

Parenting Connection

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When a Sibling Goes to Prison

Thousands of young people are sent to prison every day, leaving behind many more brothers and sisters that researchers know very little about. On November 14, 2016, *The Atlantic* began a six-part series to describe these young people with siblings in prison.

According to “A Shared Sentence,” a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, over 5 million kids in the United States currently have or have had a parent in prison. The unusually intense stress that these children face has been well documented and studied. That’s mostly due to researchers’ emphasis on the parent-child relationship when analyzing incarcerated populations — and how little support is available for those left-behind children who are forced to stand by as their primary role models, caregivers, and providers are put behind bars.

But incarceration also affects a separate number of children who have been isolated from another profound relationship: They are the children with siblings in jail or prison — and much less is known about them. It isn’t even clear how many of them there are.

One analysis of grief and coping among “non-offending siblings,” brands them as the “most often overlooked” family members of adjudicated youth. The study’s author, sociologist Katie Heaton, detailed the levels of daily “emotional stress” siblings may experience, including “bullying by other students who discovered their sibling’s imprisonment, adjusting to new household roles and routines, complex feelings of ambivalence related to their sibling’s safety, visiting their brother or sister, and having their sibling return home after an extended period away.”

Heaton concluded that non-offending siblings suffer from “disenfranchised grief.” Disenfranchised grief often creates a sense of shame or guilt within the individual or that person’s family, making it difficult to openly mourn, discuss, or cope with the actions that have created the loss.

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This kind of sibling-to-sibling impact is serious. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's report "Juvenile Offenders and Victims," 1.6 million kids under the age of 18 were arrested in 2010. Half of the youth offenders were taken into custody for simple assault, drug-abuse violations, larceny-theft, and disorderly conduct. Another large portion of kids was arrested for violating liquor laws, breaking curfew, loitering, vandalism, and simple assault. And young people were involved in 8% of that year's murders. Whatever their crimes, all of them have one thing in common: They all left families behind — and many times that included the impressionable siblings who just lost a brother or sister to prison.

The good news is that those figures also represent the lowest youth crime rates in American history. According to the Campaign for Youth Justice, from 2005 to 2014, youth arrests dropped by a staggering 51%, compared with just a 14% decrease for adults. Similarly, between 1997 and 2013, there was a 48% drop in the number of young people placed in corrections facilities. Still, when 1.6 million kids are getting arrested each year, there could be another million siblings watching.

What lessons will they absorb? Experts note that there is no typical reaction. Some children put the incarcerated sibling's needs before their own or take on more responsibilities within the family, which can put them under considerable emotional strain and pressure. Other children become angry towards the prisoner for disrupting their lives and causing hurt to their families. Some children find themselves in unknown territory — frightened by prison visits, guilt-ridden, or bullied. Some feel relief if the sibling was abusive. Worse, some feel newly vulnerable — perhaps losing a protector when their sibling went away.

Having a sibling in jail or prison can also have severe financial consequences for a family that may often already be impoverished. The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that "65% of families with a member in prison or jail could not meet basic needs." That can be an especially harsh reality for a non-offending brother or sister who sees limited resources being diverted away from their needs and toward the child in custody.

The legal financial obligations encountered by youth and families going through the system can also be great. Some of the fees they encounter include: costs for evaluating and testing the young person; cost of care paid to the state; health-care, mental-health care, and medication costs; GPS-monitoring costs; public-defender fees; and court expenses like transportation, prosecution, witness fees, and general-operations costs. In some states, a family who has been declared indigent is still responsible for these bills.

Sometimes siblings are asked to play a role in the implicated young person's court proceedings. A sibling could be an eyewitness to the alleged crime or might be a defense witness. If the state believes that the sibling has information against their own sibling, they could force them to testify as a state's witness against their own sibling. Not only do prosecutors have every right under state laws to subpoena siblings and force them to testify against their own brother or sister; the parents have no say in whether or not they will allow the minor to testify. But even if not required to do something as extreme as take the stand in court, siblings often play key roles in the investigations that help lawyers prepare for trial.

The immediate and long-term impacts of the fragmented families, especially siblings, who are left behind when a young person is incarcerated are varied and profound. In *The Sibling Effect*, Jeffrey Kluger writes:

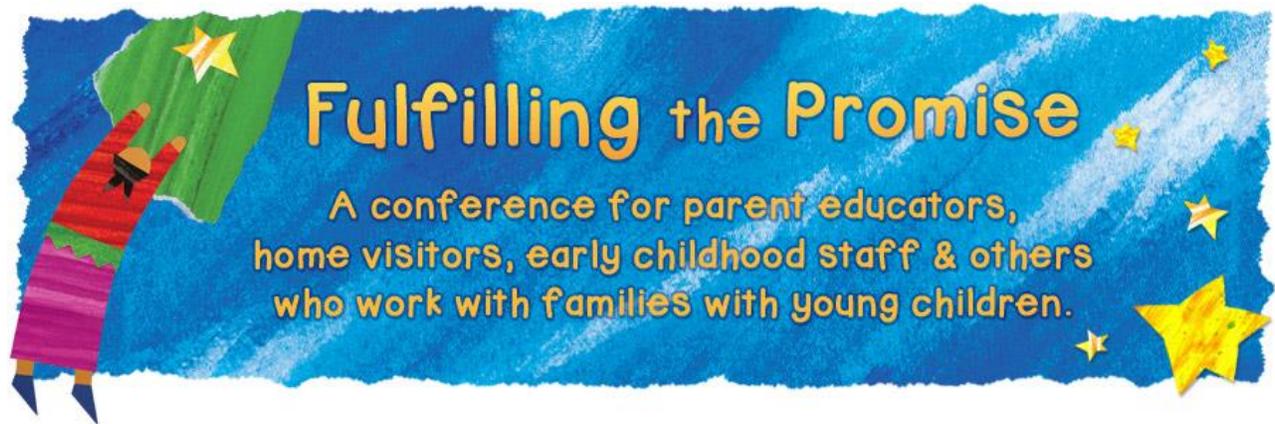
"From the time we're born, our brothers and sisters are our collaborators and co-conspirators, our role models and our cautionary tales. They are our scolds, protectors, goads, tormentors, playmates, counselors, sources of envy, objects of pride. They help us learn how to resolve conflicts and how not to; how to conduct friendships and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls; brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys. Bigger sibs learn to nurture by mentoring little ones; little sibs learn about wisdom by heeding the older ones."



On any given day, 54,000 juvenile offenders are not living with their families because they are instead in one of the 696 youth detention facilities across the United States. But those are just the youth in the juvenile justice system. In the adult criminal system, another 200,000 young people “are tried, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults.” That results in an average of 4,000 to 5,000 children sent to adult jails every day.

And in the shadows, behind all of those statistics, are the left-behind siblings—many of whom will experience incarceration as a kind of mutual sentence.

To read the complete *The Atlantic* article, “When a Sibling Goes to Prison,” and for links to related stories, go to: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/when-a-sibling-goes-to-prison/507020/>.



**March 6-8, 2017
Wilderness Resort
Wisconsin Dells, WI**

Fulfilling the Promise is an annual conference for early childhood professionals providing support and education to parents, home visitors, program managers, and parent educators who provide home-based, group-based, and center-based support and education to parents of young children. Participants work in Family Resource Centers, Head Start and Early Head Start, private agencies, health departments, hospitals, Birth to 3 programs, Even Start Family Literacy schools, county and tribal social service departments, and Early Childhood centers. Annually, the conference averages about 375 participants from across the state. The first day will provide a variety of full day Institutes, Day 2 will be a daylong session focused on Family Engagement and Day 3 will provide workshops for participants to learn more on specific topics. The Fulfilling the Promise conference seeks to provide participants with a rich learning experience covering a wide variety of topics that provide participants with evidence-based practices and programs and best practices within the field of parent education and family support.

Registration for the 2017 Fulfilling the Promise Conference is now open!

The conference brochure is now available. Go to <http://uwm.edu/mcwp/programs/fulfilling-the-promise/> for the conference schedule, speakers, session descriptions and registration information.

Tell Us About Your Program
Email your article to:
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A Shared Sentence Report Assesses Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids

According to the new KIDS COUNT® policy report, *A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families and Communities*, done by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 88,000 children living in Wisconsin have experienced the separation of a parent who served time in jail or prison. Nationally, more than 5.1 million children have a parent that has been incarcerated.

Latino children are five times as likely and African American children twice as likely, as whites to suffer the destabilizing effects of losing a parent to the system. In Wisconsin, the racial disparities are especially stark.

The percentage of kids with incarcerated parents varies dramatically between states, from a low of 3% in New Jersey to a high of 13% in Kentucky. In Wisconsin, 7% have experienced the effects of having a parent behind bars.

An analysis done by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families shows that Wisconsin taxpayers spend about \$1.5 billion each year on corrections — significantly more than other states of similar size. Beyond the evident fiscal cost, the report found there are significant “opportunity costs” associated with the state’s out-sized reliance on incarceration, including how corrections costs reduce opportunities to invest in other important things like education, workforce development, and health care that can make Wisconsin healthier, more educated, and more equitable.

“It is all too easy to overlook the economic and psychological impact on a child when a parent is sent to jail or prison,” said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, a Casey Foundation partner, in a press release containing state statistics. “Although disparities occur in all states, Wisconsin faces a deeper challenge that we must address — we incarcerate a larger share of black males than any other state. This adds to a cycle of poverty and inequity for our children of color that places them at greater disadvantage.”

“While momentum for criminal justice reform continues to build, we know progress will take time,” the report says. “But we also know children can’t wait — nor can we as a nation afford to let them and their parents founder, perpetuating poverty from one generation to the next.”

Several states are putting in place prison reform measures in an effort to reduce the staggering cost of locking up a larger percentage of citizenry than any other country in the industrialized world — although according to Taylor, Wisconsin lags in that effort.

The *A Shared Sentence* report observes, “There is no question that our country’s practice of mass incarceration is flawed, costly and in need of change. Policymakers on both sides of the aisle have pushed for better solutions, and several states have overhauled their correctional systems, favoring less costly alternatives for addressing nonviolent offenses, while maintaining public safety. Many advocacy efforts also recognize the wildly disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on people of color, especially African-American men, who are far more likely to be arrested and spend time behind bars. As a result, children of color are inevitably more likely to contend with having a parent in prison.”

The Casey Foundation is hoping their report will spark a discussion on how to give kids of incarcerated parents a better chance to succeed in life, concluding, “Policy debates about incarceration rarely focus on the burden borne by children and families. Theirs are stories of things lost: connections, jobs, income,



homes — and hope. And communities, in turn, suffer from losing so many parents, whose absence leaves the economic and social fabric of their neighborhoods in tatters.”

Read the full report, *A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families and Communities* at: www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence.

Children Who Have Experienced Parental Incarceration: 2011-2012

Nationally, the number of kids who have had a parent in jail or prison at some point in their childhood hovers around 5.1 million — a conservative estimate.

	Total			Total			Total			Total	
	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
United States	5,113,000	7	Idaho	35,000	8	Missouri	98,000	7	Pennsylvania	181,000	7
Alabama	88,000	8	Illinois	186,000	6	Montana	18,000	8	Rhode Island	10,000	5
Alaska	18,000	10	Indiana	177,000	11	Nebraska	41,000	9	South Carolina	73,000	7
Arizona	138,000	9	Iowa	58,000	8	Nevada	55,000	8	South Dakota	17,000	8
Arkansas	61,000	9	Kansas	45,000	6	New Hampshire	15,000	5	Tennessee	144,000	10
California	503,000	5	Kentucky	135,000	13	New Jersey	65,000	3	Texas	477,000	7
Colorado	60,000	5	Louisiana	94,000	8	New Mexico	52,000	10	Utah	44,000	5
Connecticut	36,000	5	Maine	20,000	8	New York	148,000	4	Vermont	7,000	6
Delaware	15,000	8	Maryland	82,000	6	North Carolina	179,000	8	Virginia	103,000	6
District of Columbia	9,000	8	Massachusetts	69,000	5	North Dakota	10,000	7	Washington	109,000	7
Florida	312,000	8	Michigan	228,000	10	Ohio	271,000	10	West Virginia	34,000	9
Georgia	189,000	8	Minnesota	67,000	5	Oklahoma	96,000	10	Wisconsin	88,000	7
Hawaii	16,000	5	Mississippi	55,000	7	Oregon	68,000	8	Wyoming	12,000	9

For past issues of this newsletter, parenting handbooks, program resources, and more – go to www.ceawisconsin.org

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 experienced parenting educators who are eager to help. Just send an email to 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.



Women in Recovery Program Earns National Award

Early this year, Family & Children's Services Women in Recovery (WIR), an alternative-to-incarceration program for drug-addicted women, won the Excellence in Addictions Treatment Innovation award from the National Council for Behavioral Health

Founded in 2009 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the program works with women facing lengthy prison terms due to addiction and trauma-related crimes which make them ineligible for other prison diversion programs such as Drug Court.

Although, the US has recently begun dialing back on the number of male prisoners, we have continued to increase the number of women behind bars. The imprisonment of women has heartbreaking collateral damage because women are disproportionately likely to be primary caregivers and 60% of women in state prisons have children under 18. Studies have found that 43% of women in jails have serious mental health problems, and 82% have drug or alcohol problems.

The continued mass incarceration of women has collateral effects. Recidivism is high, and imprisonment breaks up and impoverishes families. A newly published study from the Russell Sage Foundation shows that 2.6 million American children who have a parent in prison or jail pay an enormous price. Incarceration of a family member is associated with a 64% decline in household assets, magnifying the effects of poverty.

Research has shown that once their mothers are imprisoned, research has shown that children become more likely to be abused, engage in criminal behavior, experiment with drugs and end up in prison themselves.

Women in Recovery's goal is to reduce the number of women with drug-related offenses sent to prison. WIR works closely with the criminal justice system and other community partners to give its women the supervision they need, along with substance abuse counseling, mental health treatment and trauma treatment education, workforce training and family reunification to ensure they break the cycle of re-offending.

Through a 14-18 month program, WIR provides its participants with services including substance abuse, mental health and trauma treatment; court-related supervision and drug-testing; culinary training; case management; wellness programs; housing; and family therapy. The family reunification component, delivered through an after-graduation program for grads, helps to break the cycle of incarceration.

Women in Recovery's two-generation approach works with both the women and their children. It reduces the numbers of women in prison, saves money and has had remarkable success helping troubled women shake drugs and restart their lives. The Women in Recovery program costs \$19,700 on average; after that, the woman is in a job, and recidivism over the next three years is just 4.9 percent. Since its inception, WIR has prevented more than 156,000 days in prison and impacted the lives of more than 900 children, in addition to its graduates.

For more information about the Family & Children's Services Women in Recovery program, go to: www.fcsol.org/services/wir/.

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org





InterNational PRISONER'S FAMILY CONFERENCE

**May 3-5, 2017
Dallas, Texas**

The United States incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world. With only 5% of the world's population the U.S. incarcerates 25% of the world's prisoners. Forgotten in the persistent growth of mass incarceration are the millions of children and countless family members and friends traumatized by a loved one's incarceration.

Unfortunately, history tells us that as many as 70% of children of prisoners will one day become prisoners themselves and at least 65% of prisoners returning to our communities will recidivate within 3 years after being released from prison. These unacceptable and tragic facts diminish the quality of life and safety of our communities for all of us and call for effective resolution.

Message from Carolyn Esparza, Conference Originator and Chair:

The family is the greatest resource for prisoners. Credible research indicates strong family support during and following incarceration is crucial to prisoners' successful community re-entry and family reunification.

The conference provides powerful resources for strengthening the prison family and improving its relationship with the criminal justice system by bringing together those with a sincere desire to improve the quality of life of those touched by incarceration.

In reality, families are secondary victims of crimes, yet historically have received little, if any support. As a result prison family members typically withdraw and isolate from the mainstream community, suffering alone in silence as a hidden population. There they remain as a hidden sub-culture of our society often shunned with as much disdain as the prisoner. We must change this perspective; we must bring hope where there is none.

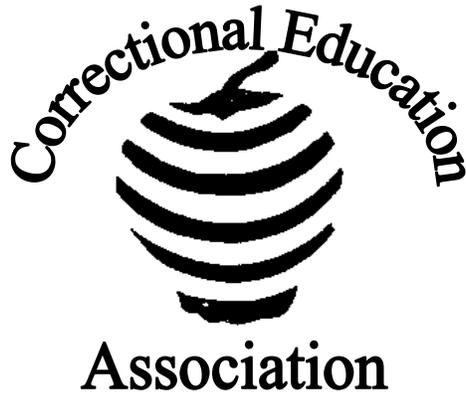
It is the responsibility of those who know the trauma created by incarceration of a loved one to bring awareness where none exists. To that end this conference brings together diverse individuals and organizations serving many diverse purposes on behalf of prisoners and their families. Yet with all the diversity each entity represented has the singular purpose: improving the quality of life for all prison family members.

The InterNational Prisoner's Family Conferences offers those with genuine concerns for prisoners and their families world-wide an opportunity to unite, to educate the uninformed, to build best practices programs, to improve relations with the criminal justice system and to advocate on behalf of the prison family. Together we will encourage one another and we will generate a much greater impact than we could ever accomplish by going the course alone.

We hope you will join us at the next InterNational Prisoner's Family Conference. We promise you will be enriched by the experience.



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Editor's Message:

Almost 2000 years ago, Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 A.D.) declared, "Poverty is the mother of crime." In the centuries following, social scientists and public officials have continued to identify poverty as a "root cause" of crime or, at least, as a significant "risk factor."

What may not be apparent is that *crime causes poverty*.

The study, *Changing Priorities: State Criminal Justice Reforms and Investments in Education*, done by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities concluded, "Incarceration also increases poverty, for those who have been to prison as well as other household members, including children."

Robert H. DeFina and Lance Hannon in their paper, "The Impact of Mass Incarceration on Poverty, *Crime and Delinquency*," determined that if incarceration rates had not increased, the official poverty rate would have fallen by roughly 20% over the period studied instead of remaining relatively stable.

In his book, *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse*, Todd R. Clear concludes, "Because high levels of incarceration are heavily localized, the individual and family effects of imprisonment accumulate to limit entire communities' economic and social opportunities. Removing large numbers of working-age men and women from the community depletes the human capital needed to build stable neighborhoods. That depletion, in turn, tends to reduce economic and social opportunities even for community members with *no* interaction with the criminal justice system."

Poverty is the mother of crime . . . and incarceration is the mother of poverty.

Jerry

