

Responding to the Needs of Children and Families of the Incarcerated: Implications for Public Health



APHA Philadelphia 2009  
Ann Adalist-Estrin, M.S.  
Director  
National Resource Center  
on Children and Families of the Incarcerated  
at FCN

Presenter Disclosures

Ann Adalist-Estrin

"No relationships to disclose"

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

Numbers Talk

In 2007, 1.7 million minor children had a parent in prison, an 82% increase since 1991

One in 43 American children has a parent in prison.

One in 15 black children and 1 in 42 Latino children has a parent in prison, compared to 1 in 111 white children.

An estimated 7-10 million children have or have had a parent under some form of correctional supervision in their lifetime.

*The Sentencing Project 2009*



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

Concerned Responses

*After many years of advocacy, it is finally registering to the American public that having a parent go to jail or prison effects a lot of children:*



(Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2009).

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

The Needs of Children and Families of the Incarcerated

"...break the intergenerational cycle of crime and incarceration and give a forgotten (invisible) group of children the chance to reach their highest potential." MCP program brochure 2009

"...distorted in the telling, buried in the un-telling."  
Randall Robinson



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

BREAK THE CHAIN



Joe R. 58



Joe R. Jr. 36



Jimmy R. 16

Adapted from Mentoring program website-2009

" Their mothers are prostitutes and drug addicts but they want to do better."  
Troop 1500 Video



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Implied Causal Patterns

*"If we are at risk for following in our parents footsteps, perhaps it is because you say we are."*

*S. 16 year old daughter of an incarcerated mother in Connecticut*

- These are children that are better off without their parents
- These are children that lack affection and guidance
- Most of them didn't even live with their parents

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Facts: Pre Incarceration Relationships

- 44%/55% Percent of fathers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration
- 64% /84% Percent of mothers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration

State/Federal  
Hairston (2008)

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Needing a New Frame

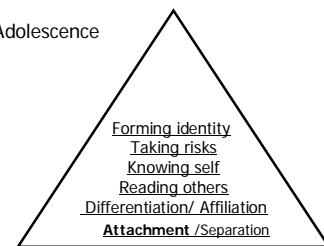
- Attachment Theory
- Brain Development Research
- Trauma Research



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Developmental Tasks For Children and Youth

Infancy through Adolescence



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## The Attachment Literature

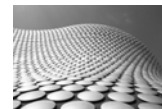
**Children with secure early attachments are more likely in later years to:**

- be better problem-solvers
- form friendships and be leaders with peers
- be more empathetic and less aggressive
- engage their world with confidence
- have higher self-esteem
- be better at resolving conflict
- be more self-reliant and adaptable

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## *Perspective is 9/10 of Reality*

*"Researchers and clinicians utilize attachment research to guide family strengthening program and policy development."* Zero To Three 2004



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Examining the Cycle

### Government Separation of Children and Parents: Attending to Attachment

**Child Abuse and Neglect: Child Welfare Supports**

**Military Deployment : DOD Supports**

**Incarceration : No Supports**

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Trauma in Children: Key Points

- An incident is traumatic if it carries a threat against life, physical well being or personal security
- Children always experience the loss of a parent as traumatic
- Trauma changes brain architecture
- Children can be re traumatized by situations characterized by additional threats or **simple uncertainty**

(Mc Allister-Groves, Child Witness to Violence Project 2002)

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## 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 )

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## The Impact of Trauma

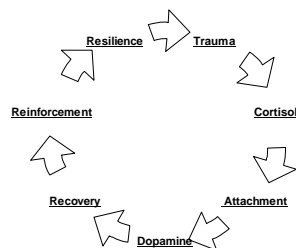


The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol.

( Dozier, 2005)

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## The Positive Cycle



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Attachment & Trauma

### Important Connections

- Primary attachment figures provide a buffer from the most damaging effects of trauma
- Separation from the primary attachment figures causes trauma

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Attachment-Contemporary Perspective

*Scientists now know that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, caused by separation from caregivers, extreme poverty, or parental depression, for example, can be toxic to the developing brain in the same way as repeated abuse and witnessing violence changes brain architecture.*

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University,  
*In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development.* NGA  
Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State  
Legislatures, and Center on the Developing Child, Harvard  
University, 2008, [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

## Toxic Stress

**Strong & prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of buffering protection of adult support**

**Activated by:**

- Recurrent abuse, neglect, care-giver depression, substance abuse, family violence or triggers for tolerable stress that are prolonged and without supports
- Increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and mental health problems ([www.acestudy.com](http://www.acestudy.com))

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

## UNIQUE STRESS of PARENTAL INCARCERATION

**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

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

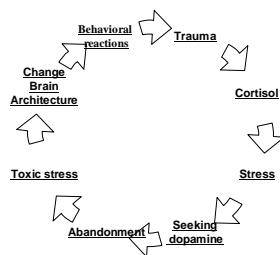
## Impact on Brain Development

- Impulse Control
- Cause and Effect
- Predictability
- Emotional Regulation
- Reciprocal Engagement



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

## The Negative Cycle



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

## Children of Incarcerated Parents:

*Children of incarcerated parents mourn the loss of that incarcerated parent. The one that cared for them or the one that should have.*



*"My mother, who did not raise me but loved me as if she had..." Clifton Taulbert*

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission

## IMPLICATIONS for PROGRAMS



Eighty-six percent of minor children of the incarcerated were under 10 years of age



22 percent were under five  
Hairston (2008)

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Embedded Issue

Two-thirds of the incarcerated parent population is non-white



*The Sentencing Project 2009*

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## ***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. And it is harder for some to think of them as our own when they are mostly black and brown. "***

Vince Schiraldi, DCDJJ

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## ***Advocacy that Heals***

- 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 by others and interfere with attachment.

*See Freeing Tammy by Jody Raphael 2007*

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated: A Framework for Responding

### I Have the Right...

- ❖ To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
- ❖ To be heard and considered when decisions are made about me or my parent
- ❖ 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
- ❖ Not to be blamed, judged or labeled because of my parent's incarceration
- ❖ To a lifelong relationship with my parent.

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Implications for Public Health

- **Public Health Nurses can be trained to work with law enforcement & with Caregivers-Arkansas Voices**
- **Physicians trained to support parent –child relationships - Montefiore Hospital NY/Osborne Association**
- **Medical School Pediatrics Program focused on Children of the Incarcerated-**
- **Issue of Social Work in Public Health – Belinda Bruster, Ed.**
- **Healthy Steps for Young Children-Boston U Medical School**

Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use only with permission

## Presenter Contact Information

To get a copy of this presentation-

E-mail me

[Adalist@fcnetwork.org](mailto:Adalist@fcnetwork.org)



Created by Ann Adalist-Estrin. Use  
only with permission