

Parenting Connection

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Shoes: A Child's View of Incarceration of a Parent

"My father's prison sentence was not my fault, but as a child there were times when it felt like I was being punished, too." This is an excerpt from Alisa Smedley's upcoming book *Embracing Your Story*, a collection of essays based on her childhood experiences. Alisa's continues with her story . . .

The stress of my dad's imprisonment had an impact on the entire family, especially financially.

I was asked to speak at my 6th grade graduation. I was excited, but as June approached I got nervous about what I would wear to graduation. Money was very tight around our house, my dad had gone to prison nine months earlier. He got a 15 to life sentence.

My mother requested a clothing voucher from our caseworker. If that came through, maybe I could get a new outfit, and some shoes, too, to wear for graduation. I tried not to worry about it. The voucher got mailed to our house about a week later. My mother said that we would go shopping that Saturday. Graduation was next week, but I was trying not to get nervous.

When Saturday came me and my sister got dressed and we all headed out. We had to go to two different stores because one voucher was for clothing and the other was for shoes. My mother was annoyed because that was going to use up a whole lot of gas. I stayed quiet while we drove around, I didn't want to get on her nerves.

The department store was first. We picked out a suit, it was a light grey two-piece with a jacket and skirt. I didn't like it very much. I told my mother that the school said we were supposed to wear blue or black and she told me that "the school needed to buy it then." We would buy whatever we could find! She was getting more annoyed, so I just got quiet.

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The shoe store was our last stop and it was very busy. It was late in the afternoon and we were all tired. The manager was an older man who walked very slowly. He looked over our voucher and told us to follow him as he walked to the back of the store, and then into the storeroom.

“You can pick anything on this rack,” he said and returned to his desk. The rack was full of men and women’s shoes. They were all dusty and ugly. We tried to find my size, but it wasn’t looking good. “Do you have any other sizes?” my mother asked the manager. “Just what’s on the rack,” he said.

“Those are the only shoes you can buy with that voucher.” I looked at my mother’s face and saw a flash of sadness.

*We looked harder to find a pair of shoes for my graduation. She picked up a pair of blue suede earth shoes and told me to try them on. They were my size. “But these don’t match,” I told her. “And they’re ugly!” I added. My mother lost it. “If your foot wasn’t so d**n big, maybe we could find a pair that fit,” she screamed at me. Other customers looked into the storeroom at us and the manager glanced over, too. “Let’s just get these,” I said quietly. My little sister, standing beside me, reached over and held my hand.*

A week later I went to my sixth grade graduation. When I walked into school my teacher frowned and said that I was supposed to be wearing blue or black. She started to say something more, but didn’t. I just looked at her but did not say a word. I just wanted to give my speech and go home.

I walked across that stage in a light grey suit and blue earth shoes; I gave an eloquent speech, received my certificate and ended my elementary school education.

Who knows what middle school will be like, I thought to myself as I walked home, my feet hurting in my blue suede earth shoes.

Alisa’s work today at a maximum security jail stems from a very personal understanding of the effects of incarceration. Alisa is a “Coach” in the One-Stop Job Center at the Montgomery (Maryland) County Correctional Facility.

Alisa Smedley says she and her co-workers use the word coach for a reason. “We take your weaknesses and turn them into strengths. In many settings, people want to focus on just your assets. We don’t talk about weakness. Well, coaches do.”

The Montgomery County program was visited last year by U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Labor Secretary Tom Perez to highlight workforce training for inmates about to leave prisons and jails. They plan to replicate the county’s program around the U.S. by giving federal grant money.

As part of Alisa’s efforts to promote her program and the coaching approach to reentry education, she will be presenting two workshops and a general session talk at the CEA-Wisconsin Training Days on May 2-3, 2016 in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin.

To receive notification about the publication of *Embracing Your Story*, you may email Alisa at: coachsmmedley@gmail.com.

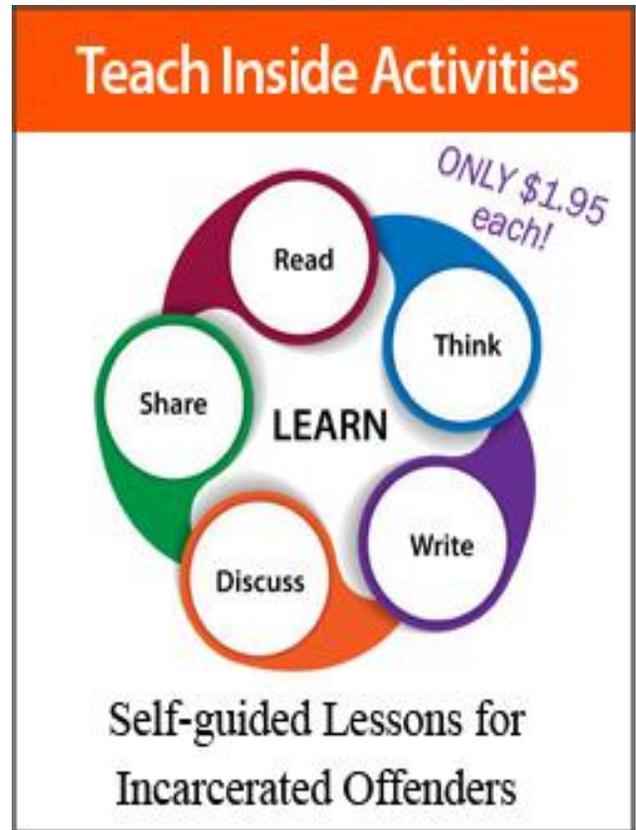
To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



Teach Inside Activities Now Available

Jan Walker has known parenting education and corrections from many perspectives. As a community college instructor, she taught parenting and family relationships concepts and social responsibility inside Washington State women's and men's prisons for 18 years. She developed parenting, family relationships and social responsibility curricula specific to the needs of incarcerated students. She wrote *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities*, a text for incarcerated parents, early in her prison teaching career, and has updated it over the years. Jan also authored several novels and memoirs based on the experiences of children affected by a parent's incarceration. She testified regarding children's needs for ongoing contact with birthparents in court cases seeking termination of parental rights. After retiring Jan volunteered inside a women's reentry prison for several years where she worked with offenders and their family members as they prepared for the women's release.

Jan Walker's most recent endeavor is the creation of a valuable series of "Teach Inside Activities" that are downloadable and printable from her new website, www.TeachInside.com.



The lessons in the series are designed to provide information to men and women who are inside prisons and jails. The lessons can be used as class or group activities or for individual study.

The lessons are available in PDF format for \$1.95 each and range in length from 9-13 pages. The purchaser may copy and distribute the lessons to individuals inside as needed. The material is copyrighted by the author and the content cannot be altered. If anyone has questions or problems downloading the Teach Inside lessons, Jan Walker can be contacted at janwalker@centurytel.net.

Teach Inside Lessons

Talking to Children About Prison or Jail

This Teach Inside Activity helps you explain your crime and incarceration so children can understand. Incarceration does not end your parenting role. You still have rights and responsibilities as a parent. Children tend to think they did something wrong when a parent leaves them. Children need accurate information about your crime and incarceration. This lesson explains how to tell children at each stage of their development.

Child Custody & Dependency

This activity provides information about legal and social services that pertain to offenders' families. There are about **2.7 million children** in the U.S. with a parent inside prison or jail. Another **7 million** children have a parent under court supervision. This lesson discusses federal and state programs that provide assistance for the children's care. It also covers child custody, legal guardianship, dependency, foster care and termination of parental rights. A sample Affidavit of Legal Guardianship and sample letters to schools and caseworkers are included.

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Reparent Yourself

Adapted from *Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children*, by Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson, this activity explains the ages and stages of human development and how to rethink behaviors and choices. You reparent yourself when you take personal responsibility for your attitudes and beliefs. You grow up again when you work on problems that developed as you grew. This lesson helps you set goals for choosing to change.

Reuniting with Your Family and Community

Going back home from prison or jail is stressful for everyone. You need to be prepared to look for a job. You may need to attend AA or NA meetings daily for several weeks. This lesson discusses the realities of transitioning back into your family and community. It includes suggestions for using a Contract for Forgiveness with each family member.

Reaching Out to Children and Family

Staying in touch with family and friends during incarceration is considered the most important factor for a successful reentry. Many facilities provide electronic communication (email and video visiting) for a fee. All provide phone communication, again for a fee. Write letters instead. You can think through what you want to say. You can write stories and poems that include small illustrations. You can explain your absence in words children understand.

Visiting Inside: Keep it Positive

Visiting inside jail or prison is stressful for everyone. Some jails limit visiting to video-only. Visitors come inside to a closed circuit video center. Children get restless. Adults worry about “saying the wrong thing,” and leaving everyone upset. Visiting inside most prisons is less restrictive, but still involves the same issues. Plan for a positive visit by making notes about what you wish to discuss. Then continue the discussion by exchange of letters. Rebuild your family by learning what you can do for each family member while you are inside.

Tell Us About Your Program

Email your article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com

Children’s Book Review – Parental Incarceration

These books were reviewed and rated (1-5 stars) for content related to parental incarceration, availability, and affordability by a group of fourteen students representing multiple disciplines (e.g., child psychology, family social sciences, sociology, public health women’s studies) under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Shlafer, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota (shlaf002@umn.edu). The review process was informed by an examination of book lists created by other organizations, agencies, and an online retailer. With the exception of a few chapter books, each book was independently read and reviewed by two reviewers and combined into one review. Recommended ages and ratings were averaged across reviewers.

***After Tupac and D Foster* by Jacqueline Woodson**

Appropriate for ages 10+ 4/5 stars

The unnamed narrator is an African American teenage girl who grows up with her two best friends. She struggles to make sense of the depictions of African American people in the media, and growing up in a world filled with violence, prison, music, friendship, family, and loss. As she tries to understand her friend’s experience in the foster care system, she learns more about herself.



Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart by Vera B. Williams

Appropriate for ages 7+ 4/5 stars

Using pictures and poems, the book tells a story of two sisters who stick together through tough times while their father is in jail. The father was sent to jail for forging a check after he was fired from his job. The sisters take care of each other while their mom works hard to support her children.

An Inmate's Daughter by Jan Walker

Appropriate for ages 11+ 4/5 stars

Jenna MacDonald's father was sent to prison. Jenna's mom tried to cover up this fact because she did not want it to reflect poorly on the family. As Jenna learns that she cannot talk about the experience of having an incarcerated father with her friends, she finds support through journaling and reflecting on her feelings about her father.

Do Not Pass Go by Kirkpatrick Hill

Appropriate for ages 9+ 5/5 stars

This story is told from the perspective of Deet, a young, but very mature and reflective, boy who is the oldest of three siblings. His dad goes to jail for using drugs to stay awake on the job. Throughout the book, Deet's perspective drastically changes as he visits his father each week in jail. Deet transitions from feeling ashamed and embarrassed about his dad, to seeing the people who go to jail in a new light. He realizes that other kids at school have the same experience as him and that the inmates are people, just like his father.

Five-Finger Discount by Barthe DeClements

Appropriate for ages 8-13 2/5 stars

Jerry Johnson is in fifth grade. His father is in jail and he does not want anyone to know. One of his classmates finds out and threatens to tell everyone, which creates conflict between the two peers. Jerry steals pieces of wood from a construction site to build a tree house and also steals shoes to give to his mother because he cannot afford to buy them. When his father is released on parole, he and Jerry go shopping; his dad attempts to steal shoes by using Jerry. Jerry finally learns that stealing is not appropriate, regardless of the circumstances.

Harry Sue by Sue Stauffacher

Appropriate for ages 8-12 5/5 stars

This story is told through the eyes of eleven year old Harriet Susan Clotkin, also known as Harry Sue. Both of Harry's parents are incarcerated, so she lives with her grandmother who is abusive. Harry wants to be incarcerated with her mother as soon as she is able, and begins using prison slang. Even though she seems to be tough, Harry Sue is still a caring eleven year old. She tries to protect the children that are being mistreated by her grandmother. Harry Sue's life is much like Dorothy's in the Wizard of Oz; she is trying to find her way home, but in the end, she realizes she was there all along.

Jailbird Kid by Shirlee Smith Matheson

Appropriate for ages 8-12 5/5 stars

This story is told by Angela, a ninth grade girl whose dad has returned from prison to live at home with Angela and her mom. *Jailbird Kid* nicely illustrates the many struggles Angela deals with, particularly regarding the conflicted feelings she has about her father and family. She loves her father and tries to help him find work, but also knows he is making unhealthy decisions. She grapples with who to talk to and when, and her feelings of embarrassment about how her friends and others in the town see her and her family. While her father gets mildly caught up in old habits, the story ultimately ends on an upbeat note.

Jakeman by Deborah Ellis

Appropriate for ages 8-12 2/5 stars

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This story is about Jake, who visits Wickham prison with his older sister Shoshana. Jake has been writing to the governor for three years to have his mother pardoned, but he has never received a response. Together, Jake and his sister must sneak out of their foster home to meet the bus for the 10-hour ride to prison. Jake visits regularly and describes the multiple rules about visiting to his friend, a “first timer.” One trip home from the prison is filled with adventure and chaos as Jake continues his quest to get his mother pardoned.

***Mexican Whiteboy* by Matt De La Peña**

Appropriate for ages 13+ 4/5 stars

Danny is half-Mexican and visiting his father’s family this summer near the Mexican border. At his home in San Diego, he attends an all-white private school where he struggles to fit in because his race. At the border, where the population is predominantly Mexican, Danny stands out as “too white.” He struggles to find his place as a “Mexican Whiteboy” and save money to find his absent father in Mexico. Another character, Uno, also stands out because of race; he is the only black kid in town. He dreams of getting out of the border town, hoping to move to Oxnard to be with his father. Together, Danny and Uno use Danny’s baseball talent to con local teams. At the end of the story, Danny learns that his dad did not run off to Mexico, but instead has been in prison for the last several years.

***My Daddy is in Jail* by Janet Bender**

Appropriate for ages 3-10 5/5 stars

A young girl returns home from school to witness her father being arrested. The book discusses the girl’s confusion and her other complex feelings about her father’s arrest. Ultimately, the young girl finds help from the guidance counselor at school.

***My Father’s Son* by Terri Fields**

Appropriate for ages 16+ 2/5 stars

Kevin is shocked to discover his father plastered in the media as a serial killer, responsible for the brutal deaths of over a dozen women. Kevin’s parents had been separated for years and he had split his time between both parents. Kevin questions his father’s innocence, never thinking his father could be responsible for such atrocities. Kevin and his mother struggle to survive financially and socially. The events that unfold are heart-wrenching, and will keep readers anticipating what will happen next.

***My Mom Went to Jail* by Kathleen Hodgkins and Suzanne Bergen**

Appropriate for ages 3+ 3/5 stars

Sarah is a young girl who lives with foster parents because her mother is incarcerated. In this short book, readers learn a about some of the difficulties Sarah is facing, including her thoughts and feelings about her mom being in jail.

***The Night Dad Went to Jail* by Melissa Higgins**

Appropriate for ages 5-10 5/5 stars

Sketch witnesses his dad’s arrest, and is confused and angry about why his dad was taken away. After his dad’s arrest, Sketch has a hard time in school and acts aggressively towards another kid at school. This book follows Sketch’s story through his dad’s incarceration, including how Sketch ultimately finds support at school and from a mentor and Sketch’s experiences with visiting his dad in prison.

***The Not-Just Anybody Family* by Betsy Cromer Byars**

Appropriate for ages 8-12 4/5 stars

Junior Blossom wakes up in the hospital after falling off the roof and breaking both of his legs. He remembers being on the roof with his siblings when they spotted a police car headed toward their family farm. When the police arrived, his siblings (Maggie and Vern) ran, leaving Junior behind. They later learned that their grandfather is in jail. With their mom gone performing in the rodeo, Maggie and Vern are left to rescue Junior and their grandfather, and solve their family’s problems.



Sunny Holiday by Coleen Paratore

Appropriate for ages 3-9 4/5 stars

Sunny is a spunky 9 year-old with a wonderful support system that includes her mother, best friend, family friends, and neighbors. Sunny's father is in jail. Still, her father, mother, and friends instill remarkable hope in Sunny. The story follows Sunny and her adventures with her friend, living with her father in jail, and becoming involved in improving the community by infiltrating politics.

Tyrell by Coe Booth

Appropriate for ages 15+ 3/5 stars

Tyrell is a 15 year-old boy. His father is currently doing his third stint in prison. While his dad is in prison, Tyrell has primary responsibility for keeping the rest of his family safe. His family has recently lost their home and moved to emergency housing. At the shelter, Tyrell meets a girl named Jasmine who has lost both of her parents and is being raised by her sister. Tyrell has an ambivalent relationship with his father – he idolizes him, but he is also angry at his father for ending up in prison again. Meanwhile, Tyrell is dating a “good girl” whose mother is everything that his parents are not. The book centers on Black masculinity and what it means to be a man in the community.

Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson and James Ransome

Appropriate for ages 4-9 4/5 stars

This well-illustrated book tells the story of a little girl as she prepares to visit her father. Once a month, she takes a long bus ride with her grandmother to visit her father in prison. Although she is very excited to visit, she is sad that it is over so quickly. Her grandmother reminds her to count her blessings and start a new list of things to tell her dad at the next visit.

What Will Happen to Me by Howard Zehr and Lorraine S. Amstutz

Appropriate for ages 4+ 5/5 stars

The first section of this book includes personal stories of children with incarcerated parents. Each story illustrates different experiences children may encounter when a parent is incarcerated. Some children remember their parent being taken away. Some have good relationships with their incarcerated parent, while others acknowledge feelings of anger or grief. The second section of this book is for caregivers of children whose parents are incarcerated. There are a few personal stories, in addition to specific advice for caregivers.

Wish You Were Here by Autumn Spanne, Nora McCarthy and Laura Longhine

Appropriate for ages 12+ 3/5 stars

The book is divided into two sections: teens and parents. The book is filled with personal narratives that both teens and parents share regarding incarceration. The stories shared by the teens cover a myriad of topics, including anger, forgiveness, relationship building, and feelings about visiting their incarcerated parent. The parents share first-hand accounts of the pain, grief, guilt, shame, and regret that incarceration has produced. One particular parent speaks of his experience being sexually molested as a child, and becoming a sexual molester once he had children.

The Year the Swallows Came Early by Kathryn Fitzmaurice

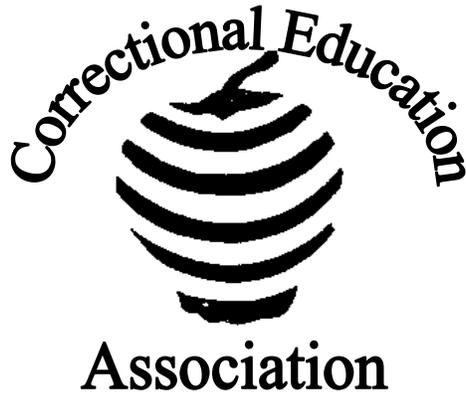
Appropriate for ages 15+ 5/5 stars

Eleanor Robinson, known as “Groovy,” is an 11-year old girl who dreams of going to cooking school. Her dreams quickly fall apart when her mom has her dad arrested and Groovy learns that her father gambled away her inheritance money. She goes through a roller coaster of emotions from anger towards her mother, and then towards her father, to sadness while her dad is away. Throughout her journey, she witnesses her friend's family problems. But, the swallows that return to the city every year teach her some life lessons and restore her hope. Ultimately, Eleanor learns to forgive her dad and to “expect the unexpected.”

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Editor's Message:

In addition to publishing this bi-monthly newsletter, the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association had published three handbooks – two for incarcerated parents and their families and the other for those who provide education and services for them.

Recently the handbooks have been updated and reformatted. Instead of having two handbooks, *Reaching Out: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin* and *Reaching In: A Handbook for the Families of Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin*, they have been combined into one handbook, *Reaching Beyond Bars: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin and their Families*. This should avoid confusion as to which handbook a person should use. The *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails* handbook has also been updated with many new resources added.

Those who work with incarcerated parents and their families are welcome to print the handbooks or any sections of them for use with their clients. Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin has partnered with CEA-Wisconsin to print hardcopies of the booklets. The hardcopies will be distributed those to people who request them and to those attending workshops that the Parenting Special Interest Group presents.

These handbooks are "living documents." That means information will continue to be added to them as relevant programs and resources are identified. As the handbooks are updated, they will be posted on the www.ceawisconsin.org website. If you have information that you feel should be included in any of the handbooks or would like to request a hardcopy of a handbook, email jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com.

Jerry

