia Giese described how the Wisconsin DEC program helps communities organize local DEC programs to protect, rescue, support, and defend high-risk children in drug environments. Thirty-eight conference participants attended the workshop.

Parenting SIG to Present Workshop at CEA-O Conference

The Planning Committee for the CEA-Ohio Conference has invited the Parenting Special Interest Group to present a workshop at its Correctional Education: Challenges, Changes, and Choices Conference to be held at the Sawmill Creek Resort in Huron, Ohio on September 27-29, 2006.

National Parenting SIG Chair Jerry Bednarowski will present a workshop titled, "Nurturing Parents to Be Nurturing Parents."

The workshop will summarize the Parenting Special Interest Group's activities since it was formed two year's ago. Spotlights will be the SIG's efforts to promote the establishment of Parenting classes, Father/Mother Support Groups, Parent/Child Book Projects, and Father/Mother Fairs. Participants will be asked to describe parenting programs at their institutions and contribute ideas for expanding the activities of the Parenting SIG.

If you will be attending the CEA-Ohio Conference, join us at the Parenting SIG workshop at 3:00 on Thursday, September 28.

Children and Food Workshop to Be Presented at Conference

Jana Beres, Jackson Correctional Institution, and Luane Meyer, Jackson County University of Wisconsin Extension, will be presenting a workshop titled "Children and Food – Making the Match" at the Wisconsin GED/HSED & Adult Literacy Conference to be held at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton on October 17-19, 2006.

Children and Food - Making the Match, will be a hands-on workshop showing participants how to involve children in the meal planning process. Parents are faced with the challenge of helping young children develop healthy eating habits. Parenting strategies can be utilized during mealtime situations to help both parent and child. Once parents realize what their responsibilities are and how children are involved in these decisions, mealtime can be a pleasant time for the family.

Unmarried Fatherhood Not Slowing

News Article contributed by Mary Knox, Wisconsin Resource Center

WHERE'S DADDY?: HOW SINGLE MOTHERHOOD AFFECTS THE COMMUNITY

MAY LEE JOHNSON
Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND -- Before he died recently, the Rev. Allen Gray, pastor of New Testament Baptist Church, told a reporter that the high number of babies in St. Joseph County born to unmarried women calls into question: Where are the men?

"It is a bit unfair to blame just the women when some men aren't playing as full a role in their children's lives as they should be," Gray said. The 79-year-old minister said the role of men has not changed, but men have changed.

"It's an issue we shouldn't be shying away from when talking to our young men and women about the kind of lives they are expected to live," Gray said. "It's something that the community as a whole should be addressing."

According to David Blankenhorn, author of "Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem," "Fatherlessness is our most dangerous social trend. It weakens the family, harms children, causes or aggravates many of the worst social problems, and makes individual success more difficult to achieve.

Blankenhorn wrote: "Fathers are frequently being replaced by the mother's boyfriend, the guy next door, or even the state."

The rising trend of unmarried fatherhood shows no sign of slowing, according to Blankenhorn, and best estimates show that more than half of all children will spend significant time separated from their fathers.

"Fathers need to go see about their children and go back home if at all possible," Gray insisted. "Then instead of sending your children to church, bring them."

Another pastor shared his sentiments. "When I heard the high statistics ... I immediately wondered where and who are these babies' fathers," said the Rev. Samuel Diggins, Jr., of Believers Church of God in Christ in South Bend. "One of the main reasons so many babies are being born to young black women is the clear lack of a father figure in the family. Many are now headed by mothers," the pastor said. "It is important for girls and boys to have a father in their lives. Fathers teach both young men and women how to live in the world.

"My father was home, so I learned many things from his guidance," Diggins said. "He taught me how to plant things in a garden, how to cut wood, how to work in the yard as well as help neighbors, and he taught me how to be a man."

Fathers also teach girls what they should expect from a man, he said. "By my father being in our lives, my sister wanted to marry someone like my father."

The 'mama drama'

Why are men fathering children they don't help raise? At least some men don't see themselves as totally to blame. They talk of the "mama drama."

"I really liked my baby's mama and I used to go over to see my son every week," said Marcus Taylor, 20, of Mishawaka. "But if I was late or didn't show up one week when I said or didn't bring any money, she would start tripping."

Some men may lack the skills to handle conflict constructively. "I don't hate my baby's mama," he said. "But it's no use in everybody being miserable."

"There are just so many women, I don't have to deal with the drama," said Otis Lenny, 25, of South Bend. "But I take care of my kids; my mother makes sure of that."

Not all men are in a position to take care of their children. According to a recent report by the National Urban League, black men rate only three-quarters as well as whites when researchers looked at income, health, education, civil justice and civic engagement.

The Urban League's report came on the heels of a series of academic studies showing that the nation's 5 million young black men lag behind other groups. For example, even as the nation's unemployment rate remains low, joblessness for black men between the ages of 20 and 39 has grown. Seventy-two percent of black male high-school dropouts were unemployed in 2004, compared with just 34 percent of white dropouts and 19 percent of Hispanic dropouts.

A growing number of black men are serving time, too. In 2004, 21 percent of black men in their 20s who didn't attend college were in prison, up from 16 percent in 1995.

'The legacy of slavery'

"I think it's important when we are speaking about how poorly African-American men are doing that we understand some things," said Ray Turner, a school counselor for the South Bend Community School Corp.

"Black and white men have never been on an equal basis, and slavery and 'Jim Crow' are proof of that," he said. "Another thing is President Bush's fiscal and economic policies have resulted in the loss of millions of jobs during his years in office. His slash-and-burn of job training programs and dearth of tax incentives for the working poor have certainly helped fuel the crisis black men are facing."

Turner offered the theory that slavery caused African-American men to suffer in ways that no other people in this country have suffered. "Fathers could be and often were uprooted from their family, even being bred to produce desired offspring for the owner," Turner said. "Slavery deprived African-American men of the leadership of fatherhood, to provide and plan for or even protect his family. Thus, his role was often ... unclear and confused.

"Today the African-American family carries the scars of the legacy of slavery in America," he said. "So in trying to compare the black man to the white man or black females with white females, especially in regards to unmarried mothers, is basically like comparing apples and oranges, because they are totally different in most all ways."

This in no way makes excuses for men who do not assume responsibility for their children, Turner said. Men must "further commit themselves to work to overcome barriers and obstacles to restore the leadership of fatherhood," Turner said.

"However, problems such as these that the men face must be understood in historical context and the present social, economic and political realities."

Reaching out

Diggins said he saw young men coming to church looking for guidance, so he started a program for them. The group is known as RAAAP (Raising Attitude And Academic Performance) and meets three times a week at Believers Church of God in Christ. It is a free program sponsored by the church and Memorial Hospital.

The young men do role-playing of hot issues that involve them, such as sex, relationships, parents and religion. About 16 to 18 young men attend each week.

"People also need to remember that black men, especially, have a lot to overcome with all the negativity put before them. They have been branded underachievers, troublemakers, failures and God only knows the other names they have had to live with," Diggins said. "But in my work at the Martin Luther King Center and here at the church, I have tried to instill in them just how important they are to everyone and society, as well.

"There is hope for these young men who have been called the lost generation," he said, "but they need strong leaders to walk side by side with them and teach them to love so they know how love works."



News from Fox Lake

At Fox Lake Correctional Institution teachers are now presenting their programs during the time the men are in orientation to the institution. It has made the inmates more aware of the vocational programs available and the other classes that they can take. This has meant that we are getting the inmates into classes much faster. I now have two parenting groups going and may possibly start a third class soon. I start a new group any time that I have 15 inmates to enroll.

by: Mitzi Soldner, Fox Lake Correctional Institution

What Do Children of Prisoners & Their Caregivers Need?

By Ann Adalist-Estrin

From Interviews with Caregivers

Every child, family, and circumstance is different. Some children are used to parents who were not around much before their incarceration. Some children have parents who are unpredictable because of depression or drugs or alcohol. Other children's parents were actively involved with them before they went to jail or prison.

Some children may have been traumatized by witnessing a violent arrest or may have a history of traumatizing experiences. Some children of prisoners may have no contact with their parent; others talk to their incarcerated parent every day.

Some children move to a new city or state. Some change schools or go into day care so their caregivers can work. Children will need different things from caregivers depending on their age, temperament and personality, the family circumstances, the facts and details of the crime, and the availability of outside resources.

Most Children of Prisoners Need

- Consistent caring adults who understand that, in general, children love their parents, even when they have committed a crime
- People who will not condemn the incarcerated parents as worthless
- People who will understand that children of prisoners feel angry, sad, confused, and worried
- A chance to express these feelings and learn to cope with them
- A chance to learn and practice skills and keep busy with activities
- Faith or affiliation with a community that can provide meaning for the child beyond their own crisis
- People who can help them to maintain contact with their incarcerated parent or parents or explain to them why they cannot maintain contact

Most Caregivers Need

- Support and understanding from friends, family, clergy, and the community
- Emotional support, such as counseling or group activities
- Information about children of incarcerated parents as well as about services in the community
- Guidance about what is generally best for children and how to answer their questions
- Rules, boundaries, and space in the home: for the children, for the family and for the caregiver
- Opportunities for respite care and relief from the duties of care giving
- Help with managing the needs and services that are all too often fragmented, unavailable, or costly

News from Children of Prisoners Library

www.fcnetwork.org

Editorial from Mary Dahl

I could really use some help from all of you. First, I need more articles sent to me for printing. Second, I need some feedback from the readers as to what they would like to find out more about and finally would you like to continue receiving the newsletter? Please complete the following survey:

1. What would you like to see added ?
2. How many times would you like to receive the paper?
3. Any suggestions as to how to get people to submit articles?

Thank you for your feedback. It will make my job much easier.