

Children and Families of the Incarcerated: Surveying the Landscape of Programs and Services



Ann Adalist-Estrin, M.S.
National Resource Center
on Children and Families of the Incarcerated
at FCN Adalist-Estrin 2008

The Past As Prologue

What Was...
What Is ...
& What's Next



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What was.....1979-1994



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Children of the Incarcerated

“Distorted in the telling,
buried in the untelling”

Randall Robinson on the legacy of slavery

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Distorted in the Telling...

Seeing those that commit crimes as parents gives them a human “face”



and interferes with tough on crime and rescue the children perspectives.



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Distorted in the Telling...

Incarcerated parents come from all walks of life, but are disproportionately low-income people of color. Racism joins with fear to fuel many myths.



Creating Myths:

➤ ***Most Children of incarcerated parents are in Foster Care and are better off without their parents***

➤ ***Incarcerated Parents don't really have relationships with their children***

➤ ***The incarcerated parent is a negative influence on the child and the free parent/caregiver is not***



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➤ ***Most children visit their incarcerated parents and often against their will***

➤ ***Visits are a risk to prison security***

➤ ***The intergenerational cycle of criminality is related to genetics and role modeling***



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Distorted in the Telling...

These myths have formed the basis of policy and practice in responding to the needs of children and families of the incarcerated.



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A Look Back...

Policy Recommendations on Families of Adult Offenders
1986

A focus on the parents inside and the families that support them

References: Proceedings of the First National Leadership Conference on Families of Adult Offenders, NIC 1986, www.fcnetwork.org/reading/policy.html

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A Look Back...

1994 Policy Recommendations:
From Whether to What

Shifting the focus to children
In the context of the
Family Support Movement



Adalist-Estrin, "Family Support and Criminal Justice" in *Putting Families First*, Weisbord and Kagan, Eds. (1994)
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1994 Policy Recommendations on Adult Offenders and Their Children

- Make prison visiting safe, secure and supportive of family interactions
- Make family support programs available inside prisons.
- Make family support services available to those who run prisons as well as to those held within them.

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1994 Policy Recommendations on Adult Offenders and Their Children

- Redefine prisoner pre-release preparation to include ongoing contact between prisoner and family throughout incarceration.
- Make family support services available in the community to insure successful prisoner re-adjustment upon release.

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1994 Policy Recommendations on Adult Offenders and Their Children

- Examine program designs carefully to insure they are relevant to offenders and their families, and to their cultural and ethnic norms.
- Consider community alternative to incarceration whenever sentencing primary care-giver parents of young children.

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1994 Policy Recommendations on Adult Offenders and Their Children

- Direct community agencies such as schools, social welfare, health organizations and juvenile courts to find ways to support families of offenders.
- Establish a national database to provide comprehensive statistics on the impact of the correctional system on offenders and their families.

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The Past as Prologue:1994-2004

The Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners

- Looked at model programs and practices
- Engaged stakeholders
- Included youth and caregivers
- Developed training materials

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The Past as Prologue

Family and Corrections Network:

- Disseminated current research, ideas and information
- Compiled Directories of Services
- Created training materials and provided training
- Compiled information from the requests of stakeholders

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2008: From Whether To What To WOW



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2008-What We Know...

1 in 100 people in the USA are in prison or jail

Pew Report 2008



- The number of inmates in state and federal prisons was 1,479,179 in 2006. An additional 766,010 were held in local jails, for a total of more than 2.2 million.
- This makes us the world's leading jailer
- Over 80% will return to the community

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2008

Federal Initiatives Drive Programmatic Responses

- Mentoring Children of Prisoners Programs
- Healthy Marriage Initiatives
- Second Chance Act

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NRCCFI: Framing the Issues Now

- Themes and Variations
- The Broader Context of the Brain
- The Significance of the Significance of Parent – Child Relationships
- The Triad-Data, Best Practice and Public Awareness
- Collaboration-Wheel Reinvention Prevention
- Policies and People Who Shape Them

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Children of Incarcerated Parents and Their Families:



Themes and Variations



What we know about children and families of the incarcerated

1 in 32 adults in the United States is under some form of correctional supervision: jail, prison, probation, parole. (BJS, 2003)

That translates into approximately **7 million** children. (BJS, 2003)

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What We Know...

93% of prison inmates are male, 7% female. (The Sentencing project 2006)

Therefore, most children of incarcerated parents have a father in prison or jail

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What We Know

- 90% of children with an incarcerated father live with their mothers. (BJS, 2000)
- Many report also living with grandparents (Adalist-Estrin, 2003)
- 50% of children with an incarcerated mother live with their grandmothers. (BJS, 2000)

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What We Know

There seems to be a growing number of children of incarcerated mothers living with their fathers, reflecting a trend in the free parenting population.
(Adalist-Estrin, 2007)

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What We Know...

- Most incarcerated fathers reported regular contact with their children prior to imprisonment, even if they did not live with them at the time.
- Seventy-two percent of incarcerated mothers with children under age 18 lived with those children before entering prison.

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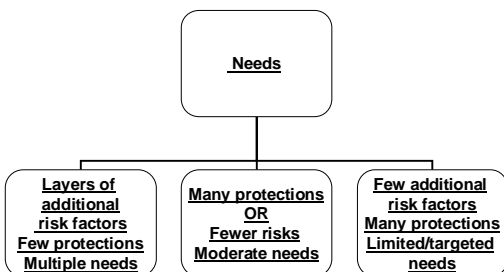
What We Know

Many children of incarcerated parents lived with grandparents on and off before parental incarceration (Adalist-Estrin,2006)

Between 2% and 10% of the children of incarcerated parents are in a foster home or institution. (BJS, 2003)

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Children of the Incarcerated: A Continuum of Need?



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Children of the Incarcerated: Anecdotal Realities



Children of the Incarcerated like all humans are “all at once like all others, like some others and like no others.”

Emmanuel Lartey

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Children of Incarcerated Parents: Unique Life Circumstances

- Stigma and Shame
- Conspiracy of Silence
- Loyalty Conflicts
- Trauma of Separation

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Children of the Incarcerated: A Broader Context

- Brain Development Research
- Trauma Research
- Temperament Research
- Attachment Theory Debates

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The Impact of Trauma

- Trauma or perceived danger causes the excretion of adrenalin and cortisol in amounts that cause brain damage and death in laboratory animals.
(Perry 2004)

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The Impact of Trauma

- The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol
(Dozier, 2005)
- Prolonged anxiety and excessive stress disrupts the architecture of the developing
(National Scientific Council on the Developing Brain, Harvard University 2006)

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Positive Stress

- Moderate, short-lived physiological response
 - Increased heart rate, higher blood pressure
 - Mild elevation of stress hormone, cortisol , levels
- Activated by:
 - Dealing with frustration, meeting new people

National Scientific Council on the Developing Brain, Harvard University 2006

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Tolerable Stress

- Physiological responses large enough to disrupt brain architecture
- Relieved by supportive relationships:
 - that facilitate coping,
 - restore heart rate and stress hormone levels
 - reduce child's sense of being overwhelmed
- Activated by:
 - Death of loved one, divorce, natural disasters

National Scientific Council on the Developing Brain, Harvard University 2006

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Toxic Stress

- Strong & prolonged activation of stress response systems in the **absence** of buffering protection of adult support
 - Recurrent abuse, neglect, severe maternal depression, substance abuse, family violence
 - Increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and mental health problems

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Common Stress Points for Families

- Arrest : Fear, Confusion, Panic
- Pre trial/ Trial : Anxiety, Frustration
- Sentencing: Hopelessness, Helplessness
- Initial Incarceration : Abandonment, Stigma, Loyalty
- Incarceration Stage 2: Resentment, Balance
- Pre-release: Fear , Anxiety, Anticipation
- Post-Release: Ambivalence, Chaos

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Protecting Children and Families from Risk

Parents are usually a child's primary attachment figures and development is deeply affected by parents' inability to meet this need.



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Honoring the Parent-Child Relationship for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Why is this in question?



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Quick Check: Assumptions Beliefs and Attitudes

1. Children of incarcerated parents need _____
2. Incarcerated parents need _____
3. Incarcerated parents should _____
4. The best thing that could happen to the children of incarcerated parents is _____
5. The worst thing that could happen to children of incarcerated parents is _____

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Think About It

"Think of these children as you would your own, but never forget that they're not...if they were yours, you would not ...focus on the floor of crimelessness... as if it were the ceiling."

Vince Schiraldi, DCDJJ

"Since they are not, we need to be ever mindful that they have parents (in and out of jail) that they love and are loved by. "

Ed, Maryland mentor

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The Incarcerated Parents: Parent-Child Relationships

- Some incarcerated parents were primary caretakers before incarceration
- Some did not live with their children but had solid and regular contact
- Some incarcerated parents seek a relationship with their children as a result of the incarceration
- Some discontinue or minimize the relationship as a result of the incarceration

Adalist-Estrin, 2003

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The Incarcerated Parents: Parent-Child Relationships

- Some incarcerated parents will be co-parenting with the child's caregiver
- Some will have little or no influence on the parenting decisions of the caregiver
- Some will be returning to the community to parent the children
- Some will return to the community but not resume a parenting role

Adalist-Estrin, 2003

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The Parent-Child Relationship

- Central to each developmental task for children
- At the core of program development
- Key to best practice
- Forms the foundation of policy initiatives

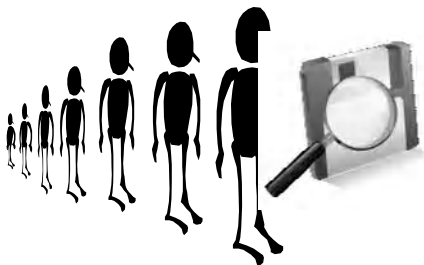
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In Pursuit of Evidence



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The Data

And How are the Children?

And where are they?

And what do they need?

And how many of them are there?

How do their needs differ from each others?

Consider: What do we really need to know and what will we do with the data when we do know and how can we find out what it is that we don't yet know that we need to know?

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The Data

- The need for data
On the themes and variations in the lives of children and families of the incarcerated. Where do they fall on the continuum of stress?
- Challenge: As interest in this research grows, how can we advocate for recognizing parental incarceration as a risk factor without creating automatic labels of pathology and further stigmatizing the children and their families?

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The Data

What works?

And how do we create effective programs?
Do interventions for other children at risk work equally well for children with incarcerated parents?
Are strategies more effective when they are focused on the children? Or on the family? The Incarcerated parents?

Consider: If we only evaluate programs in isolation we promote models without ever knowing if another strategy would have worked as well

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In Pursuit of Evidence

- The need for data
On the varied and many types of programs and interventions that are focusing on children and families of the incarcerated.
- Challenge: As more and more services and programs are available, how can we be sure that programs focused on making, mending maintaining and managing parent-child relationships are all equally evaluated and results compared. Will mentoring be as effective in improving overall child outcomes as programs focused on maintaining parent-child relationships during incarceration?

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The Data

Research Initiatives

- Literature Survey
- Record number of small sample studies
- Release of longitudinal data

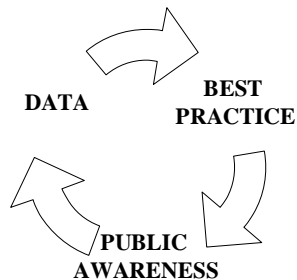
Best resource

Annie E. Casey Foundation:
Children of Incarcerated Parents: A List of Selected Resources

www.aecf.org

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In Pursuit of Best Practice

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National Trends

In Pursuit of Best Practice.
Guiding Principles

1. Relationships are the tool of change.
2. Honor the significance of the prisoner to the child.
3. Caregivers are the gatekeepers.
4. Agencies provide the scaffolding that support relationships: training and on going supervision is essential.

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National Trends

- **Making** : Parent-Child Relationships that begin during incarceration
- **Mending**: Parent-Child Relationships that need to heal during incarceration
- **Maintaining**: Parent-Child Relationships that support to keep the connection
- **Managing** in the Absence: Parent-Child relationships that cannot be


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National Trends

The Children

Programs: It's about the goals

- Mentoring
- Support Groups
- Leadership Training
- Literary Projects



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National Trends

The Children

Practices and Policies: It's about the philosophy
Communicating about the parents-MCP Training
Communicating with the parents – Letter Writing Packets ;Collect Call Access; Visitation Support
Professionals and Systems Training

- Health/Mental Health Care
- Education
- Child Welfare


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National Trends

The Parents

Programs: It's about relevance

- Parenting programs
- Reentry preparation
- Visitation Support
- Caregiver Collaboration



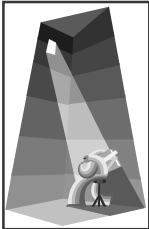
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National Trends

The Parents

Policies and Practices: It's about reality vs. risk

- Post visitation searches and trauma
- Contact vs. non - contact visits
- School and Health Care contacts
- Phone surcharges



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National Trends

The Caregivers

Policies and Practices:
It's about judgments and
competing agenda



- Collaboration with caregiver organizations
- MCP- Caregivers Choice
- Judgments and perspectives assessment in trainings

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In Pursuit of Best Practice

- The need for model programs evidence based practice and policy.

Challenge: The question is- best practice for what? For connecting children and parents to minimize the trauma of separation? For aiding in the reentry process? For helping children to cope without the parent?

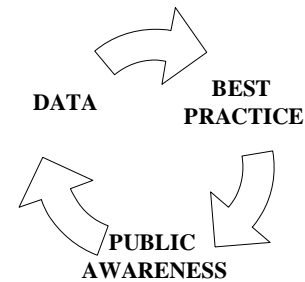
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In Pursuit of Best Practice

Goal: To provide comprehensive , multi-system, non-stigmatizing and non-traumatizing services and supports to the children and their incarcerated parent and the caregiver and training and support for those that work with them inside and out! Are we there yet?

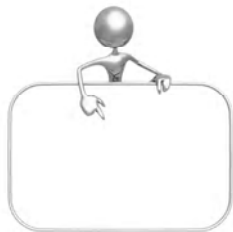
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In Pursuit of New Images



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Public Awareness Shifts

- The need for an atmosphere of safety and trust for children and families of the incarcerated in programs, practices and policies.

Challenge: How can we encourage families to seek support and services without demoralizing them with images of neglect and projections of criminality? How can we increase the interest in and support for children of the incarcerated without demonizing the incarcerated parents which increases the anxieties and loyalty conflicts for children and weakens the Parent-Child relationships?

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Still Distorted in the Telling

- “Kids of Cons”
- “ Their parents are prostitutes and drug addicts but they want to do better.”
- “These children have no one to give them affection or guidance.”
- “ Would you want your child to be parented by a thug?”



Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

Children experience the stigma of having a parent in prison

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

They experience risks...poverty, racism, trauma, inadequate structural support systems

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

They are likely to go to prison or jail because of their parents' role modeling

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

Often, the same life circumstances that led the parent to criminality are present for the child

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

Children of color are going to be disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

They are at risk for the cycle of trauma, addictions, rage, and criminality

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Intergenerational Patterns: Myth or Fact?

Adults in their world contribute to that risk by telling them that they are just like their parents and will follow in their footsteps

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7to 10 times more likely? We Need to Stop Saying This

- Children(families) experience the stigma of having a parent in prison
- They experience risks...poverty, racism, trauma, inadequate structural support systems
- Often, the same life circumstances that led the parent to criminality are present for the child.
- They are at risk for the cycle of trauma, addictions, rage, criminality.
- They feel further stigmatized by this message

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Still Buried in the Un-telling

“Relatives ...feel forced to hide from the shaming gaze of others...” Leading them to withhold information and avoid connections that may help them.

“Families Shamed” Rachel Condry 2007

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Still Buried in the Un-telling

- Children are not told the truth about their parent's whereabouts
- Children are told the truth but told not to tell
- Children are told the truth, allowed to tell but discouraged from speaking their feelings

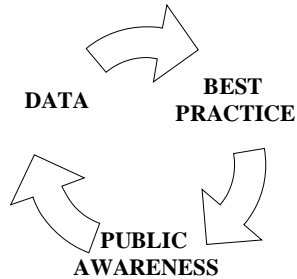
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National Trends

- Checking the images in advertising services
- Responsivity of the media
- Demanding accurate data
- Honoring the significance of the parent child relationship
- Universal marketing
- Respecting but combating “hidden by choice”

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The Cycle of Success



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Implications for Programs and Policies

Attitude
Relevance
Complexity
Healing



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Attitudes

- Assumptions
 - Beliefs
 - Perspectives
 - Personal experiences
- Staff training and public awareness campaigns*

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Relevance

- Programs must be developed based on accurate information, relevant content and realistic expectations
- It is essential that in every initiative, the people we are talking about—the incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, their children and families have a **key** place at the table.

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Relevance

“Families of the incarcerated are included as “the warm up act, the anecdotes and the sad stories instead of as the experts.”

Liz Gaynes, FCN Report 33, 2003

Caregivers, adult children of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents on boards of directors

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Complexity

The importance of resisting the temptation to implement one size fits all responses and the need to honor the “theme and variations” realities in the parent-child relationships for children with incarcerated parents



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Healing

“ First do no harm”

- Guard against models of intervention not designed for this population
- Honor the significance of the incarcerated parent to each child and family
- Implement trauma informed practices

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Healing

- Recognize that incarceration causes trauma and / or re-traumatizes those who have experienced trauma
- Adapting to trauma causes behaviors such as (disconnecting from family) that are misinterpreted

See *Freeing Tammy* by Jody Raphael 2007
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ARCH... the cycle

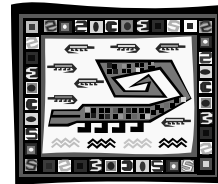
- These misinterpretations contribute to attitudes that lead to programmatic responses that lack relevance, ignore complexity and compound trauma.

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In Pursuit of Relationships

“Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodiles wont eat you”

African Proverb



In Pursuit of Relationships

- The need for collaboration in the field

Challenge: Now that children of the incarcerated are being focused on in many and varied settings how can we work together to combat the obstacles that interfere with effective program and policy development?

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Failed Intervention & Wheel Reinvention Prevention

- Intra - state communications
- State to State Coalitions
- Parenting Curricula Reviews
- Mentoring Connections
- Conference Collaborations
- Funding Coalitions
- Materials Use Agreements

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In Pursuit of Scaffolding Policies



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The Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated

I have the Right...

- To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
- To be heard when decisions are made about me
- To be considered when decisions are made about my parent

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The Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated

- To be well cared for in my parent's absence
- To speak with, see and touch my parent
- To support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration

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The Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated

- Not to be blamed, judged or labeled because of my parent's incarceration
- To a lifelong relationship with my parent.



Children and Families of the Incarcerated: A Developing Field

- Decades of programs leading the way
- Pioneer programs still guiding practice
- Recent Federal Initiatives opening doors
- Constantly shifting focal points:
 - The child: Mentoring
 - The incarcerated parent: Reentry and Healthy Marriage
 - The programs: Federal Resource Center
 - The caregiver: MCP Caregiver's Choice

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The Past as Prologue

“ Enlightenment must come little by little, otherwise it would overwhelm.” Sufi Proverb



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RESOURCES

National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at FCN

- Directory of Programs
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Library
- Responding To Children and Families of incarcerated parents: A Community Guide by Ann Adalist-Estrin and Jim Mustin(2003)
- Telephone Trainings, Conferences and Technical Assistance

fcnetwork.org

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