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Facts and Issues: CIPL 101

Introduction to Children of Incarcerated Parents

By Ann Adalist-Estrin and Jim Mustin

*Adapted from **Responding to Children and Families of Prisoners: A Community Guide** by Ann Adalist-Estrin and Jim Mustin, copyright Family and Corrections Network, 2003, used with permission.*

There are nearly 3 million prisoners in the United States.

Over the last 30 years, the U.S. prison population has increased by 500%. When someone goes to prison, their family members become invisible victims. While each family's experience is unique, there are some common themes.

Many families find that, at a time when help is most needed, people seem to withdraw from them. There is often a sense of shame and a fear of being labeled. Many in our society view prisoner's families as guilty by association.

Many families were already short on money before their loved one's incarceration and now are plunged into a struggle for economic survival.

The justice system and its procedures are often baffling and frustrating.

Maintaining ties between prisoners and their families is difficult at best. Visiting conditions are usually stressful. Prisons are typically located in remote areas, not served by public transportation. Ties outside blood or marriage may not be recognized by the system. Self-confidence can be undercut by friends, family and society members who criticize a relationship with a prisoner.

When visits do occur, the happy and unhappy feelings and events of day-to-day life seem hard to talk about.

Over time, un-connectedness can overtake relationships. This is especially hard for children.

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One in twenty-eight children in the United States has a parent in prison.

Children of incarcerated parents are often present at their parent's arrest. Many times, they are not told the truth about where their incarcerated parent is. This leaves children confused and questioning.

Children with parents in prison imagine all kinds of explanations and answers. They feel vulnerable, unprotected and at fault. When children blame themselves for the loss of a parent to jail or prison, they may rebel or withdraw. They are often afraid to talk to anyone about their situation, limiting the ability of others to understand and help.

Children of **Incarcerated Parents Library**

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While there are still no government agencies charged with specific responsibility for the impact of the criminal justice system on families and children, the last 2 years have brought a dramatic shift in the field. The impact of parental incarceration on children has been addressed by the White House, Sesame Street and a growing number of state agencies and community programs. The bulging prison walls have created collateral consequences previously unrecognized on a significant scale. (National Research Council 2014) These consequences are beginning to influence policies in child welfare, child support enforcement, correctional visitation practices, law enforcement protocols, and community programs and advocacy initiatives across the US.

This impact on families has long been seen as a *series of crises*: from arrest, to trial, incarceration, and re-entry (Fishman and Alissi, 1979). Each of these crises can diminish a family's capacity to care for and support its members. The challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents have also been described as "ambiguous losses" creating "disenfranchised grief" (Arditti, 2012) and involvement of a family member in the criminal justice system is also now seen as an Adverse Childhood Experience and linked to both physical and emotional health problems.

To help, Family and Corrections Network created —the Children of Prisoners Library in 2003 and

the 2nd edition Children of Incarcerated Parents Library in 2014. These Internet based resources are available at www.nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu. CIPL provides free information pamphlets for those who work with children and families of the incarcerated. CIPL pamphlets describe the challenges facing children of incarcerated parents, strategies for intervention, and tips for fostering trust. CIPL along with the rest of the NRCCFI website, provides additional resources: agencies serving children and families of prisoners, a list of books for children, a set of pamphlets especially for incarcerated fathers, topical reading and references, and a selected video list.

References and Resources

National Research Council (2014) *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*

Fishman, Susan F. and Alissi, Albert S., "Strengthening Families as Natural Support Systems for Offenders," *Federal Probation*, September 1979.

Vincent J. Felitti, et.al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, 14 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE 245 (1998).

Turney, Kristin, 2014 "Stress Proliferations Across Generations? Examining the Relationship between Paternal Incarceration and Childhood Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 55:302-319.

Little Children-Big Challenges: <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/apps/> Look at the tab labeled "Family Tool Kits" near the bottom you will find the interactive link for the Incarceration section.

Federal Children of Incarcerated Parents Website <http://findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents>

In the Library

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- 101: Introduction to Children of Incarcerated Parents
- 102: Why Maintain Relationships?
- 103: Conversations - Questions Children Ask
- 104: Risk and Protection
- 105: Visiting Mom or Dad
- 106: Jail and Prison Procedures
- 107: Communication Tips for Families

Materials For Caregivers

- 201: Caring for Children of Incarcerated Parents
- 202: Questions from Caregivers
- 203: What Do Children of Incarcerated Parents Need?
- 204: Tips from Caregivers for Caregivers

Materials for Health Care Providers

- 301: Impact of Parental Incarceration
- 302: Challenges for Health Care Providers
- 303: Common Stress Points
- 304: Different Children/ Different Behaviors
- 305: Strategies for Intervention
- 306: Tips for Fostering Trust & Safety
- 307: The Caregiver's Situation

For more resources, please refer to: <http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/>
For related research, please see: <http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/research-review/and> <http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/2014/10/05/annotated-bibliography-parental-incarceration-and-child-wellbeing-by-christopher-wildeman/>

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About CIPL'S Author and Publisher

Ann Adalist-Estrin

Ann Adalist-Estrin is Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University Camden, New Jersey where she also teaches in the department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice. Ann is an author, speaker and consultant to a wide variety of agencies serving children and families in the U.S. and abroad.

Ann is also a Child and Family Therapist in Jenkintown, PA and a trainer for the Healthy Steps for Young Children Pediatric Training Program at Boston University School of Medicine.

In 2013, she was honored at the White House as a "Champion of Change" for her work as an advocate for children and families of the incarcerated.

With Jim Mustin, Ann co-authored *Responding to Children and Families of Prisoners: A Community Guide*. She authored the Children of Incarcerated Parents Library.

Jim Mustin

Jim was the executive director of Family and Corrections Network (FCN) since he founded it in 1983. FCN was the first national organization in the United States focused on children and families of the incarcerated. Jim retired in 2006 after helping to create the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated by merging FCN with the Federal Resource Center on Children of Prisoners.

With Ann Adalist-Estrin, Jim co-authored *Responding to Children and Families of Prisoners: A Community Guide*. Jim edited and published the Children of Incarcerated Parents Library and FCN Report which he published from 1994 until 2007.

About the Children of Incarcerated Parents Library (CIPL)

Pamphlets may be downloaded without charge from the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated current website:

nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu.

Duplication is permitted and encouraged, so long as the materials are not altered or sold. Sorry, the NRCCFI is not budgeted to mail free copies. Send comments to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Library at Rutgers University Camden, 405-7 Cooper Street, Room 103, Camden, NJ 08102-1521.

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