

Parenting Connection

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Tip Sheets Created by Youth to Support Youth Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

On June 28-29, 2016, a diverse group of youth from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C., for a listening session to discuss their experiences as children of incarcerated parents. These youth came together to share their unique needs, observations, and suggestions for how to improve services and programs designed for them and other youth with incarcerated parents.

The listening session was supported by the Office of Human Services Policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the US Department of Justice. It was organized by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), through the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, and the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI) at Rutgers University, Camden, NJ.

This historic event was the first time that youth with incarcerated parents were brought together from all parts of the U.S. to not only discuss the issues and concerns they and their families face, but also to present their stories and recommendations to senior officials in various agencies of the federal government.

On day one, the listening session brought together 19 youth, ages 15 to 23, from 13 states with different backgrounds to discuss the challenges they had during their parent's incarceration. In facilitated small group discussions they shared their experiences of having incarcerated mothers or fathers and sometimes both parents. They talked about their struggles as well as the supports and programs that helped them.

On day two, they presented their ideas for how to improve the supports and systems that affect youth and families of the incarcerated in front of an audience from Federal departments and agencies.

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Topics included:

- Challenges and successes with available services;
- Communicating, visiting, and maintaining a relationship with their incarcerated parent
- Preparing for their parent's reentry to the family and community.

The purpose of these discussions was to learn more about the effects of parental incarceration on children, youth, and families. The themes that emerged will contribute to the understanding of the needs of children with incarcerated parents and their families and will help inform future work regarding policies and procedures contributing to positive outcomes for children with an incarcerated parent.

Participants' ideas and feedback from the session were used to develop two tip sheets and a video:

Tip Sheet for Youth: Youth Supporting Fellow Youth Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

This tip sheet was written *by* youth who have an incarcerated parent *for* youth who have an incarcerated parent. It shares information that young people wish they had told them when their parent was first involved in the criminal justice system.

Tip Sheet for Providers: Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

This tip sheet is meant for community-based organizations that reach children and youth who may have incarcerated parents. It gives practical information about how these youth want to be supported.

In their Words: 4 Young People Share Experiences with Having an Incarcerated Parent

This video shares the stories of four young women who are dealing with having a parent behind bars.

The Tip Sheet for Youth and Tip Sheet for Providers are summarized on pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter and both tip sheets and the video are available at www.Youth.gov/COIP.

The Tip Sheet for Youth and Tip Sheet for Providers are the most recent additions to the library of tip sheets available on Youth.gov. Other tip sheets in the collection are:

Tip Sheet for Prison/Jail Staff and Volunteers: Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

Prison and jail staff and volunteers play an important role in facilitating visits and helping make visits a positive experience for children with incarcerated parents. Visits from family members can help promote strong family ties and have been shown to decrease recidivism. For children, visits are an important way to maintain the relationship with their incarcerated parent, which can have important implications on a child's behavior and mental health. Staff and volunteers are the first and last individuals that children see in the facility; their support of family visits can set an important tone that parent-child relationships are valued and important.

Tip Sheet for Incarcerated Parents: Planning for a Visit from Your Child/Children

Visitation can be an important and meaningful experience for incarcerated parents and their children, but it can also be a source of stress and anxiety when parents' or children's expectations do not align with what ends up happening. Many aspects of visitation are outside of the control of an incarcerated parent, but there are things you can do to anticipate problems and reduce stress to make visitation a positive and beneficial experience for everyone involved. Below are things to consider when planning for a visit from your child. If you do not know the answer to a question, think about who in your facility you can ask for an answer such as other incarcerated parents, volunteers, or facility staff. Even if you cannot find the answer to a particular question, if you think it could affect the visit, make sure your child's caregiver is aware of the issue.



Tip Sheet for Mentors: Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

Mentors can play an important role in addressing the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Mentors are caring adults who work with youth as positive role models in a formal or informal way, offering consistent guidance and support. Youth connect with mentors through youth-serving organizations, including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, businesses, and after-school programs. Mentors can help improve outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents by using research-based practices and effective supports.

Tip Sheet for Teachers (Pre-K through 12): Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

School staff make a difference in the lives of all children, including children of incarcerated parents. For the child with a parent in prison, a safe and supportive school can provide a caring, stable setting offering opportunities for educational, social, and emotional development. The bonds and relationships fostered at school with peers and trusted adults play a vital role in the child's short and long term learning and maturation.

For past issues of this newsletter, go to:
www.ceawisconsin.org

Tell Us About Your Program

One of the goals of the Correctional Education Association's Parenting Special Interest Group is to provide a vehicle for communication among educators who are developing programs for incarcerated parents in correctional facilities or for their families in the community. 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 program
- 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 newsletter articles to JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com.

Mark Your Calendar

International Prisoner's Family Conference

May 3-5, 2017

Wyndham Gardens-Dallas North

Dallas, Texas

www.prisonersfamilyconference.org



Tip Sheets for Youth and Providers: Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

From the youth: What you should know. Here are some things many of us experience:

- We rely on our own inner strength
- We often grow up too soon taking on responsibilities:
 - Taking care of younger siblings
 - Getting jobs to help with family finances
 - Obtaining services such as physical and mental healthcare
 - Navigating systems and avoiding negative attention from Child Welfare or Human Services who might take us or our siblings away
- We love our parents, even though they have made mistakes. We miss them during:
 - Big events like having the parent there for holidays and graduation
 - Small activities like having the parent there to help with homework and going to our sporting event
 - Everyday opportunities for having parent as a role model
- We are misjudged by many and negatively judged because of our parent's actions
- We are sometimes told we will turn out like our parent and we are constantly fighting against and running from that judgement
- We have different experiences than other youth whose parent is absent for another reason like divorce:
 - Not being able to pick up the phone and talk to our parent any time we want
 - Not being able to hug our parent during a visit
 - Being judged differently and feeling shame and stigma because of those judgments
- We have different experiences even from each other:
 - Living arrangements before the incarceration
 - Relationship status with our parent before the incarceration
 - Being told the truth or lies about the incarceration
 - Involvement with child welfare during the incarceration
 - Changes in financial stability during the incarceration
- We are not different from other youth. We are young people, too, with the same needs and wants:
 - To be loved
 - To have support
 - To be successful
 - To have friends
- We do not have control over the situation, which is difficult:
 - We don't know what to expect with the incarceration process or when visiting our parent in a facility
 - We don't know with any certainty when we will be able to talk to or see our parent again

Advice for Youth from Youth who have or have had an incarcerated parent:

- Seek out resource lists on websites from government or other trusted organizations
- Reach out for help if you need it
 - Look to a trusted adult such as youth group leader, school counselor, or mentor for help
 - Advocate for help that is relevant to your situation – let them know what you need
 - Ask for help finding a counselor who is experienced with issues of incarceration



- Look for programs that have specific services for youth with an incarcerated parent and are familiar with your challenges and needs
 - Look for programs that offer transportation to help you visit your parent
 - Find after-school programs, weekend activities, mentoring, or other programs
- Find ways to cope with the challenges of having an incarcerated parent
 - Get involved with activities like sports or athletics, community service volunteering, etc.
 - Find ways to express yourself like writing, art, music, design, video/filmmaking, etc.
- Know that you are not alone — 2.7 million youth have an incarcerated parent
 - Find a support group to be able to talk with others going through the same thing
- Know there are opportunities to be an advocate
 - Channel your emotions (which might include anger and pain) into making a positive change through advocacy
 - Work with organizations to suggest that they include youth with incarcerated parents on planning committees and boards
 - Develop well thought-out messages when requesting change in a policy or procedure that affects you
 - Be part of efforts to create and expand visiting and mentoring programs
 - Advocate for financial backing and funding for effective programs

From the youth: Changes we would like to see

- Increased opportunities to visit — Our parents are often incarcerated in facilities that are far away. Whenever safe and appropriate we would like for courts and correctional agencies to place our incarcerated parents in facilities closer to family. If that's not possible, courts, corrections, and community-based organizations could consider providing additional transportation assistance to make visitation easier.
- More frequent and less expensive opportunities to communicate — The cost of phone calls from prison can be too expensive, making it difficult, or even impossible, for us to communicate with our parents. Corrections could consider reducing these costs and allowing for longer calls. Organizations serving youth could consider ways to help pay for or share the costs of calls, which would allow us to talk to our parents more often.
- Better communication between corrections and schools — We would like our parents to have the opportunity to participate in parent-teacher conferences. Corrections and courts should consider allowing flexibility for our parents to participate by phone or video technology, which the schools could help coordinate. Additionally, we often receive unexcused absences from school for going to visit our parents during the school day, even when we do not have other options. Schools could consider providing excused absences, and corrections could consider providing proof of visitation.
- Improved sharing of information about our parents — During the arrest, pretrial, trial, incarceration, and reentry processes, our parents are frequently moved around without letting us know. Courts, corrections, and probation should consider ways to ensure that we and our families have the most up to date information possible on the location of our parents.
- Better understanding about the impact of mandatory reporting rules — We frequently choose not to share personal details about our parents or our lives with people or organizations who we fear will report that information to child welfare. Youth serving organizations should be aware of our hesitations and find safe, comfortable ways for us to share what is happening in our lives.
- Friendlier interactions when visiting. We often feel like we are the ones who have done something wrong when we go to visit our incarcerated parents — Most prisons have strict rules about who can visit, the number of visitors, what we can bring, what we can wear, etc. These rules can be unclear, cause our families stress, and sometimes even result in a cancelled visit. Youth serving organizations can help us understand the rules and prepare for our visit. Corrections can make the rules easier to find and provide training for staff that reminds them that family visits are supposed to be a positive experience for all.



Executive Order Gives Child Support Relief for Incarcerated Parents

In the last days of the Obama administration, regulators quietly eased the child support burden on parents in prison. In an executive action just a month before President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration, the Obama administration unveiled a new federal regulation aimed at ending state policies that can leave prisoners saddled with crippling child support debts.

The new rule, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, requires states to notify all parents incarcerated of their right to ask the child support agency for a temporary reduction in payments. The regulations crafted by the Administration for Children and Families would require that prisoners be allowed to seek to lower the amount of child support they pay while in prison. The move aims to avoid inmates struggling to repay large debts after their release that can lead to reincarceration.

Many states have long considered incarceration a form of "voluntary" impoverishment, and therefore not a valid excuse for missing child-support payments. The policy effectively blocked many prisoners from modifying existing child support orders.

But jobs in state prisons pay a median wage of about 20 cents an hour, meaning that most incarcerated parents cannot feasibly pay the full amount of their child-support obligation — and end up tens of thousands of dollars in debt by the time they get out.

In 2010, the Obama administration said nearly 29,000 of the 51,000 federal prisoners with child-support orders were behind on payments. According to the HHS's Office of Child Support Enforcement, parents owe an average of \$23,000 or more in child support. With it being hard enough to reintegrate into society, the cycle of poverty and incarceration is likely to continue.

Under the new regulations, states would not be allowed to treat incarceration as "voluntary unemployment." States would also be required to notify both parents of the right to seek changes to child support payments if one of the parents is incarcerated for more than six months.

The new rule, said Vicki Turetsky, commissioner of the Office of Child Support Enforcement, is intended to keep these mostly-poor fathers out of severe debt so they are less tempted back into crime after they are released.

"Our number one goal is to increase regular child support payments to families. Orders often go unpaid when they are set beyond the ability of unemployed and low-wage parents to pay them, resulting in large arrearages that themselves lead to less employment and support paid," Turetsky said.

"By ensuring states set their orders based on actual circumstances in the family, we believe the rule will result in more reliable child support payments, and children will benefit," Assistant Secretary for Children and Families Mark Greenberg said in a statement about the new rule, published by the Department of Health and Human Services.

President Obama had advocated for the rules in late 2014 as part of his push for criminal justice reform in his second term. In June 2015, Republicans in Congress — led by then-House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin — introduced legislation to block the Obama administration from introducing the rule, saying it would be a burden on taxpayers and reward "deadbeat parents." The legislation has since stalled.



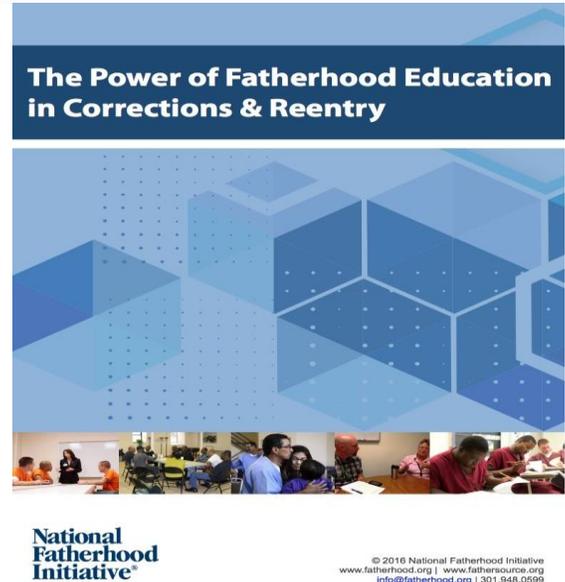
It is unclear whether the Trump administration will resume efforts to undo the regulation. But to do so, the new Health and Human Services Department under Secretary Tom Price would have to go through the same extensive rulemaking process the Obama administration did — which took more than two years.

NFI Offers Free eBook for those Working with Fathers in Corrections

The National Fatherhood Initiative has created four new eBooks to help professionals get started serving fathers in various settings. The new eBooks may be downloaded free from the NFI website: <http://www.fatherhood.org/fatherhood/4-ebooks-to-serve-fathers>.

One of the eBooks, *The Power of Fatherhood Education in Corrections and Reentry*, is designed for professional who work with fathers in corrections and reentry settings.

Because there are 2.7 million children with a parent in prison or jail and 92% of parents in prison are fathers, the National Fatherhood Initiative views incarceration as a significant contributor to father absence. Indeed, it is a major cause of father absence.



Here's some of the information you will find for working with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated fathers in the National Fatherhood Initiative's new eBook:

- The Problem for America's Children
- The Case for Fatherhood in Corrections and Reentry
- How to Rehabilitate and Address Criminogenic Needs
- How to Maintain Facility Safety and Order
- Planning for Reentry
- Reducing Recidivism
- The Solution for America's Children
- Evidence-Based Fatherhood Programming
- Creating Sustainable Programs
- Programs in Jails and Short-Term Stay Facilities
- InsideOut Dad® Testimonials

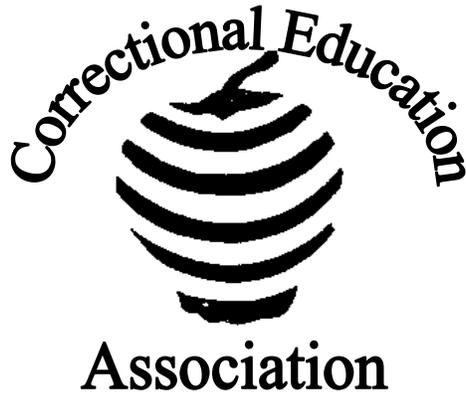
The other free eBooks in the NFI series are:

- *Community-Based Organizations: The Benefits of Fatherhood Programs in Community-Based Organizations*
- *Military: Strong Fathers + Strong Families = Mission Success*
- *State and Local Agencies: Creating Effective and Scalable Local Fatherhood Programs and Initiatives*

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



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Editor's Message:

Over the years, many dedicated individuals who work with incarcerated parents and their families have developed and delivered parenting classes, programs for children of incarcerated parents, parent/child reading projects, parent support groups and other parenting projects. Often their programs were developed independently and with little knowledge of or collaboration with each other.

The Parenting Special Interest Group (SIG) was created to improve communication and cooperation among these dedicated individuals and to encourage the development of new programming opportunities. The Parenting Special Interest Group's initiatives have included:

- Establishing a parenting network
- Publishing the bi-monthly *Parenting Connections* newsletter
- Posting information on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org, and www.fairshake.net websites
- Presenting workshops and training seminars at professional conferences
- Publishing a handbook – *Reaching Beyond Bars: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin and their Families* and a resource directory – *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails*
- Serving as an advocate for parenting programs for incarcerated parents and their families
- Serving as a resource for those teaching or developing parenting programs.

Anyone wishing to contribute articles for the newsletters or suggest ways to expand and improve our services may do so by contacting jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com.

Jerry

