

# Parenting Connection

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## Grant Initiative Bridges Programming Gap

“Rising numbers of children are affected by the incarceration of a parent. As of 2006, an estimated 7,476,500 children had a parent who was incarcerated or under correctional supervision.” These are the numbers reported in *The Evaluation of the Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and their Partners (MFS-IP)*.

The evaluation report also concluded, “Research on the effectiveness of parenting programs for incarcerated and reentering men is encouraging: participants report improved perceptions of the importance of fatherhood, increased parenting skills, and more frequent contact with their children.”

Despite the increasing number of families affected by incarceration and the effectiveness of parenting programs for incarcerated and reentering men, few correctional facilities provide family strengthening programs. In fact, only about 10% of fathers in state prison report participating in a parenting class. The evaluation report concludes, “This gap represents a lost opportunity to intervene with at-risk families to improve family functioning, particularly during the critical period before reentry.”

In an attempt to start bridging this gap, in September 2006, as part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) initiative to support healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, thirteen grants were awarded to 12 different states to implement multiple activities to support and sustain marriages and families of fathers during and after incarceration. Grantees combine established approaches to parenting skills training with innovative efforts to improve relationships between co-parents and increase father-child contact during incarceration. Grantees may also provide support for reentering the family and community from prison, parenting support including visitation during incarceration, and education and employment services during and after incarceration.

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While incarceration takes a huge toll on families and children, research suggests that supportive families and positive marital/partner relationships are important for promoting positive adaptation for children of the incarcerated and for preventing subsequent criminal involvement among reintegrating prisoners.

In April 2010, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) published a *Research Brief* to give an update on the Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and their Partners initiative. It can be accessed at [www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/mfs-ip/](http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/mfs-ip/) . Go to the “Available Publications” and click on “Brief #5.”

This brief highlights approaches to supporting incarcerated and reentering fathers in strengthening their parenting and co-parenting relationships. MFS-IP grantees employed varied and comprehensive strategies, including parenting skills training, relationship building and co-parenting support, child-friendly visitation, enhanced communication (e.g., video diaries, letter writing), and auxiliary services including case management and vocational training. They aimed not just to increase father-child contact, but to improve the long-term quality of family relationships by teaching skills important for family functioning and providing opportunities to practice these skills. Although numerous barriers exist, grantees were able to successfully implement these services, and a rigorous evaluation is currently underway to assess their effectiveness. The goal of these evaluations is to identify relationship-strengthening strategies that can be successfully delivered within the constraints of the correctional system; assess the effectiveness of such programs on family functioning, relationship quality and stability, and recidivism; and make recommendations for how these programs can be integrated and sustained with the correctional system.

The implementation and impact evaluations will continue over a seven-year period, and will include on-site data collection regarding program implementation and a longitudinal survey data collection effort to study the effect of program participation in comparison with comparable individuals not participating in the MFS-IP programs. This evaluation will add to research, policy, and practice by helping to determine what types of programs work best for those involved in the criminal justice system, what does not work, and what effects these programs may have on fostering healthy marriages, families, and children.

In future issues of this *Parenting Connection* newsletter, we will include articles on some of the programs that are part of the Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and their Partners initiative.

## Engaging Offenders’ Families in Reentry

The quality of their relationship with family members is the most important factor in enabling inmates to make a successful transition back into the community, but maintaining family ties while incarcerated can be difficult.

### Challenges to Staying in Contact with Inmates

In their publication, *Engaging Offenders’ Families in Reentry*, author: Margaret diZerega, Vera Institute of Justice and editors: Madeline M. Carter, Center for Effective Public Policy and Rachelle Giguere, Center for Effective Public Policy list the challenges family members faced in staying in contact with a family member who was serving time in prison.

Of 247 families surveyed by *Naser & Visher* in 2006, these were the chief challenges reported:

- Facility was too far away = 75%
- Cost of making or receiving phone calls = 52%
- Cost of visiting = 38%



- Prison environment is unpleasant = 36%
- No transportation = 34%
- Could not miss work = 32%
- Visitation schedule = 26%

## Family Visitation in Prison

Allowing family visitation in prison is critical to maintaining family ties while offenders are incarcerated. Correctional facilities staff might assist offenders in maintaining contact with their families in the following ways:

### Develop agency policy that recognizes and supports a family-focused approach:

- Build visitation into the incarcerated individual's regular routine.
- Refrain from using contact with families as leverage or consequences for misconduct.
- Employ staff in the reception and visitation areas based on their skills in interacting with families.
- Offer visitation hours outside of regular working hours to facilitate family schedules.
- Allow and encourage inmates who are parents to visit with their children as frequently as possible (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly visits).
- Create a visiting environment that is welcoming to children and families (e.g., provide games and activities for children of different ages, allow inmates to have physical contact with children, when appropriate).

### Keep family members informed of policies and events:

- Send information to families with the most up-to-date visitation policies and procedures.
- Maintain a staffed hotline or call center for families who have questions about the visitation process or family events.
- Assign case managers to be present to meet families during visitation and answer their questions.

### Provide incentives for families to stay engaged in offenders' lives:

- Host formal and informal events to encourage families to visit the facility (e.g., graduations, holiday parties).
- Provide or help to assure that transportation is available for families.
- Offer the use of video-teleconferencing for long-distance visitation and parent-teacher conferences.

In addition to the *Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry* publication, the Center for Effective Public Policy and its partners, the Urban Institute and the Carey Group, developed a series of tools to assist correctional staff 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.

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 contact:

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# New Year's Resolutions to Make with Your Kids

The National Fatherhood Initiative suggests that by making your New Year's resolutions *with* your kids for 2011, you'll be more likely to follow through. And, it's an easy opportunity to grow closer to your children. Here are five resolutions to make with your kids:

- **Be Active.** Make a pact with your kids to get regular exercise. Whether you institute an evening family walk or play a favorite sport together, resolve to get active.
- **Learn Something New.** Picking up a new hobby or activity with your kids is an easy way to bond and to understand their personalities better. To make sure they're engaged, let your kids choose the activity you learn.
- **Save More Money.** As soon as your children start to earn an allowance, this is a lesson they can learn. Save money with your kids in 2011 and talk to them about the importance of sound money management.
- **Put First Things First.** This resolution works well with school-aged kids or teens who have a lot of homework. Resolve to prioritize well with your kids, so that you put important tasks first, and they focus on making schoolwork their priority.
- **Be Organized.** Make it a resolution to keep your life organized and your kids can join in by resolving to keep their rooms clean . . . or to stop losing permission slips and important school items.

Whatever you resolve, involve your family and use this opportunity to teach your kids some important lessons as you plan for the year ahead.

More valuable articles and information about the National Fatherhood Initiative may be found at [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

## Top 10 Tips for Parents Who Have a Child with Learning Disabilities

Find strategies to help cope with your child's disability, and tips to help your child manage in and out of the classroom.

### 1. Learn All You Can About the Disability

Learning disabilities take many forms. As a knowledgeable informed parent, you will be better able to communicate with teachers about your child, help your child with schoolwork, and develop strategies to help him or her navigate social situations.

### 2. Keep in Contact with Your Child's Teacher(s)

Teachers want to work with parents. Let them know your child behaves at home, any difficult times he or she is going through, any subjects or lessons he or she has particularly enjoyed in class. Parents can also play an essential role in working with teachers to develop instructional and behavior strategies that can be used both in school and at home.

### 3. Keep a Profile of What Your Child Does Well

This can be important for your child at school and on a personal level. Too many times in the school arena, we tend to focus on the areas in which a child needs to improve. A "Strengths Profile" can help teachers and parents remember areas in which the child excels and that can be used to build curriculum that is



meaningful to the child. A "Strengths Profile" is also a handy tool parents can use to banish the times when a child is feeling frustrated, a failure, or unable to cope.

#### **4. Help Your Child Understand the Effect the Learning Disability Will Have on Him.**

Even when a child accepts that he or she has a learning disability, the child may not realize how it will affect his or her life. Parents should help their child understand the learning disability may mean he or she will have difficulty reading, that others may become frustrated with the child or that the child may misread social cues, which can impact his or her social life. Of course, the parents and teachers could also develop intervention strategies to help the child cope with these factors.

#### **5. Help Your Child Get Organized**

For many children with learning disabilities, organization is a difficult concept. Parents should not only buy their child an assignment book, they should also teach him how to use it. For example, the child should not only put down the day project is due, he should also break the projects into steps and assign due dates to each one. If possible, parents should also get extra copies to textbooks to keep at home.

#### **6. Involve Your Child in Extra-Curricular Activities**

Some children with learning disabilities have a difficult time making friends and/or excelling in the school environment. Getting your child involved in extra-curricular activities provides another avenue in which your child can achieve success, as well as gain new friends.

#### **7. Involve Your Child in Helping Someone Else**

Too often students with learning disabilities fall into the "poor me" syndrome. Parents can not only put a stop to this, but also boost their child's self confidence by giving him or her opportunity to help someone else. Children with learning disabilities have successfully tutored younger children, helped the elderly, worked in homeless shelters, or in other capacities. Even very young children have served others successfully.

#### **8. Keep Your Expectations for Your Child High But Realistic**

It is extremely important that you keep your expectations for your child high, and let your child know that you believe in him or her. If a particular task or assignment is difficult for your child, the answer is not necessarily to make it easier but to help your child find a way to do it. Also, don't forget to ask your child to think. Children with learning disabilities are often very creative and insightful. By asking their opinions and allowing them to figure out the answers to problems, you let them know you trust their intellect and their judgment.

#### **9. Help Your Child Learn to Ask for What He Needs**

While children with learning disabilities often know what they need to learn (such as sitting close to the teacher), they may be afraid to ask for "special treatment." By teaching your child self-advocacy skills, you help him or her get the assistance they need to progress in any situation.

#### **10. Lastly, Join or Form a Group of Parents with Similar Situations**

You can learn invaluable information from other parents. And they can be a much needed source of support in times of stress!!!

These tips can also be helpful in working with our inmate students. Many of them have learning disabilities that we know little about.

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





# Re-Energize Yourself at the Fulfilling the Promise Conference

**March 16-17, 2011  
Kalahari Resorts  
Wisconsin Dells, WI**

Are you looking for new ideas and approaches . . . chance to re-energize yourself? At the Fulfilling the Promise conference, you'll hear from parent education and home visitation professionals, peers with innovative programs, and experts in related fields.

This year's 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Fulfilling the Promise Conference will give participants a chance to select from 27 workshops, 4 full-day training institutes, and 9 half-day training institutes. The conference for parent educators and home visitors will be held on March 16-17, 2011 at the Kalahari Resorts in Wisconsin Dells.

Coined "The Adversity Coach" for her belief in embracing and utilizing the obstacles in our lives, keynote speaker Nicole Lynn Lewis will share "The Gloriously Simple Way to Get What You Want." Nicole is a former teen mother --- turned author, motivational speaker, and founder of the nonprofit organization Generation Hope, which matches sponsors with teen parents attending college from Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia. She has dedicated herself both personally and professionally to giving people and organizations the tools they need to reach their goals.

Among the workshops scheduled is "Hidden Victims of Incarceration" which will be presented by Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (Wisconsin) teachers Mary Pohlman and Michael Troutd.

The statistics in 2006 indicated that 7.5 million children in this country had a parent who was somehow involved in the corrections system. The numbers of incarcerated adults are on the rise. Mary and Michael will share what research has found regarding the effects of parental incarceration on children. They will share how re-entry programs strengthen inmates' parenting skills and help build stronger bonds with kids, thereby reducing the incidence of generational familial incarceration. Participants will discuss methods they could use to help children and incarcerated parents maintain or build a relationship.

For a conference brochure and to register online go to:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/conference/index.cfm>

## Save these dates:

**Region III & IV Correctional Education Association Conference  
May 2-3, 2011  
Osthoff Resort  
Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin**





**Tuesday, March 29, 2011  
Madison**

Bethel Lutheran Church  
312 Wisconsin Avenue  
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

\$40 registration (includes breakfast and lunch)

**Registration opens January 2011. Watch for more information!**

We need you in Madison!  
Learn about the state budget and the new governor!  
Meet with your legislators!

The day will begin with advocacy training that you can use when you meet with your legislators. You will get a briefing on the state budget and what is in it for kids. We have invited Governor-Elect Walker and legislative leaders to speak on their priorities for the state. Conclude the day by meeting with your legislators in the state capitol.

Questions? Contact Wenona Wolf at [wwolf@wccf.org](mailto:wwolf@wccf.org) or at 608-284-0580 x 304

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



**Dear Reader:**

Another new year and many things to be thankful for --- family, friends and yes --- even our job. As New Year's resolutions go, if we make them and keep them --- we are blessed. Breaking them just gives us more practice for the next New Year.

As we think about the New Year we want to make someone else more comfortable, if we can. That is why my husband and I volunteer at a local hospital in the nursery rocking preemie infants on a Sunday morning in the wee hours. Not only does it help the regular staff, it gives us a sense of satisfaction knowing that we care and want to help out.

There are times I often say, "Do I really have to get up to do this?" My husband says, "Yes, we really need to do this." After we come home and enjoy the Sunday paper and a cup of coffee, we often say, "We remember those night time duties and are glad we have grown children." The next Sunday comes along and we enjoy the uninterrupted hours when no one else is around and we see the sun rise and people begin to stir.

What a great way to help out. Find something to do for someone else this year and be thankful for the small things!!!

Have a wonderful New Year!!!!!!!!!!!!

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