

Bill of Rights

(for children of incarcerated parents)

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to be supported as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be blamed, judged or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.
8. I have a right to a life long relationship with my parent

Source: (NRCCFI at FCN) The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Family & Corrections Network

In 2006 the I.Y.T.F. received a grant from the Department of Health & Human Services to service children of incarcerated parents. The completion of the grant led to the creation of this resource guide so that our understanding, observations, and findings regarding children with incarcerated parents would be passed on to our counselors, schools, and community members.

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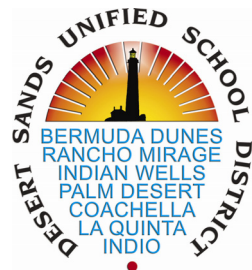
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A Resource Guide to Better Serve

Students impacted by the incarceration of their parent



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Information gathered in cooperation with Desert Sands Unified School District Student Assistance Program

- In 2007, there were 1.7 million children (5-18 yrs) in the US with a parent in prison.
- The number of incarcerated mothers has increased 122% (from 29,500 in 1991 to 65,600 in 2007).
- Children with incarcerated parents are cared by:
 - The non-incarcerated parent (80%)
 - Grandparents (20%)
 - Foster-care (2%) .
- The number of Anglo and Latino children with an incarcerated parent has increased 26% and 20% respectively.

Not all children react to parental incarceration in the same way, factors that may buffer the effects include:

- Length and degree of separation
- Remaining adult's parenting style, attitude and stability
- Good communication with family and incarcerated parent
- Child's temperament
- Age at the time of separation
- Repeated separations
- Positive peer relationships
- Community support
- Supportive relationship with caring adult outside of the family (mentor, teacher, coach)

Resources

Books

- ☉ When Andy's Father Went to Prison by Martha Hickman
- ☉ Let's Talk About When Your Parent is in Jail by Maureen Wittbold
- ☉ Dad's in Prison by Sandra Cain
- ☉ What is Jail, Mommy? By Jackie A. Stanglin
- ☉ My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has a Disease: A Child's View: Living With Addiction by Claudia Black
- ☉ Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson
- ☉ My Daddy is in Jail; Story, Discussion Guide and Small Group Activities for grades K-5 by Janet M. Bender

Documentaries

A sentence of their own www.asentenceoftheirown.com

When the Bough Breaks www.itvs.org/whentheboughbreaks

Silent Victims: The impact of parental incarceration on children
www.communityvoices.org/

Websites

www.indioyouthtaskforce.org Indio Youth Task Force

www.dsusd.k12.ca.us/DSUSD/EducationalServices/StudentAP/
Desert Sands Unified School District Student Assistance Program

www.cvusd.us/ Coachella Valley Unified School District

www.e-ccip.org Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents

www.mentoring.org/find_resources/caregiverschoice/ Mentoring
Children of Prisoners Care Givers Choice

<http://fcnetwork.org/> The National Resource Center on Children
and Families of the Incarcerated

www.prisonerswithchildren.org/ Legal Services for Prisoners with
children

What can a parent do?

- **Keep communication open and honest about the absent parent.** Kids overhear adult discussions and may have questions. If not answered, these unanswered questions lead to anxiety. It is often a great relief for kids to know where the parent is so they can begin to explore their feelings .
- **Prepare your child for each step of the incarceration process.** Explaining about the arrest, trial, prison, and parole helps the child understand what is happening and can help to minimize fear and anxiety.
- **Encourage visits to the parent in prison, if possible.** Kids are exposed to views of prison life from TV which can increase their fears. Seeing the parent in prison can be an important and positive event for the child. Seeing the parent safe can reduce anxiety and provides an opportunity for him/her to feel loved and nurtured.
- **If allowed, encourage letter writing and other communication** The parent in prison can describe a typical day, what they eat, what jobs the prisoners do, etc. These should only be described in a neutral and nonthreatening manner to the child.
- **Seek support for yourself.** Find ways to reduce your stress levels such as exercise, eating well, developing hobbies and getting involved in community activities.
- **Talk with your Student Assistance Program or school counselor about the situation.** Let your child's teacher know that one parent is in prison so that he or she can be sensitive to the issues facing your child at school.
- **Let children remain children.** Rely on other adults to help you deal with your feelings, stress level, loneliness, and fears rather than relying on your children to take care of you.



School-age children 5-10 years of age may:

- Think poorly of themselves and lack self confidence
- Regress to younger behaviors such as bedwetting
- Search for other adults to take on the parent's role
- Have trouble paying attention
- Identify with the parent's behavior
- Feel guilty that they are free when the parent is in jail
- Worry about parent's safety in prison
- Experience feelings of abandonment

Pre-teens and teenagers 11-18 years of age may:

- Question the incarcerated parent's love for them
- Take on the absent parent's role
- Reject limits on their behavior, such as curfew
- Have trouble with social skills
- Engage in promiscuous activity
- Commit Law violations
- Become rebellious
- Reject the parent's attempts to reunify

What can school counselors, teachers and youth service providers do?

Protective factors have been shown to reduce the negative effects of having a parent incarcerated. Below are some **Protective factors with specific strategies** that can be used by school counselors, teachers and youth service providers in helping students and families impacted by their loved ones incarceration.

1. **A positive relationship with their caregiver (most important)**
 - ◆ Encourage frequent in-depth communication between the student and their caregiver—it's shown to build resiliency
 - ◆ Encourage quality time together (i.e., going to the park, walk around the block, prepare dinner together)
 - ◆ Refer family to classes that enhance their relationship (i.e., Strengthening Families, PRICE Parenting, Positive Action Family Workshops, Parenting for Success)
2. **Maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent—it may improve the child's emotional response to incarceration**
 - ◆ Have a non-judgmental dialogue with the caregiver regarding communication with the incarcerated parent.
 - ◆ If caregiver approves, encourage student to send letters or drawings to incarcerated parent.
 - ◆ Encourage student to share with you any letters, cards or drawings sent by the incarcerated parent.
 - ◆ Show enthusiasm if student informs you of an upcoming jail visit.
3. **A long-term mentoring relationship with a trusted adult**
 - ◆ Establish a mentoring relationship between the student and a positive adult role model (mentor).
 - ◆ Ensure that the mentor neither stigmatizes nor ignores the parent's incarceration.
 - ◆ Effective mentoring relationships last for one year or longer.

4. **Participation in organized activities and community events.**
 - ◆ Create opportunities for student to get involved in activities where they have choices, decision-making power, and shared responsibility. Such experiences help them to develop new skills, increase self-confidence, and offer a chance to make a difference (i.e., food drive, Relay for Life, ASB, Youth Advisory Council, Conflict Mediation).
 - ◆ Encourage student to get involved in after school activities and/or clubs (i.e., ASES, Friday Night Live, Book Club, Choir, Band).
5. **Having clear boundaries for behaviors that reinforce structure and rules.**
 - ◆ Ensure that student understands rules and expectations (i.e., rules posted on the wall, signed contract)
 - ◆ Provide reasonable disciplinary actions when rules are violated, take time to discuss desired behavior
 - ◆ Model expected behavior by always interacting in a respectful and empathetic manner
 - ◆ Praise student's achievements and accomplishment—even if improvements were minimal
6. **Having a sense of purpose and belief in a positive future**
 - ◆ Communicate high expectations (i.e., good attendance, college or vocational school)
 - ◆ Provide opportunities for college or career exposure (i.e., fieldtrips to colleges, ROP, Job Corps, presentations by community professionals)
7. **Having access to community resources**
 - ◆ Be knowledgeable about community resources especially health care, shelter and food distribution centers.
 - ◆ Provide information of resources to students and their family, encourage them to give you a follow up on services received.