

# Parenting Connection

Volume 8 Issue 2

September/October 2011

## Gotham Gazette Examines Link Between Incarceration and Poverty

The Gotham Gazette founded in 1999 is an online publication of the Citizens Union Foundation, a government watchdog group focusing on issues confronting New York City. The site is non-ideological and non-partisan. Recently the Gotham Gazette has been running a series of articles that examine what government is — and is not — doing to combat poverty in the city. They have examined specific problems and the policies that address or contribute to them.

An August 23, 2011 article, "Helping Parents Behind Bars be Parents" by Jason Lewis, looks at the relationship between incarceration and poverty. Specifically, the article focuses on services provided by the Osborne Association including the Parenting Course and Healthy Marriage Seminar run at Sing Sing Prison and the Children of Incarcerated Parents program run in the community. The entire Gotham Gazette article, "Helping Parents Behind Bars be Parents" by Jason Lewis may be found at <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/socialservices/20110823/15/3590>.

"Many people are blind to the immense economic, psychological, educational and social burdens that incarceration imposes on children, families and entire communities," said Tanya Krupat, Program Director for the Osborne Association's Children of Incarcerated Parents initiative.

Changing that, she said, will require "sensitivity training — really appealing to people's hearts, but it's also reframing. Under the heading of criminal, or offender, or inmate and convict, they're real people, with kids and with families, with stories, with lives."

### The Burden of Incarceration

In the article, Jason Lewis describes the burden that incarceration has on the estimated 105,000 minor

#### In This Issue

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | Gotham Gazette Examines Link Between Incarceration and Poverty  |
| 4  | Summer Camp Reunites Dads and Kids                              |
| 5  | What Are "Soft Skills" and Are They Hard to Teach?              |
| 6  | Resources for Juvenile Offenders and Troubled Teens             |
| 7  | The Parenting Magic Word and Ten Ways to Use It                 |
| 9  | It's Time to Update the Guide to Successful Parenting Programs  |
| 10 | Brain Blog: Help! My Child Is Screaming on the Floor, Now What? |
| 12 | Editorial   |

The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association. Send articles and comments to:

Barbara E. Rasmussen  
Racine Correctional Institution  
2019 Wisconsin Street  
Sturtevant, WI 53177-0900  
[Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov)  
Phone: 262-886-3214 ext. 3530

Co-Editor: Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin  
Proofreader: Laura Reisinger,  
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



(continued from page 1)

children in New York City who have at least one parent incarcerated. In addition, thousands of single mothers, single fathers, grandparents, foster parents, extended-family members and family friends are left to care for those children — and are also deeply affected by the incarceration.

The brunt of the "mass incarceration" that has occurred from 1970 to 2005 has especially fallen on members of inner-city communities — particularly African-American and Hispanic men — as evidenced by the fact that 1 in every 15 black males and 1 in every 36 Hispanic males over the age of 18 are incarcerated, according to the Pew Center on States.

The Osborne Association believes that providing individuals, families and communities with access to education and support services will substantially reduce the negative effects of incarceration. In addition to helping the child while the parent is incarcerated, such services can provide benefits after incarceration. Studies have found that prisoners who maintain ties with their families are less likely to return to prison and have lower rates of drug use than those without such connections.

## **Recalling Incarcerated Parents**

Jason Lewis cites a June 2011 Osborne Association report that shows the response that a child has to the incarceration of a parent depends on a number of different circumstances, including the age and developmental level of the child, how much the incarcerated parent was involved in the kid's life, the stability of the child's home, and whether the child must go into foster care. In most cases, not only does the child have to contend with the loss of a parent, but also must grapple with shame and stigma attached to incarceration. Some children externalize the negative emotions associated with the incarceration, acting out and behaving poorly. This affects their ability to learn in school and places extra stress on their caregiver.

## **Resisting Help**

Children need outside support to help them properly deal with the trauma of a parent's incarceration. Despite that, they often reject advice and inquiries from outsiders because they have had bad experiences when opening up to others.

The Osborne Association advocates training for teachers, guidance counselors and psychologists to help them properly handle and help students with incarcerated parents. The organization also is pushing for increased community outreach to educate people on the realities of incarceration and reduce the stigma associated with it.

Often, community and family members can make it difficult for kids to escape the shadow of their parents' imprisonment. This not only leads to individuals having lower personal expectations, but it also affects the expectations of entire communities.

Despite the hardships that the young men and women of Osborne have faced, many still hope for a productive present and a brighter tomorrow.

## **Parenting from Prison**

According to Jason Lewis, many outsiders and even caregivers believe that a child may be better off not having any contact with their incarcerated parent. However, studies have shown that children benefit when they can have positive and frequent contact with their incarcerated parent.

Many people object to children visiting their parents in prison, perhaps fearing the children will become even more distressed when they have to leave their parent at the end of the visit. But, if the parent and child have consistent contact and positive exchanges, the child will become more comfortable with the reality of the situation, according to the Osborne report.



## The Economic Strain

Beyond the psychological issues, incarceration places an economic burden on families. The mother is usually left to bear the responsibility of supporting the family when the father is in prison. Even if that father lived apart from his children prior to going to prison, chances are that he contributed to the family's economic well-being in some way, according to the Osborne report.

That changes when the sentence begins. If a father had been paying child support, he will likely be unable to continue to make that contribution while he is in prison. Depending on the degree of that support, his imprisonment could leave the mother with a significant financial burden.

The situation differs dramatically if the mother goes to jail. "When a mother is incarcerated, it is much less likely that the father will assume care. It is more likely that grandparents, especially grandmothers, will," according to the report. "Grandparents, though, are not always in the ideal physical or economical condition to meet their grandchildren's needs."

The economic effects can linger long after the parent leaves prison. A 2010 Pew Center study found that serving time in prison reduced a man's earnings by 40 percent a year. "Even when paroled inmates are able to find jobs," the New York Times has reported, "they earn only half as much as people of the same social and economic background who have not been incarcerated."

## Finding Funding

The Osborne Association advocates more federal, state and city level government economic and legal support to caregivers and more programs for children with incarcerated parents. In times when governments are cutting budgets, money to accomplish this could be hard to come by. Even during sound economic times, New York has had difficulty fitting such services into its budget.

New York's significant reforms to drug sentencing laws — most notably the 2009 repeal of the harsh Rockefeller Drugs Laws — have led to steady declines in prison populations. These declines have allowed New York State to save money by closing several state prisons. However, the significant reduction in prison population has not resulted in a reinvestment of any of those monies into community based supports.

## Still a Parent

Despite the problems incarceration creates, it does not have to signal the demise of a family. There are some people out there who think that a prisoner could never be a fit parent — that incarcerated individuals will never change. But experts' opinions are changing.

"A father in prison is better than no father at all," wrote Omar Williams, a Sing Sing inmate and graduate of Osborne's parenting course. "It is better for a child to be loved, though distance separates the father and the child, than to believe that he or she is not loved at all."

## Save the Date!



**CEA-Wisconsin State Conference**

**May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**The Concourse Hotel & Governor's Club  
Downtown Madison**



# Summer Camp Reunites Dads and Kids

Hope House is a non-profit organization in the Washington DC area that began in 1998 to provide cutting edge programs to strengthen families and, in particular, the relational bonds between children and their fathers imprisoned far from home. In addition, their goals include reducing the isolation, stigma, shame and risk these families experience when fathers and husbands are imprisoned and raising public awareness about this most at-risk population.

Among the key services provided by Hope House is a reading program in available in 13 facilities, where fathers tape themselves reading a book to their children. More than 10,000 recordings have been produced in the ten years that Hope House has been open. They also provide a teleconferencing service at one facility, allowing fathers in far off facilities to be in contact with their children.

Another of Hope House's programs was recently highlighted on NBC's *Today Show*. Video of the segment, "Prison Camp: Getting to Know Dad Behind Bars," may be found at <http://on.msnbc.com/p3pRaj>. Since its founding, the Washington DC-based Hope House has hosted these camps all over the country, in prisons that range from low to maximum security. While there are many programs across the country for incarcerated mothers, Hope House's offerings are the first of their kind for male inmates and their children.

Kids, ages 9 to 14, spend their days with their dads in the prison gym or visiting room. Together, they dance, drum, make murals and create things like a family crest. At night, the kids and counselors sleep at an off-site facility.

Hope House Executive Director Carol Fennelly explains, "Guys in prison are forgotten as dads; they are just seen as convicts. What we try to do is lift them up and honor them as fathers. Regardless of the circumstances that brought someone to prison, he is still some child's dad."

Inmates apply to be considered for camp and must have a clean conduct record for a year to be accepted. Fennelly and her team conduct three meetings with the prison dads before camp begins, covering ground rules and expectations and their relationship with their kids and watching a video of previous camp sessions.

Class runs from 10am to 3pm over four days with crafts, games, music, creative writing. On the first day, fathers work together to create a show for their children. Another day is movie day, complete with popcorn. For many children, this is the first opportunity to go to the movies with their dad. There is also a large art project, creating life-size murals around the theme, "What would you do together if dad weren't in prison?" Father and child work together and then talk about their art once it's completed.

On the final day of camp, the kids perform for their dads, and there is a teary birthday party to celebrate all of the birthdays spent apart. "Even hardened prison staff can't handle all of the emotion of the last day," Fennelly says. "There isn't a dry eye in the room."

Fennelly has as many stories as she has had campers: the child who was meeting his father for the first time; the inmate labeled difficult by the prison guards who transformed his behavior so he could qualify for the program and maintained good behavior for three years so he could reunite with his child each summer.

"What this camp does for these dads is to have them come face-to-face with the consequences they've made. When they have to look in their child's eyes, they get it — sometimes for the first time."

For a slide show of Hope House's summer program or to learn more about Hope House go to [www.hopehousedc.org](http://www.hopehousedc.org).

information from: [meyerfoundation.org](http://meyerfoundation.org) and [hopehousedc.org](http://hopehousedc.org) websites



# What Are 'Soft Skills' and Are They Hard to Teach Kids?

GetCareerWise.com publishes creative career exploration and life skills resources that help parents, teachers and mentors prepare kids for entering the workforce. It was founded by two former Human Resources marketing professionals. The following article was published by Co-Owner Susan Schneider on their blog: [www.GetCareerWise.com/blog4](http://www.GetCareerWise.com/blog4). Their website is [www.GetCareerWise.com](http://www.GetCareerWise.com). Feel free to pass these tips on to your students who have children at an age where they are starting to think about jobs and their education.

What are soft skills? In the employment world, they refer to skills professionals use throughout their career lives to help them:

- get and keep jobs (and maybe even promotions)
- perform job responsibilities successfully
- move ever forward toward career goals
- build their own confidence and self-esteem and become respected by others

In other words, they are the life skills that help all of us — some better than others — navigate through a crowded world with confidence, grace and the respect of others. When is it too soon to start helping kids develop and understand the importance of soft skills? **Never.**

Just stay age appropriate and recognize when a wonderful trait shows up in your child's everyday life. (A side benefit of this practice is that you will be strengthening your soft and mentoring skills along the way.)

Soft skills aren't hard to learn or teach a child. But sometimes, taking the time to point them out is. Maybe that's another skill to add to the list! Here are some soft skills frequently used by employers and educators and some ideas for making them appropriate for kids:

1. **Strong Work Ethic** — "You have been working on that history project a long time and your effort really shows. I'm proud of your focus and commitment to doing a good job."
2. **Positive Attitude** — "I know you're very disappointed that we can't afford that new video game right now. I really appreciate and admire how maturely you're reacting to our family budgeting situation."
3. **Good Communication Skills** — "When I ask 'How was school today?' I'd really appreciate more than a mumbled 'ok.' Please share something special you did or learned. I really enjoy how you describe things."
4. **Time Management Abilities** — "You haven't been late for the bus once this week? And you made your bed every morning? Bravo!"
5. **Problem-Solving Skills** — "Figuring out how to fix your grandmother's garage door took a lot of patience and resourcefulness. I'm really proud of you."
6. **Acting as a Team Player** — "I saw you pitch in to help your coach put away the equipment without being asked after practice. I'm sure he really appreciated that."
7. **Self-Confidence** — "You are so good at \_\_\_\_\_. Every time I see you do that, I'm in awe of how easily it comes to you. You are very talented."
8. **Ability to Accept and Learn from Criticism** — "It's hard for anyone to hear negative feedback, but you seem to be learning to keep it in perspective. I know you realize it's meant to be helpful, not hurtful. That's something I need to work on myself."
9. **Flexibility/Adaptability** — "I appreciate how flexible you were with your plans today. I hated to ask you to change them. You're such a help to the family!"
10. **Working Well Under Pressure** — "You had exams all week and yet you were never once in a bad mood with any of us. I wish you'd teach me how to stay calm when I have a lot on my mind."



# Resources on Juvenile Offenders & Troubled Teens

Earlier this year while doing a research project on juvenile offenders, Patti Moore came across our [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org) website. As a result of her research, Patti ended up publishing an article that lists many valuable resources relating to areas impacting troubled teens. Patti Moore's article can be found at: <http://www.forensicscience.net/juvenile-offenders>.

Patti suggested that the information she compiled be passed on to readers of our *CEA-Wisconsin* and *Parenting Connection* newsletters. Here is Patti's article:

## Juvenile Offenders & Troubled Teens

With crime in certain areas of America reaching new highs, we thought it important to address the bounty of resources dedicated to protecting young offenders and bringing about effective change in their circumstances. It is always a difficult situation to handle when a young person commits a crime. Fortunately, many individuals and organizations are passionate about promoting a change of heart in juvenile delinquents and getting them back on track to a successful future. Here are several links to the best online resources for minor offenders and teenagers in trouble:

### Child Protective Services & Legal Assistance

1. [History of Child Protection in America](#). This site details America's longstanding determination to provide for the safety and well-being of its young people. It's a great place to begin to enlarge your perspective on it all.
2. [Child Welfare: Laws and Policies](#). Come to this page to keep yourself abreast of the latest in child protection legislation and procedures. It can also help you gauge to best time to call Child Protection Services.
3. [Definitions of Child Abuse](#). It can occasionally be difficult to determine whether a child is indeed suffering. Look here first for insight into the specifics of it all, with laws updated through 2009.
4. [Child Welfare League of America](#). This is an official national organization for the promotion of children's well-being throughout the country. It is a smart resource for learning more on children's protection.
5. [A Family's Account of CPS Action](#). This is a firsthand account of one's family's experience with Child Protective Services. The story is a great way to understand how CPS has real and long-lasting effects on communities.

### Mentor & Support Groups

1. [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#). One of the most effective ways to remedy or preempt a child's problems with the law is to have a strong mentor present. This organization has been heralded for its excellence in this area.
2. [YMCA](#). The Young Men's Christian Association has sidestepped any religious prejudice to provide nationally acclaimed mentorship and support for young people. It's smart to involve yourself with the Y in any possible way.
3. [Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System](#). This page will provide you a ton of information on the history of mentorship's positive effects on juvenile delinquents. It will also link you to the most beneficial programs in your area.
4. [About Juvenile Delinquents](#). This page will let you know a bit more on what exactly is entailed by the label "juvenile delinquent." It will also put you in touch with support and assistance resources.
5. [The Effect of Mentoring](#). This site spells it out to you loud and clear: Mentoring can prevent delinquency. The arguments laid out here will sway naysayers.



## Parent Resources

1. [Working with Children with Parents in Prison](#). Oftentimes, the parents of juvenile delinquents are overlooked in the situation. This site returns the focus of care and concern back toward them.
2. [Prison Families of New York](#). This state-specific site contains a wealth of information that will pertain to families all around the country. There's a real sense of compassion throughout.
3. [What Parents Should Know](#). This is a great site for parents to learn more about the ins and outs of the juvenile justice system. The language here is clear, simple, and precise.
4. [Juvenile Delinquency and Family Structure](#). This is an excellent essay depicting the details of families that fall through the cracks of juvenile dilemmas. It's quite long and well worth the read.
5. [How to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency](#). Contrary to popular belief, there's no such thing as a bad seed, and children can be saved from delinquency. This comprehensive article shows you how.

## School Programs & Resources

1. [Bootcamps for Teens](#). Sometimes an especially firm hand is needed to bring about new change in troubled teens. Look here for more information.
2. [Teen Boarding Schools](#). Though they've earned an unfairly maligned reputation, boarding schools can often be a great option for getting kids in line. Learn more about the process and great schools on this site.
3. [Educating Troubled Youth](#). The process of rehabilitating a troubled child will definitely involve an educational restructuring. This article provides a wealth on insights on these ideas.
4. [Parenting Teens: Education](#). This site will link you to a trove of resources designed to help the young adults in your life prosper in their schooling. Find help with slumping grades, bullying, and more.
5. [National Youth Network](#). This upstanding organization specializes in alternative forms of schooling and education for juvenile delinquents. You can inform yourself about the options available.

Source: Young Offenders & Teenagers in Trouble

# The Parenting Magic Word and Ten Ways to Use It

The quote, "We should educate while we care and care while we educate," sums up the parenting philosophy of Magda Gerber. After immigrating to the U.S. from her native Hungary in 1957, Magda Gerber, world-renowned child therapist and infant specialist, developed a revolutionary philosophy of infant care based on treating infants with respect and trust in their abilities to develop naturally at their own pace.

The following is an edited version of a June 22, 2011 post by Janet Lansbury on her website, [www.janetlansbury.com](http://www.janetlansbury.com). Janet is a parenting instructor and is on the Board of Directors of Resources for Infant Educators, a non-profit organization founded by Magda Gerber.

### Here is Janet Lansbury's post:

Magda Gerber extolled the power of a single word that is fundamental to her child care philosophy. This word reflects a core belief in a baby's natural abilities; respects his unique developmental timetable; and fulfills his need to experience mastery, be a creative problem solver and express feelings (even those that are hard for us to witness). The word is a simple, practical tool for understanding babies, providing love, attention and trust for humans of all ages.

The word is "**wait**." And here's how it works...

(continued on page 8)



**1. Wait for development** of an infant or toddler's motor skills, toilet learning, language and other preschool learning skills. Notice a child's satisfaction, comfort and self-pride when he is able to show you what he is ready to do, rather than the other way around. As Magda Gerber often said, "readiness is when they do it." *Ready babies do it better* (Hmmm... a bumper sticker?), and they own their achievement completely, relish it, and build self-confidence to last a lifetime.

**2. Wait before interrupting** and give babies the opportunity to continue what they are doing, learn more about what interests them, develop longer attention spans and become independent self-learners. When we wait while a newborn gazes at the ceiling and allow him to continue his train of thought, he is encouraged not only to keep thinking, but also to keep trusting his instincts. Refraining from interrupting gives our child the message that we value his chosen activities (and therefore him).

**3. Wait for problem solving** and allow a child the resilience-building struggle and frustration that usually precedes accomplishment. Wait to see first what a child is capable of doing on his own. When a baby is struggling to roll from back to tummy, try comforting with gentle words of encouragement before intervening and interrupting his process. Then if frustration mounts, pick him up and give him a break rather than turning him over and 'fixing' him. This encourages our baby to try, try again and eventually succeed, rather than believe himself incapable and expect others to do it for him. This holds true for the development of motor skills, struggles with toys, puzzles and equipment, even self-soothing abilities like finding his thumb rather than giving him a pacifier.

**4. Wait for discovery** rather than showing a child her new toy and how it works. *When you teach a child something, you take away forever his chance of discovering it for himself.* —Jean Piaget

**5. Wait and observe** to see what the child is really doing before jumping to conclusions. A baby reaching towards a toy might be satisfied to be stretching his arm and fingers, not expecting to accomplish a task. A toddler looking through a sliding glass door might be practicing standing or enjoying the view and not necessarily eager to go outside.

**6. Wait for conflict resolution** and give babies the opportunity to solve problems with their peers, which they usually do quite readily if we can remain calm and patient. And what may look like conflict to an adult is often just "playing together" through an infant or toddler's eyes.

**7. Wait for readiness** before introducing new activities and children can be active participants, embrace experiences more eagerly and confidently, and comprehend to learn far more. It's hard to wait to share our own exciting childhood experiences (like shows, theme parks or dance classes) with our children, but sooner is almost never better, and our patience always pays off.

**8. Wait for a better understanding** of what babies need when they cry. When we follow the impulse most of us have to quell our children's tears as quickly as possible, we can end up projecting and assuming needs rather than truly understanding what our child is communicating.

**9. Wait for feelings to be expressed** so that our children can fully process them. Our child's cries can stir up our own deeply suppressed emotions; make us impatient, annoyed, uneasy, and even angry or fearful. But children need our non-judgmental acceptance of their feelings and our encouragement to allow them to run their course.

**10. Wait for ideas** from children before offering suggestions of our own. This encourages them to be patient thinkers and brainstormers. Countless times I've experienced the miracle of waiting before giving my brilliant two cents while children play, or providing play ideas when children seem bored. Biting my tongue for a few minutes, maybe saying some encouraging words to a toddler like, "It's hard to know what to do sometimes, but you are creative, I know you'll think of something" is usually all that it takes for the child to come up with an idea. And it's bound to be more imaginative, interesting and appropriate than anything I could have thought of. Best of all, the child receives spectacular affirmations: 1) I am a creative thinker and problem solver; 2) I can bear discomfort, struggle and frustration; 3) Boredom is just the time and space between ideas ... (And sometimes, the wellspring of genius.)

Instincts may tell us that waiting is *uncaring*, *unhelpful* and confidence-shaking — until the results are proven to us. Sitting back patiently and observing often feels counterintuitive, so even if we know and appreciate the magic that can happen when we "wait", it usually involves a conscious effort. But it's worth it!





# It Is Time to Update the Guide to Successful Parenting Programs

In May 2005, the Correctional Education Association's Parenting Special Interest Group published its first ***Guide to Successful Parenting Programs in Corrections***. Originally it contained only programs from Wisconsin. Since then, programs from Minnesota, Oregon, South Dakota, and Washington have been added.

As time passed, programs have been added or dropped and staff has changed. It is again time to update the *Guide* and we would like your help.

Soon you will receive via email the most recent edition of the *Guide*. If you don't receive the *Guide*, contact [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) and it will be emailed to you.

Please have the staff who teach Parenting classes, coordinate Parent/Child Literacy projects, supervise Parent Support Groups, or coordinate Parent Fairs update your institution's section of the *Guide*. If your program isn't in the *Guide*, we would be happy to include it. Follow the format of the programs in the *Guide* when making the outline of your program.

Those doing the updates may make the changes on a hardcopy printout of the *Guide*, add separate pages, or send the changes electronically.

Please have the updates completed by November 1. We hope to have the updated ***Guide to Successful Parenting Programs in Corrections*** distributed by January 1, 2012.

Electronic changes may be emailed to: [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com)

Hardcopy changes may be mailed to:

Jerry Bednarowski  
W6443 Old Highway Road  
Menasha, WI 54952

Thanks for your help,  
Jerry Bednarowski  
CEA Parenting Special Interest Group Chair

## Need Help?

Do you have any questions or need some advice on starting or improving your parenting classes, parent/child literacy program, or parent support group for offenders?

We have an email list of almost 200 parenting educators from 29 states who are eager to help. Just send an email to [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) with your question or request and I will forward it to our email list. Then wait a few days and the helping responses will be sent to you.

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



# Brain Blog: Help! My Child Is Screaming on the Floor, Now What?

On her blog <http://braininsights.blogspot.com>, Deborah McNelis posts information on the importance of brain development in the early years and how easy it is to provide stimulating activities for children. With Deborah's permission, in issues of this newsletter, we are including Brain Blogs from her blog. For the complete information, go to Deborah's blogspot.

For more Information on brain development or easy activities you can do with your child to promote brain development visit [www.braininsightsonline.com](http://www.braininsightsonline.com).

## Here is Deborah's Brain Blog for this issue:

A better understanding of children's brains is quite comforting to caring parents and dedicated educators. When gaining insights into what is going on in a child's head, adults can better handle stressful situations.

Frequently I talk about and provide activity ideas for developing the "thinking area" of the brain. This area is the pre-frontal cortex. This area is critically important for the ability to self-regulate. It is the area that takes the most time to fully develop. So, it is valuable for adults to remember the brains of children are still immature. Keeping in mind that children's young brains do not always have the ability to control emotions is very helpful. Children need the adults in their lives to help them deal with big and overwhelming emotions.

It is a pleasure to share this guest blog, to provide further explanation about how the emotional brain areas may still be more in control than the "thinking areas." Dr. Laura Dessauer shares her knowledge and also provides suggestions for creative and positive problem solving with children. She also shares a link to provide further information. Enjoy!

## Help! My Child Is Screaming On the Floor, Now What?

If you are a parent then you have faced the challenge of helping your child find ways to manage those big feelings that at times seem to over take them. Those feelings of frustration, anger, or sadness appear to storm out of nowhere and take over your child. Often parents are bewildered by the behaviors attached to these feelings such as tantrums, yelling, crying, refusal, inflexibility, shutting down, or hitting. Many calm rational parents, who have read the latest parenting books, still struggle with helping their children through the maze of these intense feelings and out of control behaviors. What may be lacking in traditional parenting methods is a way to teach your children emotional management skills that speak to them in their own natural language. Creative thinking offers a way to do just that.

Children who are unable to regulate strong emotions experience "melt-downs." Brain research suggests that "emotional hijacking" occurs when there is a flooding of electro-chemicals in the brain. Children who experience a stressful situation may become emotionally escalated due to the amygdala being flooded by peptides and hormones. However, neuroscience suggests that by using your cortex, the analytical part of your brain, you can self-regulate strong emotions. When a child is in a learning environment that elicits strong negative emotions, it can impact their ability to hear or comprehend what is being taught. The inability to regulate emotions may lead to social isolation, poor academic outcomes, and low self-esteem. However, there is a link between positive affective states and cognitive performance. Thereby, suggesting a relationship between positive affect, higher productivity, creative problem solving, memory, and logic. It is also suggested that increases in dopamine released by positive affect promotes creative problem solving. Moreover, the research on multiple intelligences offers some insight into the different ways a child learns and why some children learn through trying things out by doing a hands-on project.



So what does that mean to the parent who just wants to help their child learn how to manage the big overwhelming feelings and out of control behaviors? It means that doing a creative and pleasurable activity may enhance a child's learning. It also means that if a child is involved in a positive learning experience that is related to the way they process information, they may be able to learn this information more readily.

### **Five easy tips to help your child use their creativity for emotional management:**

1. Use clay, crayons, markers, and paper to create a character from their imagination to help them stop and think before they act.
2. Use clay to express their frustration and then create a new way to solve the problem they are encountering.
3. Come up with a creative plan to stop their sibling from bugging them using markers to draw out their choices.
4. Children in a creative problem-solving group can create modeling clay figures to help them negotiate relationships and find ways to build social skills.
5. Take a creative break! When you notice your child becoming agitated and they are unable to talk through the problem, have them take a break in their relaxation corner and use markers and crayons to express what they are feeling.

These creative exercises help children to "strengthen" their problem-solving muscles. In other words, they are building up their prefrontal cortex and when they are becoming emotionally charged, they can use their creative thinking to get back in control. Creative thinking offers a way for your child to become in control of their emotions, not their emotions controlling them: and isn't that what every parent wants?

Are you in need of more support? We can help! Learn more creative tools and strategies to help your child. To access the free audio mini-course *Secrets Your Kids Really Don't Want You to Know: A Child Art Therapist Tells All* (\*except for the confidential stuff), go to [www.thecreativityqueen.com](http://www.thecreativityqueen.com).

## **Tell Us About Your Program**

One of the goals of the Parenting Special Interest Group is to provide a vehicle for communication among educators who are teaching or developing parenting programs in correctional facilities. You are invited to share your ideas by contributing an article for a future issue of this newsletter.

Here are some suggestions for articles:

- Share a creative lesson plan that you use in your Parenting class
- Compile a list of books and videos you use in your Parenting class
- Describe how your parent/child book project works
- Share advice on establishing a Fathers or Mothers Fair
- Describe a training workshop that you found useful
- Describe how you involve community organizations in your program
- Describe how you have made your institution more family-friendly

Email your articles to [barbara.rasmussen@wisconsin.gov](mailto:barbara.rasmussen@wisconsin.gov) or [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com).

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



## Editor's Musings:

The cool and crisp air, the October-blue sky and the brilliant colors that decorate the trees let you know that fall is here. Fall is also the time that children go back to school. This brings to mind reading to children. Reading aloud to children is one of the most important and effective things parents can do to help their children succeed in school (and beyond). This should encourage us as educators to encourage the inmates in turn to read to their children on visits or through the various book-sharing programs at the jails and institutions. I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but in these economic times, it's one more avenue for children to get a little extra attention and academic motivation by having a parent model a very positive behavior.

**Happy fall!**  
**Barb Rasmussen**

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

**Barb Rasmussen, Teacher  
Racine Correctional Institution  
2019 Wisconsin Street  
Sturtevant, WI 53177-0900**

