

# Parenting Connection

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## Effectiveness of Parent Education for Incarcerated Parents

One of the workshops presented at the 2008 Annual CEA Conference in Denver highlighted Colorado State University Extension's Parenting from Prison study and examined the future potential of parenting programs for incarcerated parents.

The *Effectiveness of Parent Education for Incarcerated Parents: An Evaluation of Parenting from Prison* workshop was presented by Kristina Wilson, Colorado State University graduate student; Tony Romero Ph.D., Assistant Director of Educational Services Colorado Department of Corrections; and Christine Cerbana, M.S., Colorado Family Education, Resources, and Training Project Director, Colorado State University Extension.

The workshop began by documenting the need for parenting programs in corrections. As prison incarceration rates continue to increase, so do the number of incarcerated parents. In 1991, 936,500 children had an incarcerated parent. By 1999, the number had grown to 1,498,800.

Children of incarcerated parents are at risk for negative consequences which may include:

- Behavioral and emotional problems
- Poor academic performance
- Drug and alcohol use
- Self-esteem issues
- Six times more likely to enter criminal justice system

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The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association.

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Providing parent education to incarcerated parents teaches these parents new behaviors and skills that may reduce the negative consequences that can result for children who have an incarcerated parent.

Incarcerated parents have often suffered from negative life events themselves including:

- Substance abuse issues in family of origin
- Violence histories
- Rape, incest, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of appropriate adult role models

These negative life events contribute to the incarcerated parents' lack of adequate parenting skills. Yet, most incarcerated parents intend to reunite with children after release.

The period of forced separation due to incarceration can be the ideal time to teach parenting skills. Research has shown that recidivism rates are lower for those who maintain family bonds while incarcerated. Offenders who engage in education programs while incarcerated show positive behavior changes and lower recidivism rates.

Parent education classes usually have common themes:

- To help parents establish better relationships with their children
- To teach parents how to effectively address their children's behavior
- To help parents modify their children's behavior that they deem inappropriate

Parent education programs have shown to have positive impacts on families. They lead to improvements in family cohesion, decreases in family conflict, decreases in parent and child substance abuse, and increases in children's pro-social behavior.

Parent education programs improve family relationships. Offering parent education classes to incarcerated parents may lead to strengthening of family bonds that may in turn motivate prisoners to stay out of prison, resulting in a reduction of recidivism. Improved parenting skills may be a key to interrupting the intergenerational cycle of incarceration.

Parent education programs offered in prisons have proven to be effective in improving mothers' self-esteem, expectations toward children and attitudes toward corporal punishment and family roles. They increase the parents' knowledge of child development and nonviolent approaches to discipline. Fathers' attitudes toward corporal punishment and role reversal also have shown improvement. To address the needs of incarcerated parents and to attempt to break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration, the Colorado Department of Corrections and the Colorado State University Extension began a partnership in 2002 to implement parent education programs in Colorado correctional facilities.

In 2002, the Colorado DOC parent educators were trained to use the Partners in Parenting (PIP) curriculum. From 2002-2004, the PIP curriculum was implemented and survey data was compiled. In 2004, the Parenting from Prison (PFP) curriculum, an extension of PIP, was developed. The PFP curriculum and assessment measures were revised in 2007 and an evaluation of the revised curriculum is underway.

In the next issue of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, the PFP curriculum will be described and evaluation results will be reviewed.

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# Interrupting the Intergenerational Cycle of Criminality through Parent Training

Parent education programs that meet stringent criteria for “well-established” interventions are rare. Oregon’s Parenting Inside Out program (PIO) was created to bring the best from the research and practitioner worlds to parenting education in corrections. PIO was developed by a team from the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC) and the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC).

At the 2008 Annual CEA Conference in Denver, Tracy Schiffmann, Ed.M., Schiffmann Curriculum Design & Training, and Lauren Booth, Executive Director at the Children’s Justice Alliance, presented a workshop entitled *Interrupting the Intergenerational Cycle of Criminality through Parent Training* which focused on the evidence-informed parent training designed specifically for incarcerated parents and its potential to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of criminality and build behavioral skills for a pro-social life at re-entry.

The Parenting Inside Out program is aimed at helping parents promote healthy child adjustment and prevent child problem behavior with the goal of interrupting the intergenerational cycle of criminality and to help guide children toward positive and constructive adult lives. The core content of PIO consists of learner-centered interactive skill building in the research-based Parent Management Training (PMT). A list of the PIO lesson topics may be found in the “Oregon’s Parenting Inside/Out Program” article in the September/October 2007 issue of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter. That newsletter may be found on the [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org) website.

PMT includes communication, problem solving, monitoring, positive reinforcement, and non-violent discipline techniques. Parenting coaches facilitate role-play practice, work individually with parents to create plans for child visits, are available to offer immediate coaching and guidance at child-centered events, and to provide feedback and problem solving after the visit or phone call with the child or child’s caregiver.

Participants also focus on three major projects:

- Development of a family mission statement
- Construction of a creative project that is a reflection of the inmate’s family, to be given to the child at PIO graduation
- Creation of a family action plan detailing how the inmate will apply parenting skills upon release

There are currently three versions of the curriculum: Prison, Jail, and Community. Classroom time for the prison version is 90 hours. The community version includes 48 hours of classroom time and the jail version includes a minimum of 24 classroom hours. All versions of the Parenting Inside Out curriculum are now available for sale nationwide. Those interested in implementing PIO in their state or community agency should contact Lauren Booth at 503-892-5396 or [lauren@childrensjusticealliance.org](mailto:lauren@childrensjusticealliance.org) for more information about products and training opportunities.

In the September/October 2008 issue of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter the results of Parenting Inside Out’s Post Graduation Survey will be summarized.

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)



# Re-Entry Initiative --- Key to Families

Family Connections of Wisconsin, Inc., an organization in Madison, Wisconsin, provides a necessary service for children of incarcerated mothers. The mission of one part of their program is to give children a bus ride, once a month, to see their mothers in prison. That seems simple enough, but the mission is not always simple. Without community involvement and donations, this organization would not be able to exist.

Family Connections successfully sponsors these trips for children in Madison and the rewards have been numerous. Not only are they maintaining and strengthening family relationships affected by incarceration, the bonds formed between the children and the volunteers have been a wonderful reward of the mission. Siblings separated from each other reunite for these monthly trips. The older children have become friends with the younger kids and friendships have formed --- creating a support network on the buses.

The volunteers and part-time staff speak enthusiastically about how the children love their moms and want to see them. The children often move around between foster homes and relatives and these trips give them hope of their families being back together again. The bus ride becomes a time of singing and visiting with other children who have something important in common. The volunteers read to the kids and serve breakfast on the way. On arrival, the kids get those face-to-face meetings and the volunteers do some activities with the families. The relationships between mothers and children that keep active and strong are a proven deterrent to recidivism when released. On the way home, the bus stops for ice cream at Culver's. These trips would not be possible without the generous donations of local corporations.

Involvement in this program helps the moms stay focused while incarcerated. Children occupy their thoughts all the time while incarcerated and this program helps them with their long-term goals and behavior while in prison. The goal is to get them involved as soon as they get to prison. The women have a verbal contract with the program volunteers to stay out of trouble so their children can come and visit. Volunteers tell the mothers that it is very hard to tell a child "they can't go this time because their mother is unavailable." This is a very meaningful message to the moms and the moms have been very cooperative with the verbal contract. They keep their children's pictures on their calendars to remind them of the visits.

Children need to see their moms no matter where they are --- this is no surprise. Yearning for Mom is natural and common. Children often have behavior problems when they cannot see their mothers. These bus trips have been a win-win for all involved --- moms, children, and volunteers. Caregivers of the children also benefit and appreciate the service because they often are not in a position to take the children to see their mothers but support the visits.

There are plenty of stories the volunteers share that exemplify why this program is so worthwhile for all involved and make it "worth it" to keep volunteering each month. A seventeen-year-old girl was very emotional about going to see her mother but overcame her anxiety and considered it a personal triumph to board the bus. The visit with her mother was so joyful that the girl was able to have, for the first time, some acceptance of the situation her mother was in and had a much needed mother-daughter talk with her. A family with four siblings who live in different foster homes get to be together and then share time with mom together on these Saturdays. A seventeen-year-old boy who felt his mom had ruined his life opened up to a volunteer on a bus trip forming a close bond between the two, which helped fill a void in the boy's life.

Another program offered by Family Connections of Wisconsin, Inc. on these visits to the prisons is called Reading Connections. This one-hour program facilitated by the volunteers is offered to women who do not have children visiting. It encourages literacy, parent-child bonding, and allows the moms be role models for their children as they develop their own literacy. The volunteers work with three women at a time helping them put a book on audio tape to be sent home to their children. In addition to the books to tape, FCW provides stationary for writing letters, extra books for the packages, and all the packing material. The moms



put the packages together and FCW takes care of the mailing. FCW is able to get all of these materials donated from organizations and corporations in the Madison area.

Family Connections of Wisconsin, Inc. has operated since 2000 on a grass roots level with a board of ten members, part-time staff, and volunteers. Fund raising is the biggest challenge. The organization hopes to expand to more areas of the state. With families being a key issue to re-entry initiatives for the incarcerated, this program is an exemplary example of what works.

Submitted by: Mary K. Knox  
Wisconsin Resource Center

## Parenting SIG Helps Instructor

In the middle of June, as I was co-teaching my first series of parenting classes, I put out a cry for help for ideas for reaching a particular student. I addressed my e-mail to others who had also attended a CEA-Wisconsin sponsored parenting in-service I had attended in February. In response to my e-mail I received a number of very helpful suggestions. More importantly, I was fortunate to have my request forwarded by Jerry Bednarowski to the 140+ individuals in the CEA Parenting Special Interest Group.

I would like to share my experience with others who might also find themselves looking for resources or advice:

First, I cannot say enough about the willingness of veteran teachers to take the time to help! I was amazed at the number and variety of responses I received! There is a whole network of people "out there" with lots of experience, willing to share their knowledge and advice.

Jerry has posted many of the early responses I received on the CEA website, but there have been many more – 40+. I have a running list of suggestions and ideas on my desk, and have been following up on them, one at a time. There were people who copied their favorite materials and forwarded them to me. I was gifted a book that one teacher was not able to use with her current group, and another made me a copy of a resource that I thought I might be interested in using (and I AM using it!). There were MANY thoughtful responses to my call for help, and there were also many words of encouragement ...the Parenting SIG is truly a special group!

Second, I would like to encourage others who want to improve some aspect of their program to take advantage of the Parenting SIG -- with a possible caution to be more specific than I was with my request. (Several teachers wrote back to ask me to be more clear about what I was looking for so they could better tailor their response.)

The Parenting SIG collectively is a vast resource of knowledge on teaching parenting. Even better, the willingness to help other teachers is alive and well in the Parenting SIG – and it only takes a minute to ask!

Submitted by: Linda Elerbe, Southern Oaks Girls School,  
Union Grove, Wisconsin

Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group  
Discussion Forum at [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)



# 10 Commandments of Good Parenting

By L. Steinberg, Temple University

You know the checkout line scenario: The 3 year old wants this toy, candy, this something--and she wants it noooow. The crying starts, escalating into a full-blown tantrum.

In this new book, *The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting*, Laurence Steinberg, PhD provides guidelines based on the top social science research --- some 75 years of studies. Follow them, and you can avert all sorts of child behavior, he says. After all, what is the goal when you're dealing with children? To show who's boss? To instill fear? Or to help the child develop into a decent, self-confident human being?

Good Parenting helps foster empathy, honesty, self-reliance, self-control, kindness, cooperation, and cheerfulness, says Steinberg. It also promotes intellectual curiosity, motivation, and the desire to achieve. It helps protect children from developing anxiety, depression, eating disorders, anti-social behavior, and alcohol and drug abuse. "Parenting is one of the most researched areas in the entire field of social science," says Steinberg who is a distinguished professor of psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia. The scientific evidence for the principles he outlines "is very, very consistent."

A parent's relationship with his/her child will be reflected in the child's actions --- including child behavior problems, Steinberg states. "If you don't have a good relationship with your child, they're not going to listen to you. Think how you relate to other adults. If you have a good relationship with them, you tend to trust them more, listen to their opinions, and agree with them. If it's someone we just don't like, we will ignore their opinion."

1. **What you do matters** - This is one of the most important principles. What you do does make a difference. Your kids are watching you. Don't just react on a spur of the moment. Ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish, and is this likely to produce the result I am looking for?"
2. **You cannot be too loving** - It is simply not possible to spoil a child with love. What we often think of as the product of spoiling a child is never the result of showing a child too much love. It is usually the consequence of giving a child things in place of love --- things like leniency, lowered expectations or material possessions.
3. **Be involved in your child's life** - Being an involved parent takes time and is hard work, and often means rethinking and rearranging your priorities. It frequently means sacrificing what you want to do for what your child needs to do. Be there mentally as well as physically.

Being involved does not mean doing a child's homework --- reading it over or correcting it. Homework is a tool for teachers to know whether the child is learning or not. If you do the homework, you're not letting the teacher know what the child is learning.

4. **Adapt your parenting to fit your child** - Keep pace with your child's development. Your child is growing up. Consider how age is affecting the child's behavior.

The same drive for independence that is making your three-year-old say "no" all the time is what's motivating him to be toilet trained. The same intellectual spurt that is making your 13-year old curious and inquisitive in the classroom is also making her argumentative at the dinner table.

For example, an eight grader is easily distracted, irritable. His grades in school are suffering. He's argumentative. Should parents push him more, or should they be understanding so his self-esteem doesn't suffer?



5. **Establish and Set Rules** - If you don't manage your child's behavior when he is young, he will have a hard time learning how to manage himself when he is older and you aren't around. Any time of the day or night, you should always be able to answer these three questions: Where is my child? Who is my child with? What is my child doing? The rules your child has learned from you are going to shape the rules he applies to himself.

But you can't micromanage your child. Once they're in middle school, you need to let him do his own homework, make their own choices and try not to constantly intervene.

6. **Foster Your Child's Independence** - Setting limits helps your child develop self-control. Encouraging independence helps her develop a sense of self-direction. To be successful in life, she/he is going to need both!!!

It is normal for children to push for autonomy. Many parents equate their child's independence with rebelliousness or disobedience. Children push for independence because it is part of human nature to feel in control rather than feel controlled by someone else.

7. **Be Consistent** - If rules vary from day to day in an unpredictable fashion or if you are enforcing them only intermittently, your child's misbehavior is your fault, not his. Our most important disciplinary tool is consistency. Identify your non-negotiable rules. The more your authority is based on wisdom and not on power, the less your child will challenge it. Inconsistency causes a child to be confused.
8. **Avoid Harsh Discipline** - Parents should not hit a child in anger or rage. Children who are hit or slapped violently are more prone to fighting with other children. They are more likely to be bullies and more likely to use aggression to solve disputes with others. There is a lot of evidence that spanking causes aggression in children, this can lead to relationship problems with other kids.

There are many other ways to discipline such as time outs, which work better and do not teach aggression.

9. **Explain Your Rules and Decisions** - Good parents have expectations they want their child to live up to. Generally, parents over explain to young children and under explain to adolescents. What is obvious to you may not be evident to a 12-year old. He doesn't have the same priorities, judgment or experience that you may have.
10. **Treat Your Child With Respect** - The best way to get respectful treatment from your child is to treat him respectfully. You should give your child the same courtesies you would give to anyone else. Speak to him politely. Respect his/her opinion. Pay attention when he is speaking to you. Treat him kindly. Try to please him when you can. Children treat others the way their parents treat them. Your relationship with your child is the foundation he/she will have with others later on.

Parents forget to consider the child, to respect the child. You work on your relationships with other adults, your friendships, your marriage, dating, but what about your relationship with your child? If you have a good relationship and you're really in tune with your child, that's what really matters. Then none of this will be an issue.

Submitted by: Cheri Wontor, Parenting Teacher 7th Floor  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

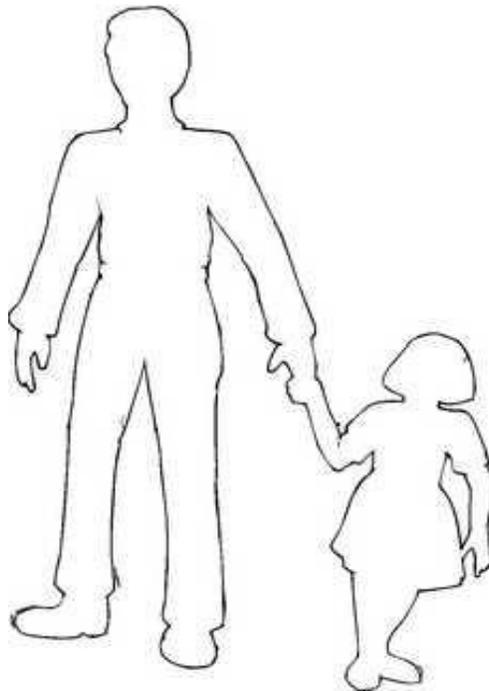


# Learning—Some Words of Wisdom by Mac Bledsoe in Parenting with Dignity

Learning can be the goal for any adjustment in a child's behavior. When your goal is learning, the strategy often is obvious. "Here is how the world works, and it will help you greatly if you understand this."

Often, taking the time to teach is the longest and most difficult way to get your children to adjust their behavior right now, but it winds up being the best way because it results in lasting behavior change. While driving in the car, it is much quicker and easier to separate quarreling children. Separating them teaches the exact opposite behavior you want them to learn. When people disagree the desired response is to separate? (No wonder the divorce rate is so high!) It is more logical to approach two fighting children with a goal of teaching them some effective ways to get along and deal effectively with quarrels and disagreements.

It takes planning, thought, time, patience, and lots of care to teach skills of compromise and negotiation, but these skills last a lifetime. It may take longer to bring about the desired behavior change at age four, but when you do take the time to teach some skills, then at age fifteen you no longer have to deal with your children fighting because what you taught at four is still working. Your child learned it and will use it forever.



## Share Your Parent/Child Literacy Program

Again this year, CEA-Wisconsin will be teaming with the Wisconsin Technical College System and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to plan workshops for the Wisconsin GED/HSED & Adult Literacy Conference to be held at the Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton on October 21-23. If you would like to present a workshop on your parent/child literacy program, contact Program Committee members: Jerry Bednarowski at [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) or Mary Stierna at [mary.stierna@wisconsin.gov](mailto:mary.stierna@wisconsin.gov)



# Parenting Special Interest Group Update

As is the procedure for this newsletter, each July a new editor for the *Parenting Connection* assumes her/his duties. Because of the co-editor Cheri Wontor's retirement, she will not be assuming the duties of the editor. Last year's editor Mary Knox has agreed to continue as *Parenting Connection* newsletter editor for another year.

Mary is has been a teacher at the Wisconsin Resource Center for the last seven years. She has taught child development and parenting for most of the last twenty years. She also teaches ABE classes and helps students prepare for the HSED. Her background is Special Education in the public schools and owning a child care center while teaching as adjunct faculty at Fox Valley Technical College.

Mary is the third person to act as editor of the *Parenting Connection*. Diane Birch, a teacher at Stanley Correctional Institution, was the newsletter's first editor. She was replaced by Mary Dahl, a teacher at Green Bay Correctional Institution.

Mary Pohlman who teaches at the Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution has volunteered to be the new co-editor. She will replace Mary Knox as editor when her term expires in July 2009.

Mary Pohlman has been a teacher at KMCI for almost 2 years. She is a special education and adult basic education teacher. In addition to these teaching duties, Mary teaches Parenting classes and is co-coordinator of the Fathers' Love of Reading Relationships Program and coordinator of the Inmate Tutoring Program.

Mary has taught for 3 years in Milwaukee in Day Treatment and Public School settings and in Sheboygan in the area of special education at the middle school level. Mary earned a BA in Psychology from Lakeland College, an M Ed in Educational Psychology from Marquette University, and Teaching Certification from UW-Milwaukee in SPED ED/LD.

If you would like to submit an article for the next issue of the *Parenting Connection*, you may send it to Mary Knox at [mary.knox@wisconsin.gov](mailto:mary.knox@wisconsin.gov).

## Still Growing

As a result of participants signing-up for the Parenting Special Interest Group at the Parenting workshops presented at the 63<sup>rd</sup> CEA International Conference held in Denver, Colorado on July 13-16, 2008, the Parenting SIG has continued to grow. Twenty-two new members signed-up for our email list. The Parenting SIG now has 146 members from 27 states. We also have our first international member, Syvion Dlamini from the Republic of South Africa. An updated email list has been sent to all of the Parenting SIG members.

If you know of any correctional educator who is involved with Parenting Classes, Parent Support Groups, Parent/Child Literacy Programs or Parent Fairs; have them contact [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) to join the Parenting SIG.



# Editorial-Mary K. Knox

Happy Summer.....this has been a beautiful summer up here in the Fox River Valley. Once we got through the floodwaters of June the weather has been "oh so fine". As you have read earlier in this publication, I will be your editor for one more year. It isn't a bad gig, but every two months the need for articles becomes my only stressor. I am so happy when there are too many things for one newsletter and I have to hold something over for the next one. All you readers are welcome to send me "anything" for the newsletter. I would love to hear from you.

Have one of your students written a poem about parenting? Send it to me and I will print it. I know taking the time to write a little piece about some interesting thing you are doing in your parenting classes can be a time commitment and you think you would like to get around to it, but just don't. Well, this is the time to make good on those good intentions. Make it your summer goal to send me some news to print in our next edition. This month we have some entries from folks in Colorado and Oregon, contacts made by our SIG Chair Jerry Bednarowski, at the International Conference in Denver. Thank you for those articles.

Let us all enjoy these last few weeks of summer.

Mary Knox

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