

Parenting Connection

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Easing the Transition to Parent and Partner

Redgranite (Wisconsin) Correctional Institution Chaplain Deborah Mejchar and Wisconsin Resource Center Human Services Program Coordinator Tamra Oman teamed to create the Home Program at the Redgranite Correctional Institution to help offenders transition from an incarcerated person to a parent and partner in the community.

The Home Program allows participants to discuss their concerns, build on the positive, and plan for a more successful future for their families. Many offenders and family members are not prepared for this process. They all have ideas of "what it will be like," but they hardly know each other after a long period of absence. This program is geared towards developing a realistic idea of what is to come and what the individual's responsibilities are.

The program designed by Deborah and Tamra assists offenders and their family members in having a healthy, effective, and realistic approach during the transition period from incarceration to freedom. Its focus is to develop skills in communication, celebrate family and community, and provide informational resources. In doing so, the Home Program attempts to offer an opportunity for higher success rates, to reduce recidivism, and to break the cycle of familial incarceration. The goals of the program are to gain knowledge of what to expect, address concerns, gain helpful tools, and gather resources and information to continue the momentum of becoming a healthy family after release. (continued on page 2)



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The Home Program consists of three sessions per group of participants:

Session 1: Getting to know one another, sharing past family celebrations, future ideas, and identifying concerns

- Icebreaker exercise
- Sharing favorite family memories
- Sharing things to look forward to
- Identifying and addressing concerns
- Debriefing: questions, answers, and educational materials

Session 2: Celebrating cultural diversity and sharing learning opportunities

- Icebreaker exercise
- Familial diversity celebration and family enhancement rotation (Each family rotates every 15 minute to experience various games, story telling, music, speakers, etc...)
- Family time to discuss and share what they learned and what they appreciate about their family heritage or newfound understanding.
- Sharing with the larger group their experiences
- Debriefing: questions, answers, and educational materials

Session 3: Role playing and brainstorming previously identified concerns

- Icebreaker exercise
- Role playing assignments and preparation
- Role plays, participant brainstorming, and developing collective solutions
- Each family group shares something they learned, enjoyed, and will attempt to apply
- Debriefing: questions, answers, educational materials, and presentation of certificates of participation

Each session is designed to be fun and exciting. Participants are asked to share good, bad memories and family experiences and what they are looking forward to.

Participants learn that it is so important for people in relationships, regardless of the definition, to identify areas that they appreciate in themselves, their partner, their children, and their family members, as well as, identifying areas of concern. In order to state their feelings, offenders learn that their feelings must be honestly and realistically identified. Then their concerns and feelings need to be expressed in a manner that is not blaming or offensive. In order to do this, each person has to be aware of what they value most, what they are willing to compromise, and how to share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a healthy manner. Reintegration is a complex, diverse, and exciting opportunity that is often easier said than done.

In order to be successful at reintegration, participants set specific goals. Identifying these areas of concern and finding out how or what got them to this point in their lives helps participants prepare a plan of action to have the life they deserve and desire to have. Participants work together to anticipate problems and develop effective solutions.

For more information about the Home Program contact deborah.mejchar@wisconsin.gov .

**Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group
Discussion Forum at www.ceanational.org**



CCIP Clearinghouse Offers Large Collection of Resources

The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCIP) was founded in 1989 by Denise Johnston and Katherine Gabel with the mission of preventing intergenerational crime and incarceration. Located in Eagle Rock, California, the Center pursues its mission through the development of model services for children of criminal offenders and their families, and by producing and disseminating documentation on this population.

A service that may be of value to parenting educators working in correctional facilities is the CCIP Clearinghouse Project. The CCIP Clearinghouse maintains a collection of over 3500 documentary and audiovisual items relating to families in the criminal justice system.

The Clearinghouse offers two catalogs: one for incarcerated parents and their families who may receive ordered items free of charge and one for all other users who are charged the cost of shipping and handling. The catalogs list items written and published by CCIP, as well as items from popular, scholarly and program literatures. Items for which CCIP holds distribution rights - including original CCIP, Prison MATCH and Phase ReEntry Program documents and tapes - may be ordered in any quantity at their original price but may not be duplicated without written permission from CCIP. The Clearinghouse distributes only single reproductions of all other items.

Examples of CCIP Client Publications available include:

- Information for Families, a CCIP brochure
- The Booklist for Children of Prisoners
- The CCIP Family Contracts Package
- What About the Kids? An Information Sheet for Arrested Parents
- Selecting a Temporary Caregiver for Your Child
- When Incarcerated Parents Lose Contact with their Children

Although new items are regularly added to the catalog, the Clearinghouse collection includes literally thousands of items which have not been cataloged. Users may access uncataloged items by requesting a search. Searches for single topic and multiple topic requests are conducted by staff for a fee. Information about searches of the Clearinghouse collection can be obtained by writing or emailing the Center. All catalog and search proceeds go toward maintenance of the Clearinghouse and the subsidy of free materials for prisoners and their families. The Clearinghouse is supported solely through income earned by these sales.

For more information on ordering items from the CCIP Clearinghouse Project, you may write or email the Center at:

The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents
P.O. Box 41-286
Eagle Rock, California 90041
Email: cciponline@yahoo.com

The CCIP Clearinghouse was on hiatus since April 1, 2010 while new items were acquired for the collection and a new catalog was prepared for publication. The Clearinghouse will reopen on October 1, 2010.



Fathers Sharing Books Still Going Strong

The Fathers Sharing Books program at Stanley (Wisconsin) Correctional Institution is going strong after seven years. Last month, another successful Fathers Sharing Books program class and recording session was completed for 33 fathers. The program was initiated by teacher Diane Birch in 2003. Dan Benik, Warden at that time, and Peg Meyers, former Education Director, agreed the program was a great opportunity for incarcerated fathers at SCI.

The first class consisted of seven fathers anxious to record a VHS tape and have it mailed to their child/children. These men participated in a weeklong class to learn about children's literature and how to select age appropriate material. They also learned how to encourage lifelong reading and learning. The program started with 82 books that were purchased, donated, or collected from various people. At the time, the library at SCI had very few children's books on its shelves. Fathers had to pay \$3.75 for the tape, postage and mailing envelope.

Many changes in the program have occurred since that first class. The library now has a nice collection of books for children and young adults. Class size has increased and offers the opportunity to more fathers. It also allows past class participants to continue to record and send new DVDs to their child/children. Some of the fathers entered the program when their children were under the age of 11. Today some of those fathers are still participating by choosing material suitable for young adults. The fathers read a chapter or two out of a book and then encourage their kids to get the books and finish the story. After all, encouraging learning and reading doesn't stop when children reach age 11.

Changes in technology also have occurred. VHS tapes are no longer the best way to record, so the switch to DVDs was made. By making the switch, the program has also become more cost effective for fathers. Fathers now pay \$2.50 for the DVD, envelope, and postage.

In 2009, the Wisconsin Literacy Council awarded "The First Lady Jessica Doyle Award for Family Literacy" to the Fathers Sharing Books Program at SCI. The Literacy Council recognized the importance of fathers staying connected with their children through the program.

Feedback from the fathers that have participated in the program has been very positive. They report that their children are excited to receive the DVD and play it over and over. They also say the program is a way for them to remain connected to their children. Many of them don't receive regular visits at Stanley because of distance and financial reasons.

Support for the program at Stanley starts in the Warden's office and extends throughout the institution. Fathers are excused, with prior permission, from their regular assignments to attend the class for a short period of time. Recording is scheduled to minimize further disruptions.

Since 2003, literally hundreds of fathers have participated in the program. Studies have shown that when inmates have family ties and support, the rate of recidivism goes down. Hopefully, as these men are released back into the community, instead of sending an inmate home, we'll be sending a father home.

by: Diane Birch
Stanley Correctional Institution

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to www.ceawisconsin.org



Efficiency Tips for Busy Parents

It's the ultimate challenge: working, raising your kids, and addressing an endless list of domestic chores. Follow these ten time-management tips and put a little more time in each day!

#1: Keep a log

Although this takes some time, it's a necessary exercise that will help you identify the time-wasters in your life. For one week, record your activities in half-hour periods. You can make one entry each day for your time at work and asleep. Don't cheat. If you usually crash in front of the tube for two hours every night, don't change your routine while keeping your log.

#2: Set priorities

Your log will show you how individual activities consume your time. Decide which activities are most important to you and which you can live without. These can be tough choices, but not making them deprives you of the time you need to really enjoy your life. Once you've set your priorities, don't add a new activity unless you subtract one. If you regularly put in extra hours on the job or bring home unfinished paperwork, you may need to discuss your workload with your boss or explore other career options.

#3: Delegate

You're probably doing chores you could pass to others. If your children are old enough, have them help around the house. Consider paying a neighborhood teen to mow your lawn. If you're in charge of the PTA fund-raiser, divide the job into several tasks and recruit volunteers to handle them.

#4: Lower your standards

Resist the urge to do things yourself because you think you'll do it better than anyone else. Maybe your standards are too high. Is it really important to keep your house and yard perfect? What's wrong with convenience foods and trips to McDonald's when you're busy? Your children will have fonder memories of the times you play with them than of the cleanliness of your floors.

#5: Don't over-program your kids

They need downtime, too. Even if they beg to sign up for every program in sight, restrict the number. They need to learn to prioritize, just as you do. Besides, the more organized activities your kids attend, the more *you're* called upon to do.

#6: Schedule some fun

Don't leave it to chance that you'll spend a leisurely weekend with your kids, go on a date with your spouse, or pursue a personal interest. Put them on your calendar, and don't let other things encroach.

#7: Take care of yourself

Give health a high priority. Don't shortchange the hours you need to sleep and the time you should exercise.

#8: Share the load

You can make your own and your friends' lives easier with carpools, baby-sitting coops, and other parental-cooperation schemes.

#9: Learn to say no

You don't have to agree to every request. That includes those from close friends and relatives. Consider how much time the activity will consume and whether you really want to do it. Apply the subtraction technique from Step #2.

#10: Relax

Stress breeds stress. Don't let yourself stay so keyed up that you can't enjoy the free time you've produced with Steps #1 through 9.



***Bud, Not Buddy* Invites Readers to Examine their Families**

Can a book written about a boy who lived over 70 years ago be relevant to students in a correctional classroom? I have found that *Bud, Not Buddy*, by Christopher Paul Curtis, captures the interest of my students and invites them to compare their lives with his.

Bud, Not Buddy is winner of the Newberry Medal and Coretta Scott King Awards.

Bud, Not Buddy is a 1936 book but the character comes alive when read and studied in your Book Club/Parenting Session. 19 year-old Bud has run away from foster care to search for his father. *Bud, Not Buddy* is a great book to look at all the interests and strategies of this young boy. Why did the author write this book and where does it take place? Every couple of chapters, have your students talk about character traits, humor of this lad and why he would try such a venture. Use read-alouds, journal writings, contrast and compare, and question-answer-predict for the outcome of the story. Brainstorm about the character, plot and setting. Have your students sketch the story in summary. Compare today's family with Bud's. How are they similar and how are they different? Compare how these issues were handled in 1936 versus today -- orphaned children, social services for people, friendships, modes of transportation and families.

This book comes with adventure, humor and character. It is just one book that will help your students understand parents, roles and responsibilities in a different setting.

by: Cheri Wontor, Parenting Teacher
Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility

Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry

In 2007, the Center for Effective Public Policy and its partners, the Urban Institute and the Carey Group, were selected by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance to serve as the training and technical assistance providers to the Fiscal Year 2007 Prisoner Reentry Initiative grantees. The project team served in this capacity from April 2008 to June 2010.

As a part of its duties, the Center developed a series of tools to assist grantees in specific areas of their reentry work. The final products of this work include eleven Coaching Packets in three series. These Coaching Packets offer practical value beyond the jurisdictions involved in this initiative and are available to criminal justice professionals and their partners interested in enhancing their strategies for reducing recidivism and improving offender outcomes.

- **Series 1** provides a blueprint for an effective offender reentry system. This series provides a conceptual framework for addressing prisoner reentry at the policy level; outlines a strategic planning process to support implementation efforts; and explores the establishment of successful collaborative partnerships at the policy and case management levels.
- **Series 2** addresses key issues related to the delivery of evidence-based services to offenders. This series summarizes the key literature with regard to implementing evidence-based practices; explores advances in approaches to case management; addresses the important role of staff in changing offender behavior; and summarizes research and practice as it relates to working with women offenders, engaging families, and mentoring.
- **Series 3** provides guidance and tools to ensure that reentry efforts achieve their intended outcomes. This series describes methods to assess the effectiveness of reentry efforts and offers strategies for achieving continuous quality improvement.



The Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry Coaching Packet focuses on a strength-based, family-focused approach to offender management. Included in this packet are sections on:

- The Effects of Incarceration on Families
- Families as a Natural Resource for Enhancing Reentry Efforts
- Research on Families and Family Support in Reentry Efforts
- Engaging Families as Part of an Evidence-Based Approach to Offender Reentry
- Implementing a Strength-Based, Family-Focused Approach

To download copies of the Coaching Packets, visit the Center's website at <http://www.cepp.com/coaching.htm>. To obtain further information on the use or content of any of the Coaching Packets, or on the 2007 PRI Training and Technical Assistance Program, please contact:

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Experts Point to Five Vital Skills for Kids

Positive psychology expert and mother of four Dr. Karen Reivich is a top advisor and contributor to the Fishful Thinking Program, a resource that provides parents with everyday, fun and simple strategies that they can use to help raise children with a positive outlook on life and who can confidently handle the challenges that come their way. Fishful Thinking focuses on five key skills that all parents can teach to their children: optimism, resilience, goal setting, empowerment and emotional awareness. At www.FishfulThinking.com parents will find activities to do with their children to help strengthen these important life skills.

Optimism --- Developing this skill helps children learn to focus on the positive, without denying the negative, and to channel their energy toward what they can control, rather than what is out of their control. Optimistic people work toward creating positive change.

Emotional awareness --- A building block for a healthy emotional life, emotional awareness is the ability to identify and express one's own feelings and to empathize with what others are feeling.

Goal setting/hope --- Hope leads to the drive to set and pursue goals, take prudent risks and initiate action. Children who are taught hope learn problem-solving skills and how to develop personal strengths and social resources.

Resilience --- Resilience is critical to a successful, happy life. It is the ability to bounce back from setbacks, learn from failure, find motivation in challenges and believe in our own abilities to deal with the stresses and difficulties of everyday life.

Empowerment --- Children with the ability to believe in themselves know they are effective in the world. Having learned their own strengths and weaknesses, they rely on their strengths to handle life's challenges.

Find more parenting tips and tools at www.FishfulThinking.com

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Dear Reader:

Again, we look at the school year as a great time of year. Kids and parents ready their children for another great chapter in their learning experience. What can be more fun than seeing them prepare for life with learning. As kids go off to school, many things are still unknown – what they will learn, who will become their friends and how this will prepare them for the big world outside.

Children do well in school if they have the necessary literacy skills. Children do not enter school as "blank slates." Students need a literacy rich environment at home prior to entering school. The ability to read determines their later success in school. The early years are extremely critical when the brain is developing. Students who grow up in poverty rarely catch up and often drop out of school at early ages. Schools often fail to recognize the problem before it is too late. As students fall behind, especially in reading, it is often too late to catch up and recover. The one thing we can do as educators is to support and increase their reading abilities by providing many reading opportunities – book clubs, journal writing, reading theatre, etc.

At the heart of school readiness are early literacy programs, which can develop skills of what they know before they can actually read. These skills are critical to reading and can be correlated to reading when they can't actually read. They are:

1. Phonological Awareness – knowing sounds in words
2. Print Acknowledgement – being excited and interested in books.
3. Story Telling Skills – describing and telling stories
4. Vocabulary Enrichment – learning words and the meaning of the words
5. Print Awareness – knowing how to handle books and following pages in order.
6. Letter Awareness – knowing letter names, sounds and writing them.

Helping children build early literacy skills assists them in obtaining the best possible outcomes in the school. Reading is fun and creates a bond with their family, caregivers and communities. It involves them in school which will become a stakeholder in their cities where the children will live and work.

Pass it on !!!!!!!

Cheri Wontor

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