

Parenting Connection

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Prison Fellowship Answers FAQs

Prison Fellowship is the nation's largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading advocate for criminal justice reform. For more than 40 years, Prison Fellowship volunteers have been going into correctional facilities to support the restoration of those affected by incarceration.

To help volunteers prepare for working with the families of incarcerated parents and gain insight into the problems children face when a parent goes to prison, Prison Fellowship has prepared a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the children of prisoners.

1) How many children in the U.S. have a parent that is incarcerated?

In America, "2.7 million children have a parent behind bars — one in every 28 children (3.6%) has a parent incarcerated, up from one in 125 just 25 years ago. Two-thirds of these children's parents were incarcerated for non-violent offenses." (Western)

Approximately one in 110 white children, one in 15 black children, and one in 41 Hispanic children have a parent who is incarcerated. (Christian)

"Black children (6.7%) were seven and a half times more likely than white children (0.9%) to have a parent in prison. Hispanic children (2.4%) were more than two and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison." (Glaze)

2) Do children always know their parent is in prison?

No. A study revealed that "a quarter of female prisoners' children did not know that their mothers were in prison." But most experts agree this is unhealthy for children and they need to be told the truth. (La Vigne)

Children are sometimes told their parents are out of town attending college or helping other family members who are ill. Sometimes the caregiver simply tells them they are the parent, not even acknowledging who their real parent truly is. (De Masi)

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Brochures to Start a Resource Library

With over 20 years of experience working with community, corrections, military organizations, and government agencies, National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) is the nation's leading and most experienced provider of evidence-based resources and programming designed specifically for incarcerated fathers

In addition to its research and evidence based reentry program *InsideOut Dad* and a variety of related resources, NFI provides incarcerated fathers with a number of easy to use and affordable resources that can help them to connect with their children and family while in custody and after release.

For correctional facilities and community organizations that would like to establish a resource library of materials to help offenders remain connected to their children and families throughout their time in prison, National Fatherhood Initiative publications could be a good starting point.

NFI recommends these research-based information brochures specifically for parents in prison and their families:

- Staying Involved with Your Children While Incarcerated
- 14 Things Dads In Prison Should Do Before Or Right After Release
- 20 Ways to Connect With Your Children and Family After Release
- The Importance of an Involved Father
- How to Better Manage Money (with Spending Plan Worksheet)

In addition, these other brochures may be of value to incarcerated fathers, as well as fathers in general:

- 7 Benefits of Marriage for Men
- 10 Ways to be a Better Dad
- 12 Questions to Ask Before Becoming a Father
- 12 Ways to Balance Work & Family
- 12 Ways to Create a Peaceful Home
- A Checklist for Keeping Your Child Safe from Newborn to Toddler
- How Dad Can Be a Good Co-Parent
- How to Help Your Child Do Well in School
- How to Keep Your Child Healthy
- So You're A New Father (or Are About to Become One)

Most of the brochures come in packs of 50 at a cost of \$18.99/pack. Most are also available in both English and Spanish. The catalog giving descriptions of the National Fatherhood Initiative's collection of brochures is available at www.fatherhood.org.

CLiF Turns 20

In 2018, the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) will be celebrating 20 years of "Opening Books, Opening Minds, Opening Doors" by encouraging a love of reading and writing among low-income, at-risk, and rural kids in New Hampshire and Vermont. Since 1998, CLiF has served more than 225,000 kids and given away nearly \$6 million in new, high-quality books!

CLiF volunteers and supporters will be celebrating all that they have accomplished together at the Montshire Museum in Norwich, Vermont on March 9, 2018 from 6:00 - 7:45 P.M.

One of CLiF's valuable efforts 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. CLiF has provided children's literacy programs and parent seminars to 17 facilities in New Hampshire and Vermont.

Activities sponsored by Children of Prison Inmates program include:

- Inspiring storytelling presentations for inmates and their children
- Donating on-site libraries in prison visiting rooms
- Book giveaways: Parents choose brand-new books to send home as gifts; children select new books on visiting days
- Literacy seminars for parents to help inmates read with their children
- Audio recordings of incarcerated parents reading to their children, so they can share stories from afar

In December, as 2017 wound down, CLiF visited its partnering prisons for the last time last year to talk to incarcerated parents about the importance of developing early literacy skills in their children, nieces and nephews and grandchildren, and sharing fun, easy tips for reading and talking about books together. As always, participants had the opportunity to choose new books for the children in their lives and write personal notes in them. Then the CLiF's stellar volunteer team arranged to get them where they needed to go.

In addition to these seminars and books, CLiF has also donated children's books to give away to visiting families during holiday parties at prisons in Berlin and Concord, NH.

CLiF volunteers know that the holidays can be an especially difficult time for kids who have family members that can't be there, so the opportunity to visit and have a fun experience reading together — plus, getting to take home a new book — is priceless to these children and their families.

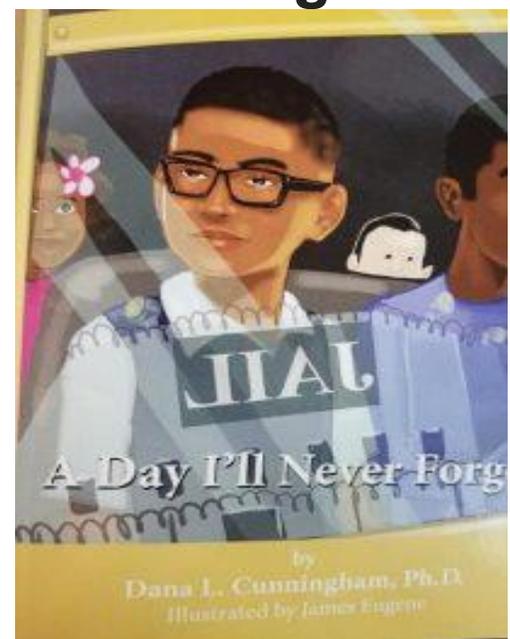
A video featuring the Children's Literacy Foundation's Children of Prison Inmates initiative and more information about other CLiF literacy programs may be found at <http://clifonline.org>.

Book Review: A Day I'll Never Forget

The new book, *A Day I'll Never Forget* by Dana L. Cunningham, provides a child's perspective of incarceration from a minority point of view. In the book, Javon's world is turned upside down when his father suddenly goes to jail. He is devastated and has no idea what he will do without his father. Javon eventually discovers that although he is separated from his father, he can maintain his relationship with him.

This touching story is ideal for children ages 10 and younger and would benefit children, counselors, teachers, family members, and any adult who works with children who have been affected by the incarceration of a loved one. The narrative and accompanying discussion questions provide an opportunity for adults to help children process their feelings about incarceration.

A Day I'll Never Forget is a great tool to understand a child's real life experiences and paves the way for grade school children to apply the coping strategies suggested.



Survey Identifies Options and Solutions

A growing awareness about mass incarceration and the collateral consequences for children and families in the U.S. has resulted in a proliferation of activity focused on children with incarcerated parents and their families including research, advocacy, and direct service interventions.

To get a handle on the breath of the initiatives being undertaken and to develop guidance for U.S. states and territories on how to provide more support for children and their caregivers who are impacted by the incarceration or justice-involvement of family members, the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, the Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative, The Council of State Governments Justice Center, and The Bay Area Children with Incarcerated Parents Partnership conducted a survey of current state level policy and practice concerning children with incarcerated parents.

The survey sought to identify initiatives and legislation focused on reducing the impact of parental incarceration on children and families. The survey also sought to identify the agencies implementing the initiatives including Education, Corrections, Child Welfare, Health, and others within state government, that intersect with this population.

Examples of state-wide initiatives that the survey sought to identify included things like:

- Children’s cabinet, task force, commission, institute, or other central bodies that are charged with addressing children with incarcerated parents.
- Staff training that is statewide within specific agencies (e.g., child welfare, education, corrections, probation/parole, etc.) regarding children with incarcerated parents and their families.
- Policies and procedures such as:
 - A model or policy for law enforcement on how to respond to children when arresting their parent or caregiver.
 - Judges’ consideration, at the time of sentencing, of Family Impact (or Responsibility) Statements for defendants with children.
 - Prison policies oriented toward children (e.g., free phone calls between incarcerated parents and children; family-specific visiting policies).
 - Extension of the Adoption and Safe Families Act timeline for incarcerated parents.
 - Procedures for stopping the accrual of child support debt during an obligor’s incarceration
- Programs for children or families such as:
 - Parenting program offered in all state or territory prisons.
 - Services to children with incarcerated parents and their families through federal or state funded programs such as The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program or Early Head Start/Head Start.
 - Transportation or prison visiting program funded by state agencies (e.g., corrections or child welfare).
- Tracking and/or sharing data regarding children with incarcerated parents and their families such as:
 - Child welfare tracking the number of children in their care with an incarcerated parent.
 - Corrections tracking the number of incarcerated parents of minor children.
- Legislation allocating funding to programs for children with incarcerated parents and their families.

The survey of all U.S. states and territories was completed in November. The findings are now being organized and clarified in order to identify statewide policies, practices, initiatives and legislation focused on reducing the impact of parental incarceration on children and families. The findings of effective and promising strategies from different states and territories as well as recommendations for implementation are scheduled for publication in Fall 2018.



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Prison Fellowship Answers FAQs

While someone might not tell a child because they want to protect them, in the end it causes the child more confusion and leads the child to believe that being in prison is "so shameful that their caregivers were unwilling, unable, or too humiliated to reveal it to the children." (De Masi) Protecting a child from the truth may cause worry, uncertainty, fear, and distrust. Children may wonder if they too will mysteriously disappear or they may find out about the incarceration through other sources and distrust those closest to them. (La Vigne)

3) What are some feelings children experience when a parent is incarcerated?

Children between the ages of 2-6 can feel separation anxiety, impaired socio-emotional development, traumatic stress and even survivor guilt. (Travis) Children between the ages of 7-10 may experience developmental regressions, poor self-concept, acute traumatic stress reactions, and impaired ability to overcome future trauma. (Travis) Children from ages 11-14 may experience rejection on limits of behavior and trauma-reactive behaviors. (Travis) Children from the ages of 15-18 may experience a premature termination of dependency relationship with parent, and it may lead them to intergenerational crime and incarceration. (Travis)

4) What are some emotional issues children of incarcerated parents face?

Children often experience chronic sleeplessness, difficulties concentrating, and depression. Also, "16% of children with a parent behind bars developed temporary school phobias that made them unwilling to attend school for up to six weeks following their parent's incarceration." (La Vigne)

"A national study of children encountered by Child Welfare Services estimated that among children with recently arrested parents, one in five children had clinically significant internalizing problems (depression, anxiety, withdrawal) and one in three had clinically significant externalizing problems (aggression, attention problems, disruptive behavior) compared to roughly one in ten children in the general population." (La Vigne)

5) Do children react differently to their parent's incarceration?

Yes. Younger children tend to experience "disorganized feelings and behaviors upon their parent's incarceration and older children displaying more antisocial behavior, conduct disorders, and signs of depression." (La Vigne)

While traditionally it has been believed that males suffered more intensely from a parent being put behind bars, some research has shown that males and females just have different reactions to a parent's incarceration, "with boys of fathers behind bars displaying more delinquency and aggression and girls exhibiting more internalizing behaviors and attention problems." (La Vigne)

6) What is the effect of social stigma on a child of an incarcerated parent?

Most children experience embarrassment when their parent goes to jail. Some children also assume they are at fault or have done something that led to their parent's incarceration, even when there was nothing they could do to prevent their parent from going to jail. (De Masi)

Children with a parent in jail or prison are teased more often at school and "may internalize the stigma and experience lower self-esteem, especially if they identify with the incarcerated parent . . . Others may react with anger, defiance, and a desire for retaliation against those who reject and taunt them." (La Vigne)

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7) Does having an incarcerated parent mean a child will eventually go to prison?

There is some controversy concerning this issue. Ann Adalist-Estrin, Director of the National Resource Center of Children and Families of the Incarcerated says: "Without adequate research we cannot say they are more likely to go to prison or jail."

According to a study conducted by Central Connecticut State University, children of the incarcerated are about three times as likely as other children to be justice-involved. (Conway)

8) Who do most incarcerated parents rely on to take care of their children?

Eighty-eight percent of incarcerated fathers rely on the mother of the children to provide daily care and 2% rely on foster care. Thirty-seven percent of incarcerated mothers rely on the father to provide primary care, 45% rely on the children's grandparents, 23% rely on other friends and relatives, and 11% rely on foster care. (Hairston)

Sadly, "one in four children living with a grandmother lives in poverty, and a third do not have health insurance, while two-thirds of caregivers of children with incarcerated mothers reported not having the financial support needed to meet the necessary expenses for the child." (La Vigne)

9) How does having an incarcerated parent affect a child's education?

"Children with fathers who have been incarcerated are significantly more likely than other children to be expelled or suspended from school (23% compared with 4%)." (Western)

They usually perform below average academically, "even when compared to children of mothers on probation (70% compared to 17%), and are more likely than similarly disadvantaged children to fail or drop out of school." (La Vigne)

10) How often do children visit their incarcerated parents?

"Seventy percent of parents in state prison reported exchanging letters with their children, 53% had spoken with their children over the telephone, and 42% had a personal visit since admission. Mothers were more likely than fathers to report having had any contact with their children . . . In federal prison, 85% reported telephone contact, 84% had exchanged letters, and 55% reported having had personal visits." (Glaze)

Children who continue to stay in touch with their parent in prison exhibit fewer disruptive and anxious behaviors. There is also evidence that it helps the parents as well by lowering recidivism rates and making reunification easier and more likely once the parent is released from prison. (La Vigne)

11) What are some obstacles that hamper visiting opportunities?

Families usually are strained for money, so it is a huge sacrifice for them to even decide to go and visit a loved one. Plus there is always a chance the prisoner could have been moved. As a security precaution, current prison practice is to inform family members of an inmate's transfer to another prison only after the transfer is completed. (De Masi)

Visiting procedures vary, but many jails and prisons force family members to be separated from the incarcerated relative by a thick glass window, which means they have to talk to each other using telephones. Also many jails and prison make visitors undergo frisk and search procedures. Crowded visiting rooms and long wait times are common. These conditions often deter family members from wanting to visit their incarcerated loved one. (Hairston)

Many children feel that the controlled environment and the limited time they could spend visiting their parent did not "allow them to have the kind of interactions they might have in less controlled environments." (De Masi)



12) Should all children ultimately be reunited with their parents?

There are many situations where it is safer for a child not to be reunited with their incarcerated parent once that parent is released. One study found that "one out of eight children who are reported victims of maltreatment have parents who were recently arrested; in 90% of cases, it was the child's mother who was arrested." (La Vigne)

Children are sometimes concerned about bonding with their parents again because they don't see their parents as "reliable" or "dependable." Often children have a different expectation of how their parents will behave than how the parents carry out their role upon reunification. (De Masi)

Parents really had to earn their child's respect upon reunification. They had to prove to their children that they had changed. "Many parents acknowledged that the time spent in prison helped them rectify many of the issues that brought them there and used their time for self-improvement." But others did not. Some parents continued to go in and out of prison, which made the prospect of long-term reunification nearly impossible. (De Masi)

The Prison Fellowship encourages organizations to download these Frequently Asked Questions and once downloaded, print, save, or share the pages with others. To download the FAQs go to:

www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/family/ministry-basics/faqs-about-children-of-prisoners/.

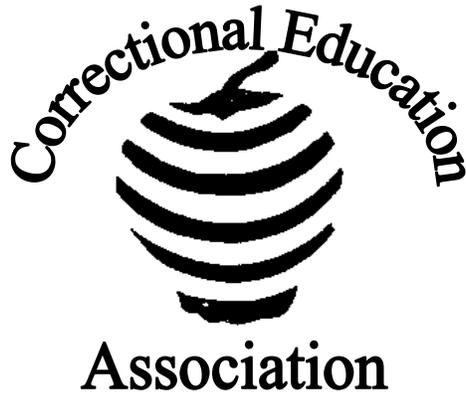
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For past issues of this newsletter, parenting handbooks, program resources, and more go to www.ceawisconsin.org



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Editor's Message:

Children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent often bear the brunt of separation and yearn for an integrated family life. The feelings they experience and issues they confront often follow them into adulthood.

While support groups exist for adult children of alcoholics, adult children who have experienced parental divorce, and survivors of abuse; there are few opportunities for adult children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent to meet, share their feelings and discuss issues relating to their life experiences. Such an opportunity could be invaluable to those whose personal emotions and family relationships are evolving as they adjust to life changes.

If you are aware of any support groups and other opportunities for adult children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent to meet and share feelings and experiences, we would like to hear about them and share the information with the readers of this newsletters.

If you can help, contact jerrybednarowski@nwew.rr.com.

Jerry

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

