

# Parenting Connection

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## Plan for Meeting the Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents Unveiled

On Monday, October 26, 2009, the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center hosted a briefing on Capitol Hill to discuss the needs of the more than seven million children of parents in prison or jail, or under community supervision. The briefing was sponsored by Congressman Danny K. Davis (D-IL).

At the briefing, CSG Justice Center unveiled the *Federal Action Plan for Improving Responses to Children of Incarcerated Parents*. The plan outlines promising practices and 70-plus recommendations for improving outcomes for the more than 1.7 million children of incarcerated parents. Supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Open Society Institute, the publication is intended to raise awareness about these children's needs and inform better policies and practices. It reflects the work of an advisory board of criminal justice and child welfare experts, representatives of community-based organizations, and a bipartisan group of state and local government officials.

Speakers provided an update on what we know about this population and discussed the role of state and federal policymakers, corrections, and community providers in improving outcomes for children of incarcerated parents.

Speakers at the briefing were:

- Senator Alan Cropsy, Michigan State Senate
- Director Robin Arnold-Williams, Office of Governor Chris Gregoire (WA)
- Director A.T. Wall, Rhode Island Department of Corrections
- Reverend Wilson Goode, Amachi Mentoring, Former Mayor, Philadelphia
- Dr. Susan Phillips, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois, Chicago

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“When parents are incarcerated, the impact on their children can be devastating,” said advisory board co-chair and Michigan State Senator Alan Cropsy. “There is so much we can do—from arrest to reentry—that can reduce the trauma for children and help ensure that their needs, and those of their caregivers, are being met. At last, that information is captured in this plan.”

Among the federal action plan's recommendations are those that urge policymakers to:

- create federal interagency task forces and develop cross-system collaborations that address the risk factors of children of incarcerated parents and better link them to services
- support new policies and practices in the criminal justice system that address trauma associated with a parent's arrest and their incarceration, which is often many miles from where a child is living
- encourage measures that facilitate visitation when in the best interests of the child and promote permanence that takes into account siblings and other important relationships
- address federal and state measures that make it more difficult for caregivers to obtain benefits and support for these children.

“Corrections, child welfare, and other agencies that encounter children of incarcerated parents can better coordinate their efforts to provide the care and services they need,” said advisory board co-chair Robin Arnold-Williams, Director, Executive Policy Office of Washington Governor Chris Gregoire. “The Justice Center partnered with leaders in the field to ensure the action plan guides policymakers on the best strategies to ensure that these children are safe and secure. It is one of the most comprehensive summaries of key policy changes needed for this vulnerable population.”

Copies of the plan can be downloaded for free at:

[http://www.reentrypolicy.org/jc\\_publications/federa\\_action\\_plan\\_version\\_id=55173&return\\_url=/admin/jc\\_publications/36506%3Fversion\\_id=55173](http://www.reentrypolicy.org/jc_publications/federa_action_plan_version_id=55173&return_url=/admin/jc_publications/36506%3Fversion_id=55173)

## News from the Wisconsin State Reading Association

The Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA) is in the process of producing a video that depicts parents of differing socio-economic status and cultures reading to their children. They plan to release the video early in 2010, if conditions are favorable. This would be a great resource for the Father/Mother Read Programs in our institutions.

Two other resources that WSRA offers to us are a newsletter and a *Literacy Calendar of Ideas*, both are found at [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org). Choose Resources then either Calendar or Newsletter.

The newsletter gives tips for reading with your children. Each newsletter focuses on a different topic to help your children become better readers. The September 2009 newsletter is titled “Family Reading Fun.”

The *Literacy Calendar of Ideas* gives ideas to use with children that will increase literacy, both reading and writing. The idea for October 5, 2009 was “Decide what you want to be for Halloween. Write to your cousin and describe your costume.” This is a good literacy exercise and a creative way for our incarcerated parents to begin a dialogue with their children.

**To join CEA go to: [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)**



# Stop Before You Spank

Spanking continues to be the most controversial discipline method. In his video talk to the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual CEA Conference in Madison, Wisconsin on July 20, Bill Cosby presented cogent and historically-minded arguments about the destructive influence of corporal punishment on kids.

Parents Anonymous of Washington State has come up with lists of **Ten Reasons Not to Spank** and **Ten Things to Do Instead of Spanking**. The lists were developed by MaryLouise Alving .

Below is the list of **Ten Reasons Not to Spank**. The list of **Ten Things to Do Instead of Spanking** will be in the January/February issue of this newsletter.

## Ten Reasons Not to Spank

1. Spanking teaches children they do not have control over their behavior. Lack of inner control can block children's ability to solve problems and make decisions on their own.
2. Spanking can teach children to rely on others for control of their behavior. Children who rely on external controls are more apt to let circumstances, events, and others influence their actions rather than using their own resources.
3. Spanking teaches children that hitting is a perfectly acceptable behavior. Children can learn that violence and force is a channel for anger and a way of solving problems.
4. The use of physical force as a means of discipline teaches children that it is okay to hit someone you love; this learning and belief can perpetuate domestic violence . . . inflicting pain on family members.
5. Spanking models an imbalance of power. Parents who use force as a means of discipline are showing children an unequal balance of power based on size and strength.
6. Spanking is not an effective means of changing behavior. The effects of spanking are immediate, but usually short term.
7. Spanking can teach children to seek revenge or retaliate against the punisher. It teaches children to hate, fear, and/or avoid the punisher. Children don't easily forget the pain of spanking.
8. Spanking is useless as children get older. The degree of intensity would have to increase as a child grew older and larger.
9. Spanking tells a child what not to do, it does not teach the child appropriate behavior.
10. Physical punishment from parents does not inhibit violence and most likely encourages it. Punishment both frustrates the child and gives him a model from which to learn and imitate.



# Angry Men: Managing Anger in an Unforgiving World

by Lynne McClure, Ph.D.

## Book Review - by Mary Pohlman

Anger management is a problem for many of the students in my parenting classes. They respond to the material that we use in *Inside Out Dads* and *Focus on Families*, although they are still resistant at the end of this unit.

Our wonderful librarian ordered a couple copies of the book *Angry Men: Managing Anger in an Unforgiving World*. I use one as a resource in teaching parenting and the library has one to be checked out. When this unit is almost over and I have presented the material from the book, my students voluntarily write down the check out information and head to the library.

The forward begins with a quote from Francis De Sales (1567-1622), "Nothing is so strong as gentleness; nothing so gentle as real strength." This generates a good discussion. The Forward of this book is written by Dave Grossman, Lt. Col., U.S. Army (retired). He addresses all men which includes prisoners, addicts, abusers, gangbangers, drug dealers, gamblers, etc. Grossman quotes his dad who stated that, "The real mark of a man is his ability to control his temper. If you cannot control your temper, then you are not a man." The inmates in my classes are drawn from the beginning to the end of this book.

McClure uses scenarios to teach about the consequences of anger. The scenarios grab the attention of my students and hold it. The scenarios are events that could happen in the lives of my students. They initiate great discussions.

I usually begin with the father who learns that his 15 year old daughter is pregnant. The father loses control, calls his daughter names, compares the young woman to a porn star, and threatens her child's father.

Another scenario depicts a 16 year old son. This young man is locked in his room to keep him from going out drinking and doing drugs with his friends. The son sneaks out and stays out until the next day. Dad escalates his anger the whole time he is waiting. He strikes the son causing a concussion. The father is charged with child abuse.

A third example I use is of a man and his wife who are in a bar. A drunken patron talks about the wife in a very vulgar manner. This one is especially difficult for the men to understand that they need to walk away from the situation.

The book contains many other scenarios that range from road rage to problems at work. They are all very pertinent to the lives of my students.



# Letters from Dad

When he was inaugurated, President Obama wrote a letter to his daughters. See what one of the National Fatherhood Initiative's dads has to say to his three children --- and get some ideas for how your students can communicate important messages to their kids.

Writing your kids letters is a great way to communicate an important message that you're not sure how to verbalize. Plus, it's a great memento for your kids to keep!

Read this letter from Greg Austen (National Fatherhood Initiative's Senior Director of Corrections Programming) to his three kids - Emily (13), Tim (15), and Matt (17) - and get some ideas for encouraging a love of reading in your kids. Plus, NFI's come up with a list of letter-inspiring ideas. They may be found the National Fatherhood Initiative's website, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

## Why Reading is So Important

September 16, 2009

Dear Emily, Matt, and Tim,

I know it may seem that I harp on you more often than you would like about watching too much TV or spending hours playing video games—not reading enough. I know you sometimes roll your eyes (or are tempted to) and seek to avoid that predictable question, “What have you been reading lately?”

I have told you before my heart is not to shame you or make you feel uncomfortable. It is also not to reinforce stereotypes I sometimes deserve of being too rigid, not able to relax, or sounding like a broken record. I am learning to “chill-lax” more—a word I learned from your friends—but there are important reasons why I want you to learn to love reading:

1. **Reading quiets your heart and stills your soul.** We live in a busy, crazy world. Much of the stress and demands on our time we have little control over. If you can get into a habit of daily or weekly non-homework reading, you will find your mind gets clearer and your soul re-centered.  
Find a quiet place. Stop texting for a bit—turn off your cell phone and read something you are interested in and enjoy. Read fun stuff like the Harry Potter series, the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes, etc. These books and books like them take you on fascinating journeys and help you relax. Again, set aside time each day or week. You know your schedule best.
2. **Reading will help you be a strong person who others look to for leadership.** Reading will help you be a better conversationalist, counselor, and writer. While it is true that not every reader is a leader, every leader is a reader. Reading keeps your mind sharp. It expands your world and thinking. It makes you feel smarter and grows your imagination. It makes you a person of breadth—someone who is balanced, well-rounded, curious, culturally-literate, intelligent, interesting, wise—all qualities that make you a better person, friend, leader, and citizen of our great country.
3. **Reading can help you be more humble.** Pride, arrogance, and snobbery are some of the most unattractive qualities one can have. Few things are more sickening than when pride is combined with ignorance and apathy.

Read fun stuff and fiction, but also read non-fiction. Especially reading great books—classics and those that have had staying power (e.g. have been around for more than thirty years)—will help



you learn that the times you are living in are not the most important times. Anything older than you are may seem lame, but the truth is you are standing on the shoulders of thousands of great men and women who have gone before you. You get to know these folks primarily through books.

Don't be guilty of what the great writer, C.S. Lewis, called "chronological snobbery"—that is, thinking that the times and culture you live in are the most important.

In closing, here is a quote I came across recently that speaks well to the points above: "Books enlarge us by giving direct access to experiences not our own. In order for this to work, however, we need a certain type of silence, an ability to filter out the noise. Such a state is increasingly elusive in our over-networked culture, in which every rumor and mundanity is blogged and tweeted. Today, it seems it is not contemplation we seek but an odd sort of distraction masquerading as being in the know. Why? Because of the illusion that illumination is based on speed, that it is more important to react than to think, that we live in a culture in which something is attached to every bit of time."<sup>1</sup>

I love you all very much and pray that you will be men, Tim and Matt, and a woman, Emily, of great character, humility, and serenity who lead and serve others—whose lives are strong enough to enrich others due in part because you learned to love reading.

Dad

<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles Times book reviewer David L. Ulin [latimes.com, 8/9/09]



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

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



# Family Traditions and Rituals

We are fast approaching the time of year when traditions and rituals become even more important in the lives of family members. Traditions are vehicles many families use to pass down family values and culture to their children. The traditions they pass along could be something important to them or a ritual or tradition passed down to them from earlier generations. Ernest W. Burgess, a professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, was quoted in Wikipedia as stating that traditions or culture endow our children with a heritage of attitudes, sentiments, and ideals. As parenting instructors, these are concepts we are attempting to teach our students.

The breakdown of family values and connections significantly correlates to generational incarceration. "Effective traditions promote a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging. They also promote a feeling of safety and security within the family by providing a predictable and familiar experience," (<http://foreverfamilies.net>).

The inmates have an image of their first meal on the outside. What they describe sounds very much like Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner presided over by the family matriarch. This time of year provides great material for teaching family traditions and talking about passing on the culture our students want their children to know.

Although I have written mainly about traditions related to the holiday season, these are not the only traditions or rituals to be passed down through generations. The Father/Mother Read programs teach the value of bedtime rituals where parents read to their children.

A book on love and rituals I purchased last year, *I Love You Rituals* by Becky A. Bailey, PH. D., encourages parents to be silly with their children. One suggestion is to shake your child's foot instead of his/her hand when you greet him/her. Good advice to pass along to our inmate scholars is spend time with your children, have fun, enjoy your kids, and laugh together often and well.

by Mary Pohlman



# Editorial

Recently I shared a small lesson from my Father's Read curriculum with fellow students in a Wisconsin Technical College System teaching methods class. My partner and I taught how to make sock puppets. We gave each classmate a holey old sock, markers, and yarn for hair. We demonstrated putting the sock on their cupped hands, pushing in the mouth area, drawing on eyes and a tongue, and then adding hair. The students were all concentrating hard between their laughter and giggling. They were having fun while learning.

Many of the inmates I work with did not have fathers in their lives to teach them how to have fun with kids. In Father's Read we not only teach them how to read to their children, but also how to make that reading time fun! Simple pleasures can be the most fun and the most meaningful.

Enjoy the Holiday Season!

**Mary Pohlman**

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