

Parenting Connection

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Family Tensions? – Routines Rule!

Having consistent routines can give kids the freedom to be kids. Effective routines can guide their emotions and behaviors at home, school, and throughout the community.

Incarceration breaks up families, creating unstable environment for kids that can have lasting effects on their development and well-being. Children with incarcerated parents face many challenges. Often they may have moved homes, changed schools, and been separated from siblings. Many children will have feelings of shame about their parents' incarceration, and they may feel isolated from others.

As a result, the children suffer more emotional problems and lower school success than their peers. Like all children, they need a source of support and stability.

Linda Armas, Trainer and Educational Consultant of Prepare Parents LLC, has some advice for educators seeking to help incarcerated parents and caregivers learn to design effective routines that can improve the children's ability to cope with the stresses caused by the incarceration of a parent.

In the description of her workshops and book below, Linda offers:

“My GIFT to you for a new and improved year is to share my strategies for designing a routine that enhances family function and relationships. This is content that I share in my Create-a-Routine Presentations and Workshops. It is based on my book, The Freedom of Routine, available at Amazon.com Parents and caregivers of children with incarcerated family members will find particular value in learning to design routines for promoting positive behaviors. For more information, check my website: www.PrepareParents.com or contact: linda@prepareparents.com.”



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The recent holiday season triggered mixed emotions for countless people. Perhaps you are among them.

Holiday traditions are often practiced by families over decades or generations. Those traditions feel familiar, comfortable and predictable. The absence of a tradition – or our loved ones to share traditions with – can cause heartache. It can be difficult to feel the joy of the season when traditions change or we can't share them with those that we usually do. There can even be guilt for enjoying traditions in the absence of certain "others." When a family member is incarcerated, that separation and the resulting sorrow and/or guilt, can last longer than the holiday season. It can be hard to get through daily life without your incarcerated loved one all year long.

As caring adults, we owe it to ourselves and to those at home to "keep it together." I'm NOT talking about turning-off or burying feelings. I'm talking about keeping day-to-day home-life consistent and predictable so that there is the opportunity for all family members to carry on optimally. I'm talking about acknowledging that having an incarcerated loved one changes things emotionally, physically, socially, and often financially. I'm talking about committing time and attention to promote a thriving existence and nurturing relationships for the family members that are *not* incarcerated. I'm talking about creating ROUTINES at home to simplify and optimize the necessary practices of daily family function.

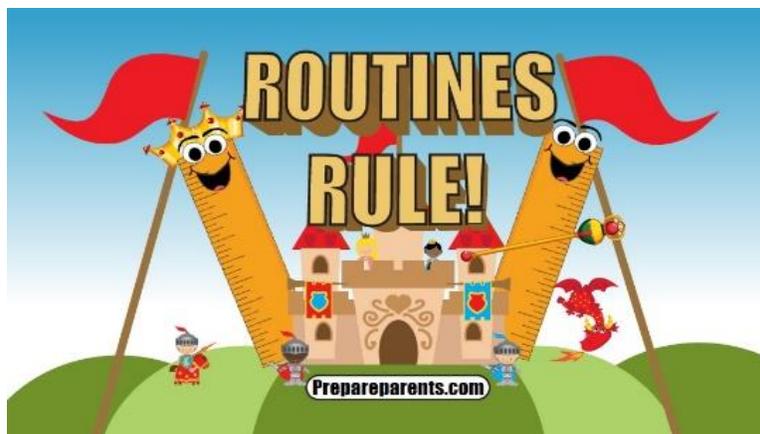
Just as holiday traditions became valued and repeated over time, so can our daily practices at home. The difference is that we LIVE these daily practices all year long, and that these practices create predictability and stability by our design. Routines are valuable for all, and essential for some.

Let's begin by thinking about improving something that your children do (or don't do). Perhaps it is a source of a reoccurring argument between you, causes you to be late, or just drives you crazy! Think about one or two of those main stressors in your home.

Here are some common family tensions:

- 1) Is it a challenge to get your children up-and-out in the morning?
- 2) Are your meals chaotic?
- 3) Do your children fail to do their school homework? Chores at home?
- 4) Are curfews an issue? School attendance?
- 5) What about getting your kids to bed at night? Does bedtime feel like an upsetting end to a stressful day?

Creating expectations that are understood, repetitive and reinforced can change these and other stressors into every day, calm happenings. The process of making your expectations into automatic behaviors is what I call my *ROUTINES RULE!* process. The Routine becomes the boss!



To implement a routine is to teach others to follow a *series* of clearly defined behaviors that result in successfully completed expectations.

Routines work because expectations are done automatically, with:

- Little or no new thinking
- Predetermined specifications
- Little or no protest
- Time after time

It may sound simple, but it requires thought and care to identify a specific path of expectations from start to finish. It is critical to define specific behaviors, define how and when they should be completed, and then reinforce their completion meaningfully and sustainably.

First, ask yourself some important questions before designing a useful and personalized routine. Your responses to these *Create-a-Routine Questions* will help you to identify specific wanted behaviors, and to create a workable routine in which they will occur.

1. What is the desired end result/goal?
2. Is this result/goal developmentally appropriate?
3. Who will be involved?
4. What has to happen to achieve the desired result/goal? Be specific.
5. What are the “hurdles” or things that make this challenging?
6. What can I do to eliminate or reduce that “hurdle?”
7. How will I observe and/or monitor progress?
8. How will I reinforce the progress/attainment of result/goal?

When you’ve answered these questions, you’ve identified the behavior that you want, and how/when you want it. You’ve thought through some trouble-shooting to give the routine the best chance of success. You’ve considered your monitoring methods and reinforcements. Now, write your expectations in a list format, and post it for your child. This step is not to be avoided! Posting the expectation list allows you to direct your child to the list instead of giving verbal reminders, since reminders are often interpreted as nagging. (If your child is a non-reader, find images on the internet to cut-and-paste when creating your expectation list.)

As you think about reinforcements, consider noting a successfully completed routine by drawing a star or a happy face on a calendar. Consider giving *time* rewards versus tangible rewards as the stars/smiles accumulate. (Example, 10 stars = extra bedtime story, 20 stars = 20 additional minutes of game time, 30 stars = 30 minutes in the park, etc.) Individualize the reinforcements to make them meaningful and motivating. These kinds of reinforcements strengthen your relationships by making your time together a valued reward!

Well-designed routines offer direct pathways to consistently accomplish goals.

Familiarity x Repetition = Predictability

Predictability x Consistency = Security

Security x Repetition = Stability

How do you want to empower your family? Routines can take you all the way!

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So whether you were one that enjoyed or was troubled by the recent holidays, enrich your family's function and relationships by creating your own personalized routines in the new year! Contact me to schedule a presentation, or a workshop where each participant is guided in customizing their own useful routine.

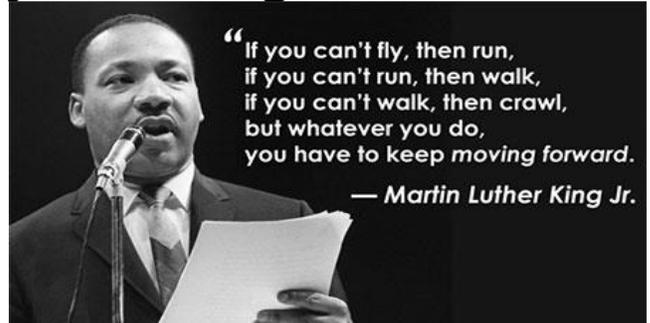
Linda Armas offers presentations and workshops for various audiences around the country. She also addresses professionals at conferences, and facilitates Corporate Wellness Trainings. Linda consults with parents and educators, customizing routines for their particular needs.

Linda Armas is committed to enhancing families, by supporting and guiding the adults in their lives. Her book, *The Freedom of Routine* is available on Amazon.com.

Celebrate MLK Day by Sharing a Quote

As we mark another Martin Luther King Jr. Day, it is a good time to encourage incarcerated parents to celebrate this American leader's legacy by sharing his wise words with their children.

Sharing one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s quotes in a letter provides the incarcerated parents a unique opportunity to chat with their kids about important principles for which King fought his whole life.



Though many recall his famous words from the "I Have a Dream" speech, King gave us many quotes that are ideal conversation starters. The incarcerated parents can take a moment to share his words with their kids and explore why we celebrate this courageous man. Who knows – maybe his words will inspire your little ones to think about how they can begin to make a difference in their world.

Here is a sampling of Martin Luther King Jr. quotes that an incarcerated parent could share:

1. The quality, not the longevity, of one's life is what is important.
2. If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.
3. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.
4. If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.
5. Only in the darkness can you see stars.
6. Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service.
7. We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.
8. The time is always right to do the right thing.
9. Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.
10. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.
11. Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"
12. Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.



CLiF Connects Inmates and their Families through Books

When the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) visits our prison partners in Vermont and New Hampshire to host parent literacy discussions and book giveaways, incarcerated parents and grandparents also have the opportunity to experience storytelling with a CLiF presenter and lose themselves in a story. There is something undeniably special about a group of adults devoting their rapt attention to Max's rumpus with the Wild Things or Sylvester's transformative adventure with the Magic Pebble.



CLiF's Children of Prison Inmates program offers incarcerated parents and their children an opportunity to share a love of reading and stories and helps bridge the distance that separates these parents from their families. Through this grant, CLiF sends professional presenters to our correctional facility partners in Vermont and New Hampshire to give literacy seminars to inmates designed to help them learn new strategies for making reading with children fun and exciting. Every seminar includes a storytelling element where the CLiF presenter shares a story with the adults participating in the seminar. At the end of each seminar every participant can choose a brand-new book to send home to each of their children with a handwritten note inside. CLiF presenters and program staff enjoy the opportunity to help parents find the just the right book for their children among the hundreds of books available to choose from. CLiF also hosts Family Literacy Celebration when kids and parents enjoy food, games, stories, and books, and we support the Storybook Program allowing inmates to read books aloud and send books and recordings home to their children.

Over the past five years, more than 500 inmates and 1,500 children have benefited from this program. As we continue to expand our impact and add new partners, we've been encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive feedback we receive from incarcerated parents. In a recent survey of program participants, 98% of the men and women reported that the Children of Prison Inmates program helped strengthen their connection with their children. And 91% felt the CLiF program helped their children become more interested in reading and writing. We are certainly grateful for our long-term partnerships with our current COPI partners: the women's prison in South Burlington, VT and the men's prison in Concord, NH and Berlin, NH. Before the end of the year, we are excited to add the men's prison in Rutland, VT and the women's prison in Concord, NH to our list of partners. This significant expansion of the Children of Inmates program is also possible due to the high level of interest and dedication shown by our network of CLiF presenters. We are able to broaden the CLiF experience for our program participants by bringing in a variety of CLiF presenters to share their work and passion for children's literacy.

To find out, more about Clif's Children of Prison Inmates program contact Executive Director Duncan McDougall at duncan@clifonline.org or to support the Children's Literacy Foundation's programs go to clil@clifonline.org.

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Mentoring Children with an Incarcerated Parent: A Review of the Research

In 2016, the National Mentoring Resource Center released a review of the research base related to mentoring children with an incarcerated parent. This review examined the relevant research on the effectiveness, the moderating factors, and the implementation of efforts to date to improve the lives of young people impacted by the incarceration of a parent through mentoring relationships.

The review highlighted several noteworthy possibilities based on the available research. Although far from being well-established through rigorous research, these possibilities include:

- Program-arranged mentoring for the children of incarcerated parents has the potential to contribute to observable improvements in their behavior, relationships, and their emotional well-being.
- Positive outcomes from mentoring may be more evident while the youth are actively engaged with their mentors, although sustaining the length of the mentoring relationship for the children of incarcerated parents is apparently difficult for programs.
- The benefits of mentoring for this population may be influenced by the child's capacity for trust and resilience, the strength of the relationship between child and the incarcerated caregiver, and whether this person is the child's biological parent.
- Processes involving positive youth development, resilience and coping skills, and self-esteem may be instrumental as pathways through which mentoring is beneficial for children of incarcerated parents.

The review also offered recommendations for practitioners based on the available evidence, including:

- Utilization of a networked approach that heavily involves caregivers and other caring adults to create a web of support in addition to the mentor.
- Connecting families to other services and supports as needed beyond mentoring.
- Using a positive youth development approach to provide youth with broad support and opportunities to thrive.
- Exploring strategies for extending the benefits of the relationship over time, especially through the identification of subsequent post-program mentors

The goal the National Mentoring Resource Center is to improve the quality and effectiveness of youth mentoring across the country through increased use of evidence-based practices and sharing practitioner innovations.

Youth mentoring programs can use the Center to strengthen their services by:

- Applying for no-cost training and technical assistance, including customized coaching to enhance your program and troubleshoot challenges using evidence-based practices
- Accessing high-quality program implementation resources, including tools, program curricula, and training materials
- Learning about what works in mentoring through evidence reviews on the effectiveness of program models and specific programs, practices, and services for specific populations of mentees

To learn more about the National Mentoring Resource Center and access its resources go to their website, www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org.

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



How to Keep Kids Out of the Middle

Incarceration can cause emotions run high for both the incarcerated parent and the partner or caretaker on the outside. Both may feel frustration, hurting or anger. When the adults are in so much pain, they may turn to their children for comfort or support, or may want to tell them the “truth” about the other person. But that is almost always a bad idea.

Kids should be protected from their adults’ conflicts. Kids whose adults stay angry and hostile have more emotional and behavior problems that can last into adulthood. Kids whose parents are able to move beyond the conflict have a good chance at success in life, in school, their relationships, future positive mental health.

Here are some ways adapted from Ann Buscho, Ph.D., a Collaborative Divorce Coach and psychologist, to protect kids from adult conflicts:

1. Don’t speak badly of the other parent. Don’t blame them, criticize or complain about them. If you’re a kid, this hurts! Seek out a friend if you need to vent or complain.
2. Don’t ask your kids to take sides. Ask yourself if you are doing so, even in subtle ways, and remind yourself that it is healthier for your kids to love both parents.
3. Don’t send messages with the kids when they communicate with the other parent.
4. Don’t have difficult conversations with the other parent about custody or finances when the kids are present.
5. Don’t ask your kids to keep secrets from their other parent.
6. Don’t use your kids as your confidantes. You need adults to turn to for support. Connect with friends and family.
7. Don’t ask your kids about the other parent’s personal life, like if she/he is dating.
8. Don’t restrict your kids’ communication with their other parent because you are mad at the other parent.

Here some things you can do to help your kids stay out of the middle of the conflict:

1. Minimize the disruptions to the kids’ routines as much as possible.
2. Make sure both parents stay involved with your kids. Make sure they have frequent and ongoing contact with both of you.
3. Provide frequent reassurance. The incarceration isn’t their fault — they didn’t cause it, and they can’t change it.
4. Focus on their growth and healthy change as they adapt and adjust to the new family structure. It can help some kids to say, “We are still one family, under two roofs.”
5. Model respect for their other parent.
6. Let the children continue to be kids. Maintain their play dates and other activities as much as possible.
7. Imagine the story you want your children to tell about their parents’ incarceration and know that every day you are helping them to construct that story.
8. Create a parenting plan that minimizes the potential for conflict. By creating and committing to a set of default decisions, the potential conflict will be minimized.

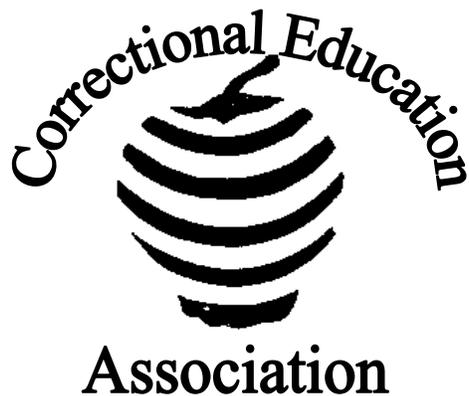
Remember that the incarceration is a problem to be dealt with by you and the other parent. The kids will benefit from knowing that their parents will continue to parent them together, even if they are living under two roofs.

Tell Us About Your Program

Email Your Article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com



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Editor's Message:

Let's start the New Year with a feel-good story . . . Over the holidays 36 children from the Pure Heart Foundation had a Very Merry Casey Christmas.

Pistons coach Dwane Casey has a soft spot for children who are at-risk and stuck in a vulnerable situation. When he took over as the Detroit Pistons coach in June and moved to Detroit, Casey wanted to get involved in a children's charity – one where he could set an example and make a difference. One where he could share the lessons he learned from his grandparents.

One weekend in December, the Pistons and Casey, his wife, Brenda, and children, Justine, 10, and Zachary, 7, held a Very Merry Casey Christmas, hosting 36 children from the Pure Heart Foundation, a nonprofit based in Detroit that helps children who have parents who are incarcerated.

The Pistons invited the kids to watch practice. They met the players, shot around after practice with many of them, and received presents, including personalized Pistons jerseys, basketball shoes from Pistons guard Langston Galloway, hats, a basketball and headphones from center Andre Drummond.

"Whatever I can do, whatever my family can do, to show them there is hope," Casey said. "If you do the right thing, you can go far. I could have gone either way. I could have gone the route of drinking all the time, hanging out, not doing my schoolwork, not working at basketball. But I decided, I made a decision, to do the right thing."

This, too, is Part of Casey's master plan is he's not just coaching a team. He's trying to teach his player's important lessons.

Jerry

