

Parenting Connection

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Just Beginning Gives Incarcerated Teens Tools to Be Competent Parents

Incarcerated teen parents rarely receive parenting education or visit with their infants despite the proven long lasting benefits experienced by themselves and their children.

Just Beginning is a parenting program that connects youth in the juvenile justice system with their children by teaching teens how to develop a positive relationship with their child through research-based parenting instruction, facilitating weekly structured visits in a child-friendly environment specially designed for positive parental interaction and connecting the teen parent to a strong support system for the entire family as the youth reintegrates into society.



Youth Law Center with Georgetown University has developed and administers the Just Beginning Program (formerly known as the “Baby Elmo Program”). The intent of the program is to begin to give teen parents the ability and incentive to become competent committed parents by teaching them the tools to communicate and build a positive relationship with their children.

Just Beginning benefits the teen parent and the baby in the following ways:

- Increased contact with the community outside of Juvenile Hall is a benefit to detainees
- Youth experience behavior improvements after just one month of program participation
- Young parents view themselves as competent and responsible members of the community
- Babies benefit from the increased skills of their parent and the parent’s continued involvement

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The Just Beginning program is video based, using the Sesame Beginnings videos. The class includes a hands-on visitation component, in which the incarcerated teen parent plays with his or her child. The visits serve as an incentive, not only to learn about parenting, but also for improved behavior in the facility and participation in rehabilitative activities.

Just Beginning is a parenting and visitation program for incarcerated teen parents that:

- Provides hands on parenting coaching in real time during youth visits with their children
- Is easily implemented both in and out of detention facilities
- Is endorsed by probation staff
- Improves youth's behaviors in detention
- Reduces recidivism

Just Beginning trainers train staff from participating facilities and work with them to structure, support and implement the program. The training also includes an instruction manual for the teacher.

One trained, the staff meet 1-on-1 with the teen parent, providing research-based parenting instruction in a format accessible for all literacy levels. The teaching component is then paired with a 1-on-1 visit between the parent and child.

After completing the program, Just Beginning graduates earn a certificate of completion which they may then use to demonstrate rehabilitation and seek an early release or transfer.

As graduates reintegrate into society, Just Beginning staff collaborate with relevant organizations to create a supportive team to assist them on their parenting journey, including parent and family support, job training and readiness, parenting and health education, day care and child support.

Detention staff report that many of the youth in Just Beginning exhibit improved behavior and become positive role models for their peers. When youth develop a bond with their children through Just Beginning, they have increased motivation to maintain good behavior so that they can continue to participate in the program. Participants also demonstrated increased responsiveness to and engagement with their children after completing the Just Beginning parenting program, which is a strong predictor of the youth's prospects for continuing their relationships with their children after release from detention.

Currently Just Beginning is in six county probation departments in California as well as the Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility in Ohio and the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. The Youth Law Center is working with Rachel Barr, Ph.D. of Georgetown University, who has done direct research on the impact of television on parent/child interactions.

For more information about the Just Beginning Program, go to www.justbeginning.org.

Watch CLiF's New Video

The Children's Literacy Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire a love of reading and writing among children up to age 12 throughout New Hampshire and Vermont. One of CLiF's initiatives is the Children of Prison Inmates program. This program inspires children of inmates to read more often, connects children and incarcerated parents through stories, and gives prisoners extra confidence to read to their children, even if they are not strong readers themselves.

The Children's Literacy Foundation has produced a short video describing the Children of Prison Inmates program. It can be viewed at <http://clifonline.org/literacy-programs/children-of-prison-inmates/>.



Website Provides Information on Modifying a Child Support Order

Whether or not they are willing to fulfill their court ordered responsibility, many incarcerated parents cannot feasibly pay the full amount of their child-support obligation. Child support payments to families go unpaid and the parent can end struggling to repay large debts after release that can contribute to reincarceration.

If the court orders can be modified to be based on actual circumstances in the family, the result may lead to an attempt to make more reliable child support payments and children may benefit.

On its website, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/state-by-state-how-to-change-a-child-support-order, the Office of Child Support Enforcement Administration for Children & Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers state by state information on how to change a child support order.

If you go to the website and click on a state on the map, you will find *Your Guide to Changing a Child Support Order* in Your State. The *Guide* provides information to help parents understand the child support review and modification process.

Although some states do not allow incarcerated parents to decrease, defer or delay child support payments, for most states, there will also be information on the website about reviewing a court order, court forms and local resources.

Updated Handbooks Now Available

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

Both handbooks have been updated in June 2017 and are now available on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org and www.fairshake.net websites.

The *Reaching Beyond Bars: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin and their Families* has been expanded from 30 to 35 pages with many parenting tips added. *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails* has also been expanded and now contains 88 entries on programs and resources for incarcerated parents and their families.

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. CEA-Wisconsin has funded the printing of a limited number of hardcopies of the booklets. The hardcopies are available to those who request them and to those attending workshops that the Parenting Special Interest Group presents.

The *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails* is a "living document." This means information will continue to be added to the handbook as relevant programs and resources are identified. The *Reaching Beyond Bars: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin and their Families* is updated approximately every two years. As the handbooks are updated, they will be posted on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org and www.fairshake.net websites.

If you have information that you feel should be included in either of the handbooks or would like to request a hardcopy of a handbook, email jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com.



Talking Is Teaching

"Talking Is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing" is a public awareness and action campaign that helps parents recognize their power to boost their children's early brain and vocabulary development through simple, everyday actions - like describing things while walking outside, or singing songs together during bath time. Using books, parent videos, text messaging, social media, and information from expert partners, Talking Is Teaching empowers parents and caregivers with fun and easy ways to improve their babies' learning.

Talking Is Teaching is a campaign of *Too Small to Fail*, a joint initiative of The Opportunity Institute and the Clinton Foundation.

While research reveals that mothers may often be more engaged than fathers in language-rich activities — like talking and reading — with their children, Too Small to Fail believes that fathers play a critical role in their children's development.

Recent studies have shown the positive impact fathers have on their children's health and development when they take an active role early and often. Fathers' involvement can improve children's outcomes at school, as well as their confidence levels, problem solving abilities and social-emotional skills.

Fathers can bond and make the most of the time they share with their children in everyday moments. When they talk, read, and sing with their children — even before the children can use words — you're building the children's brains and helping to prepare them for success in school and in life.

But it may not always be easy for fathers to talk to their babies, especially when they can't talk back. To help, *Too Small to Fail* has pulled together fun tips and resources grounded in the best science, to help you talk, read, and sing with your child every day.

Learning begins at birth. When you talk, read, and sing with your child in sensitive, loving, and responsive ways, you build their brain and help them develop the social-emotional skills they need to succeed in school and life. Check out Talking Is Teaching's new resources with tips for understanding and managing your child's behavior, and taking care of yourself during the challenging moments.

Tips for Your Child

The Talking Is Teaching campaign has created a series of videos to help parents learn more about how to support their child's early social-emotional development:

- **Understand What's Driving Your Child's Behavior** - When your child throws food off of a high-chair or has a tantrum in the grocery store, it might seem like they're trying to get a rise out of you. But behind your child's behavior is a feeling they're experiencing, too. Learn how to understand and support your child's feelings.
- **Setting Limits with Love** - When parents and caregivers set limits, they teach their children the skills they need to resolve conflict, treat others with care, and manage their emotions. Find out how to set limits with love in the early years.
- **Parenting as a Process** - Parenting is hard work! Many parents struggle through the challenges and feel like they aren't doing a good enough job. But you don't need to know all of the answers to be a good parent. Find out how practicing self-forgiveness and taking care of yourself can improve your connection with you child.
- **Fostering Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children** – Learn fun and easy tips for parents and families who want to support their children's social and emotional development from birth to age 5 during their everyday routines.



Preparing Your Child for School and Beyond

Other Talking Is Teaching videos designed to help build children's brains as well as important language, math, reading and social-emotional skills to help prepare them for school and beyond are:

- **Everyday Fun with Science** - Learn about fun activities designed to support your young child's growing knowledge of science.
- **Everyday Fun with Engineering and Technology** - Transform small moments into big opportunities for your littlest discoverers with these Engineering and Science activities that can be done during daily moments.
- **Talk, Read, and Sing Together Everyday!** - From bath time to meal time, check out tips for incorporating talking, reading, and singing into your everyday routine.
- **Turn 'Wash Time' Into "Talk Time"** - Laundromats aren't just for washing clothes. You can talk, read, and sing there, too! Here are fun ideas on how you can turn wash time into talk, read, sing time with your little one.
- **Social and Emotional Development Research Background** - Social and emotional development begins in the earliest moments. Learn more about what the research tells us on the lifelong impact of a strong social-emotional foundation.

For information, fun tips, resources and activities, check out the Talking Is Teaching website: www.TalkingIsTeaching.org.

Books to Celebrate New Dads

This Father's Day, the team at Too Small to Fail compiled a list of their favorite books to celebrate new dads. Below are the fifteen books that they selected about the special relationship dads share with their children.

Descriptions of the books may be found at <https://www.romper.com/p/15-books-to-celebrate-new-dads-all-year-long-65113>.

- 'A Perfect Father's Day' by Eve Bunting
- 'The Daddy Book' by Todd Parr
- 'Guess How Much I Love You' by Sam McBratney
- 'And Tango Makes Three' by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
- 'Rory The Dinosaur: Me And My Dad' by Liz Climo
- 'Owl Moon' by Jane Yolen
- 'Just Me And My Dad' by Mercer Mayer
- 'Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale' by Mo Willems
- 'Ten, Nine, Eight' by Molly Bang
- 'Your Baby's First Word Will Be DADA' by Jimmy Fallon
- 'Oh, Oh, Baby Boy' by Janine Macbeth
- 'Love You, Dad' by Melina Gerosa Bellows
- 'My Dad' by Anthony Browne
- 'Daddy Hugs' by Karen Katz
- 'I Love My Daddy Because...' by Laurel Porter-Garold

Tell Us About Your Program --- Email Your Article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com



Dear Dad . . .

The Beat Within was founded in San Francisco in 1996 with the goal of providing incarcerated youth with an opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences in a safe space that encourages literacy, self-expression, some critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relationships with adults and their community.

The Beat Within partners with community organizations and individuals to offer writing workshops and bring resources to youth both inside and outside of detention. The Beat Within is committed to being an effective bridge between youth who are locked up and the community that aims to support their progress towards a healthy, non-violent, and productive life.

For many incarcerated youth, participation in The Beat Within projects was the first positive recognition they ever received for having a voice worthy of an audience. The Beat Within magazine featuring the works of incarcerated youth is 60 pages and is printed bi-weekly.

The Beat Within staff and volunteers serve over 5,000 youth annually through workshops operated across California county juvenile halls: San Francisco, Alameda, Fresno, Marin, Monterey, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Solano, Riverside, and Los Angeles. Outside of California, Beat workshops occur in New Mexico, Hawaii, Oregon and in Washington, DC. The Beat Within has partnered with education and criminal justice programs at the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, San Francisco State, California College of the Arts, the University of Hawaii, the University of Redlands, and Portland State University.

To mark Father's Day, The Beat Within asked inmates of juvenile detention centers to write on the topic, "Dear Dad." The topic read: "A Letter to My Dad – The letter you always wanted (or maybe never wanted) to write. Though the letter may never be seen by this person, we want you, as a writing exercise, to write that letter. Tell your father, or the one who has played the father role in your life, whatever you think they need to know. Are you happy with his role as your dad, or is there room for improvement? Maybe share a specific memory of a time you two had together, or a time you truly wish he was there for you. We bet, for better or worse, there is plenty to tell your Dad. Dear Dad..."

Selected pieces from The Beat Within prompt, "Dear Dad. . ." may be found on the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange website, <http://jjie.org/2017/06/15/for-fathers-day-from-the-inside-dear-dad/> or the Crime Report website, <https://thecrimereport.org/2017/06/15/dear-dad-why-werent-you-there/>.

Here's a first sampling of the letters the youth produced.

Dear Dad

I often wish you would just accept me for me, for who I am (instead of) trying to change me. You always said, or at least claimed, "I'm here to teach you, show you what's needed" but you always belittled me. You always spoke above me and never listened. You heard me but failed to understand my words. When I asked for help you would come to my aid—but only helped when it helped you. You never came to help me just to help me.

When I took the extra step to try helping our so badly damaged relationship you heard me but you never fixed a thing. If I asked you for something, it felt like I asked God to forgive Satan. Asking you for something was never easy. I always had to ask someone else for what I needed. You always took my kindness for granted so I stopped showing it to everyone. I'm sorry; you claim I love you but I truly don't. I respect you for taking me in—but love? No.

Thomas, Portland, Oregon



Dear Dad

Throughout the last year I've been back and forth between being free and being locked up. I know you weren't there when I was a child, but you made an effort to be there in my later years. You proved to me that you're a good man and changed, now it's my turn to prove to you that I'm not another juvenile statistic and I can change.

I regret a lot of things in my past, I've made a lot of mistakes that affected other people not just myself, and I wish every day that to take them back. I was so caught up in the hustle life that I'd do anything to come up on money and the drugs, they owned me. I thought that this was the life to live and if you weren't in the game then you were a nobody; little did I know I was just running from the truth about myself.

Being here, locked up in these cells sounds bad, but it might just be the best place for me. It's giving me time to think about what I want in life and time to get closer to myself. I've got 10-plus years to spend in these cells for a crime that ruined my life but I've learned to not regret these things. There are things I can't change, things that I should move on from. It's only up from here Pops, the hustle game never leaves you but I'm hustling for a better life this time. 'Till I hear from you again, love you.

Mason, Portland, Oregon

Dear Dad

I love you. I wish you were here to see me right now. My life is going so downhill and if you were here I wouldn't be in this bad position. You kept me on track, or at least I listened to you so I wouldn't have been hard-headed and ended up where I am now.

I just wish you could call me right now and talk to me and tell me "you always got excuses Angelique." I need to hear your voice, the sounds in my head aren't enough. I need you physically Dad. Come to me in my dreams so I could know you are protecting me every day like you did when you were alive in this world.

Angelique, San Francisco, California

Dear Dad

I wish you would have been there when things went down, but you weren't and I forgive you, not just for that but also the things that you have done to me. I love you Dad and I know that it is awkward saying that but I truly do and I hope that you are sober. That shhh kills me on the inside that you are a drug addict even though you deny it. We all know Dad, it's time to heal from all the shhh that you have been through and it's time for you to grow up. I don't know what else to say but have a good life and I hope you become sober.

A, Los Angeles, California

Dear Dad

It has been a long time coming. I finally had the guts to write it. Dad, I ain't scared of you no more! From your mental abuse to the physical abuse, I ain't scared.

Can you see I am still your baby girl? Even though you called me a mistake, because being born ruined your dreams. Dad, all I wanted was your love. To hear you say you love me and really mean it. Or to at least spend some time with you. That's all I wanted when I was a child. But not all hopes and dreams come true. At least you have a second chance of being a father, and I'm proud of you for not drinking anymore. I can see you're happy.

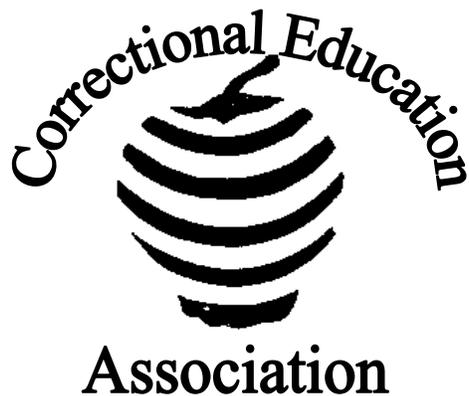
Even though I'm the black sheep of the family, I want to make you proud, the way I am of you. I vow to never disappoint you again.

Nellida, New Orleans, Louisiana

Please contact Lisa Lavaysse at llava@thebeatwithin.org, if you would like to purchase the full PDF or a printed copy of any issue of *The Beat Within: A Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside*.



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Editor's Message:

Men who did not have a father-figure present during their childhood or who had a father that was self-absorbed, uncaring or troubled by addiction or mental illness often do not know how to be a spontaneous father. They feel uncomfortable talking and playing with their own children. They may know the kind of dad they be or don't want, but feel awkward when trying to relate to their children and do not know the right way to be a dad.

The most important thing is that children know their father loves them. This means spending time with children, getting to know them and being involved in their lives so they get to know you. Often starting with semi-structured activities like reading, singing, playing games or making something with the child can be the avenue to more spontaneous talking and sharing of everyday moments that creates the lasting bond that these fathers desire.

Jerry

***Children aren't happy with nothing to ignore and that's what parents are for
--- Ogden Nash***

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

