



Child Welfare Practice With Families Affected by Parental Incarceration

The intersection of child welfare and parental incarceration is a growing concern for child welfare and related professionals, such as law enforcement and domestic violence service providers. When children or youth are separated from their parents due to incarceration—possibly coupled with out-of-home care—they may experience a variety of negative outcomes. The children’s caregivers during this time also are affected by the parental incarceration. Working with incarcerated parents and their families poses a multitude of barriers for child welfare caseworkers, but using the resources available in their communities and agencies, caseworkers can overcome these challenges and enhance outcomes for these children and families. This bulletin provides an overview of the scope of the issue; highlights practices to facilitate parent-child visits during incarceration, include parents in case planning, and work toward reunification; and points to resources to help caseworkers in their practice with these children and families.

WHAT’S INSIDE

Overview

Effect of parental incarceration on families

Working with families affected by parental incarceration

Additional resources

Knowledge checklist

Conclusion

References

Overview

In 2008, approximately 2.3 million people were incarcerated in U.S. prisons or jails, with more than half (1.2 million) of those individuals being parents of minor children (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). (Note: All subsequent references to children refer to minor children, i.e., those ages 18 and younger.) That means an estimated 2.7 million children in 2008 had a parent who was incarcerated.¹ Most children whose parents are incarcerated remain in their homes, but some become involved to some degree with child welfare while their parents are incarcerated. The following sections describe the characteristics of incarcerated parents and their children.

Correctional System Basics for Child Welfare Professionals

Much like child welfare, correctional system policies and protocols vary across jurisdictions and levels (e.g., Federal, State, local). The following provides a brief overview of the correctional system, but individual correctional systems may differ. Correctional facilities house people who are accused or convicted of committing a crime, and these people may be referred to as inmates or incarcerated individuals. Jails and prisons are two types of correctional facilities. Jails are locally operated and are intended for inmates who are awaiting trial or have been convicted of crimes that carry shorter sentences. Prisons are operated by the Federal or State government and are intended for inmates who are convicted of felonies and who, in most cases, receive sentences greater than 1 year.

Parole is the conditional release of an inmate from jail or prison before his or her sentence concludes. Individuals on parole serve the remainder of their sentences in their communities. Although probation generally refers to individuals who are placed under supervision within their communities in lieu of incarceration, some sentences may include time served in a correctional facility followed by supervised or unsupervised probation in the community for a designated time.

For a more detailed explanation of the criminal justice system, including corrections, visit the website of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/justsys.cfm>.

Characteristics of Incarcerated Parents

More than half of all inmates have children (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Nine out of 10 incarcerated parents are fathers, but males also compose approximately the same percentage of the total Federal and State corrections population (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Carson, 2014).

Nearly half (48 percent) of parents incarcerated in prisons lived with their children 1 month prior to their arrests or incarceration, and this was the case for 47 percent of fathers and 64 percent of mothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). More than half (54 percent) of parents incarcerated in prisons reported providing the primary financial support for their children prior to their incarceration.

On average, prison inmates—both parents and nonparents—are incarcerated for more than 1 year (Carson, 2014). See table 1 for more information.

Table 1. Average Time Served by Released Prison Inmates in 2012

Type of Crime	Average Time Served
Violent	28 months
Property	12 months
Drug	13 months
Public Order	12 months
Other	12 months

Source: Carson, 2014

¹ The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the U.S. Department of Justice also collects data on incarcerated individuals, including their parental status and children, through its Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), formerly known as the Survey of Prisoners in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. BJS has conducted the SPI approximately every 6 to 7 years since 1974. The most recent data is from the 2004 SPI (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). BJS developed a 2007 estimate of children who have an incarcerated parent based on previous trends (GAO, 2011). BJS will conduct the SPI again in 2015 and hopes to begin releasing data in 2016. Data from the Pew Charitable Trusts include individuals who are in prisons or jails, and data from BJS only include individuals in prisons. Data from Pew, therefore, are used in this brief in lieu of the BJS data, when available.

Characteristics of Children Involved With Child Welfare Who Have Incarcerated Parents

Data are available about the number of children in foster care who have incarcerated parents, but these data may underestimate the true number and do not account for children who are involved with child welfare but are not in foster care (e.g., kinship care). According to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), parental incarceration was a reason for entry into foster care for 19,858 children in 2013 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).² This represents 8 percent of all children who entered care that year. AFCARS data likely provide an undercount due to excluding cases in which the parent is incarcerated just prior to or any time after the child's removal and cases in which the incarcerated parent is not the child's primary caretaker at the time of the child's removal. Additionally, data may be unreliable due to the caseworker not selecting incarceration as a cause for removal even when applicable (GAO, 2011). Using BJS data, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that more than 22,000 children in foster care in 2004 had an incarcerated parent (GAO, 2011). The original BJS data, however, may not have accounted for parents with more than one child in foster care, children who are reported as living with relatives but may be doing so under the supervision of the child welfare agency, or parents who may not have known their children are in foster care (GAO, 2011).

Additionally, a study using national data found that one in every three children who are subjects of maltreatment reports and are living at home have a primary caregiver who had been arrested at least once (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009). Although this does not indicate that the parent was incarcerated while the child was involved with child welfare, it highlights that there is a strong connection between the child welfare and criminal justice systems.

Characteristics of Caregivers for Children With Incarcerated Parents

Children have a wide range of living arrangements while their parents are incarcerated, and those arrangements often vary depending on whether the mother or father is the incarcerated parent. When fathers are incarcerated in State prisons, the vast majority of their children (88 percent) reside with their mothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). When mothers are incarcerated in State prisons, their children's care settings varied across a wider range of settings, including the other parent, grandparents, and other relatives. Children with mothers who are incarcerated in State prisons are more than five times as likely to reside in a foster home or agency than children with fathers who are incarcerated in State prisons. See table 2 for more information.

Table 2. Caregivers of Children With Parents in State Prisons

Caregiver	Total (%)	Incarcerated Father (%)	Incarcerated Mother (%)
Other parent	84	88	37
Grandparent(s)	15	13	45
Other relative(s)	6	5	23
Friend(s) or others	3	2	8
Foster home or agency	3	2	11

Source: Glaze & Maruschak, 2008

Note: Percentages may total more than 100 percent because some inmates had multiple children living with multiple caregivers.

² Caseworkers can select multiple reasons for each child's entry into foster care.

How the Adoption and Safe Families Act May Affect This Population

Parents who are incarcerated and their children are impacted by many child welfare laws, including the timeline requirements established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (P.L. 105-89). ASFA requires States to file for the termination of parental rights for any child who has been abandoned or in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. With the average sentence being more than 1 year, this requirement can be a significant barrier to reunification for incarcerated parents.

ASFA outlines several exceptions to the 15 of 22 months rule that States have the option of incorporating into their laws:

- The child is being cared for by a relative.
- The agency has documented a compelling reason for determining that the termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interest.
- The agency has not provided the family with services deemed necessary for the safe return of the child to the home.

Although no State recognizes incarceration on its own as grounds for the termination of parental rights, some States include incarceration as a factor (Christian, 2009). Examples of how incarceration can be considered in termination proceedings include the length of the sentence in relation to the child's age, not arranging for the child's care, the quality of the parent-child relationship, the level of support and contact the parent had with the child before being incarcerated, multiple incarcerations, and the crime committed. Additionally, some caseworkers may view the commission of any crime as a form of neglect and therefore support the termination of parental rights (A. Adalist-Estrin, personal communication, June 14, 2015). Some States may permit termination of a parent's rights where there is a felony conviction for a crime of violence against a child or other family member (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Several States, such as Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, expressly prohibit terminating parental rights solely for parental incarceration (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).³ Other State statutes list parental incarceration as an exception to the enforcement of ASFA's 15 of 22 months provision. For example, New York law provides for an exception if (1) parental incarceration (or residential substance abuse treatment) is a significant factor in why the child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months and (2) the parent maintains a meaningful role in the child's life and there is no other reason a termination petition would be appropriate. (To view the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' administrative directive [11-OCFS-ADM-07] regarding this law, as well as its attachments, visit http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/OCFS_2011/#ADM.) Colorado law allows for an exception if the child has been in foster care due to circumstances beyond the control of the parent, such as incarceration for a reasonable period of time or court delays.

Although there is a lot of focus in the child welfare literature about how ASFA may affect permanency outcomes in families with incarcerated parents, there is very little data to determine the extent of the impact (Christian, 2009). For more information about terminating parental rights, refer to *Grounds for Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/groundtermin/> or Child Welfare Information Gateway's Termination of Parental Rights web section at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/courts/processes/legal-issues-in-adoption/termination/>.

³ All descriptions of specific State termination of parental rights provisions in this section are current as of as of January 2013.

Effect of Parental Incarceration on Families

When parents and children are separated, for any reason, the children's well-being and development may be negatively impacted. Caregivers also can be adversely affected by separation. The following sections explore the effect of parental incarceration on children and parents and caregivers and provide information for professionals working with families affected by incarceration.

Effect of Parental Incarceration on Children

Parental incarceration influences children in many ways, and the manner in which it affects them varies depending on a range of factors, including the child's age, sex, race, and ethnicity; whether the mother or father is incarcerated; the length of the incarceration; whether the child lived with the parent prior to the incarceration; the strength of the relationship the child has with the parent; and others. While their parents are incarcerated, children may feel sad, angry (at the incarcerated or other parent, the caregiver, or the system), shame, isolation, or worried about their parents' well-being (Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center et al., 2011).

Research suggests that there is a continuum of negative outcomes that may be attributed to parental incarceration, including a range of behavioral and emotional difficulties. Some studies show differences in the types and severity of these reactions depending on the gender of the incarcerated parent. This is a contentious issue among researchers and practitioners, with some being concerned that methodological or other issues with the studies downplay the effect of maternal incarceration. The research is typically very conclusive that there is an association between paternal incarceration and a host of negative outcomes. When children's fathers are incarcerated, children may show increases in both externalizing behavior problems (i.e., those that are directed outward, such as aggression, violence, or delinquency) and internalizing behavior problems (i.e., those that are directed inward, such as depression, anxiety, or difficulty paying attention) (Johnson, 2009; Wakefield, 2011; Wildeman, 2014). Some studies, however, show increases only in externalizing behaviors and not in internalizing behaviors (Craigie, 2011; Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012). The research is not as clear, though, about how maternal incarceration affects children's behavior (Wildeman & Turney, 2014). Some studies show negative effects from maternal incarceration (Arditti, 2012), but others have found that it has minimal effects on children's behavioral problems (Wildeman & Turney, 2014). Many practitioners, though, anecdotally describe the negative effects of maternal incarceration on children (A. Adalist-Estrin, personal communication, June 14, 2015), and so caseworkers should remember, as when using any research, that the children and families with whom they work may be affected differently than what is reported in the literature.

Another study reported strong associations between parental incarceration and increases in a number of health and mental health problems in young adulthood, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, high cholesterol, asthma, migraines, and overall health problems (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013). More health and mental health problems were associated with paternal incarceration than maternal incarceration. The causal patterns in this research are unclear. It is often assumed by those interpreting the research that the negative outcomes are caused by children's reactions to their parents' crime and incarceration as opposed to the children's loss or separation trauma. In addition, the impact of parental incarceration may be directly or indirectly related to the perceptions and reactions of other adults in the children's lives. For example, one study of teachers found that they tended to view children whose parents are away due to incarceration as being less competent than children whose parents are away for other reasons (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010). Similarly, there is a claim sometimes made in the literature or society-at-large that children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to be incarcerated as adults than other children, but although children of incarcerated parents appear more likely to become incarcerated themselves, that claim is greatly exaggerated (Conway & Jones, 2015; Christian, 2009).

Although many studies show an association between parental incarceration and a host of negative outcomes for children, there is the possibility that these issues may be caused by risk factors predating their parents' incarceration (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). Some studies showing an association between parental incarceration and various negative effects on maltreated children do not account for pre-incarceration risk factors, such as poverty, parental substance abuse, witnessing domestic violence, and parental mental health issues. These pre-incarceration risk factors may be what place the children at risk of entering foster care rather than the parental incarceration itself (Phillips, 2008).

Witnessing a parent's arrest also can have negative effects on a child. A study of older children who had been the subject of a maltreatment report found that witnessing the arrest of a household member was significantly associated with the child experiencing posttraumatic stress symptoms (Phillips & Zhao, 2010). The International Association of Chiefs of Police developed a model policy to guide law enforcement agencies' interactions with children of arrested parents and child welfare agencies. The policy and its accompanying report, which can be used to improve interactions between law enforcement and child welfare, is available at https://www.bja.gov/Publications/IACP-SafeguardingChildren.pdf?utm_source=FindYouthInfo.gov&utm_medium=Federal%20Links&utm_campaign=Reports-and-Resources.

It is unclear to what extent the behavioral, cognitive, and other issues these children exhibit are caused by parental incarceration, pre-incarceration risk factors, or the shame and stigma resulting from the responses of adults in child-serving systems. Child welfare professionals should still be aware that this population may be affected by these issues and seek out appropriate services and supports. Caseworkers should also remember that children's negative reactions to the incarceration of their parents can be buffered by a range of protective factors, including the quality of their home environment, caregiver support after the incarceration, frequent and meaningful opportunities to have contact with the incarcerated parent, and personal characteristics of the child (Hairston, 2009). For more information on building protective factors in children and families, visit the Protective Factors to Promote Well-Being section of the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/>.

Assessing How Localities Serve Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

It may be helpful for State and local staff from the child welfare and correctional fields to assess how their particular systems affect the children and families of incarcerated parents. In 2009, the Pennsylvania legislature mandated the creation of an advisory committee to study these effects and make recommendations for improvement. The committee's report, which could serve as a model for other States and localities, is available at <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/documents/children%20of%20incarcerated%20parents.pdf>.

Effect of Parental Incarceration on Caregivers

The vast majority of children of incarcerated parents reside with relatives after their parents' imprisonment, often in kinship care arrangements. In some cases the incarcerated parents may have arranged for the care on their own, and in other cases there may be formal or informal child welfare agency involvement. Caring for a relative's child can be a rewarding experience, but relative caregivers may experience several unique challenges. For a variety of reasons, caregivers' relationships with the incarcerated parent may become strained. The relative caregivers and incarcerated parents may disagree about the extent and amount of contact between the child and incarcerated parent or about general childrearing decisions (Hairston, 2009). Caseworkers should recognize these potential conflicts and assist caregivers in making decisions that are beneficial for the child and family.

Relative caregivers indicate they need a wide variety of supports, including access to medical and dental care for the children in their care, financial and food assistance, and general information and service referrals (Denby, 2012). The foremost unmet need for relative caregivers is emergency funds. They also may face, or perceive that they are facing, social stigma due to their association with an incarcerated person, which may negatively affect the level of social support they receive (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). Even when relative caregivers have the opportunity to obtain formal support from child welfare or other agencies, they may choose not to obtain it, perhaps for fear of having the children in their care removed from their homes (Hairston, 2009). Relative caregivers also may have difficulty making childrearing decisions because they do not have important information about the children in their care (e.g., the child's medical or academic history) (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011).

Child Welfare Information Gateway offers a bulletin designed to help child welfare professionals promote kinship placements by providing information, referral, and support services to kinship caregivers to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in their care. Examples of successful child welfare programs around the country that provide services to kinship caregivers are included. *Working With Kinship Caregivers* is available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/kinship/>.

Information Gateway also offers a factsheet for families to help kinship caregivers—including grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives caring for children—work effectively with the child welfare system. *Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System* is available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>.

Working With Families Affected by Parental Incarceration

Many aspects of child welfare cases involving incarcerated parents are similar to those in other cases, but caseworkers will need to familiarize themselves with the unique situations and challenges posed by assisting these families. In general, Federal and most State laws do not distinguish between the rights of incarcerated parents and other parents regarding regular visitation and contact with their children, engagement in case planning, and reasonable efforts in support of reunification. Even when reunification appears challenging due to the parent's length of incarceration, child welfare agencies are required to provide reasonable efforts in support of reunification in the absence of a court order directing them otherwise.

Despite the obligation to do so, engaging incarcerated parents may pose challenges for caseworkers due to deficiencies in clear policies, practice supports, and training on working with this population. Child welfare agencies and correctional facilities may not have formal policies about all facets of working together to support families involved with both child welfare and the criminal justice system. When policies have been developed, agencies may not provide training about how to implement these policies. Only half of the 10 States included in a GAO (2011) study had developed statewide guidance or training about managing child welfare cases involving incarcerated parents. Caseworkers also may need to explore any negative beliefs or emotions they have about working with incarcerated individuals or in correctional settings (Hairston, 2009).

Caseworkers should remember that even when their cases do not involve currently incarcerated parents, they should assess whether the parents have been previously incarcerated and regularly reassess whether parents have any criminal justice involvement after the family's initial involvement with child welfare. Caseworkers should be prepared to offer services, referrals, or resources to families who indicate that incarceration is an issue for them.

How to Locate Incarcerated Parents

Caseworkers may encounter cases where a child's parent is incarcerated, but the facility in which the parent is being held is unknown. To find a parent in a Federal prison, visit the Bureau of Prison's website at <http://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>, where you can search by name or a variety of identification numbers. This will provide the inmate's current location and the expected date of release. To find inmates in State prisons or local jails, caseworkers can visit VINELink (www.vinelink.com), which is the online version of VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday), the National Victim Notification Network. This is a free service through which individuals can obtain the inmates' current location and limited information about their case status (i.e., parole or probation). Individuals can register to receive notifications by phone, text, or email when there are changes in an inmate's status or location. As of June 2015, 41 States (including DC) participate statewide in VINELink, and another 7 States participate through some counties.

If caseworkers still cannot locate an inmate, they may need to conduct searches in a variety of corrections systems or facilities until the correct one is found. Some correctional facilities may have liaisons or other staff who can assist child welfare professionals in navigating the correctional facility, including locating inmates (GAO, 2011).

Case Planning and Reunification

Caseworkers must make all reasonable efforts to reunite children with their incarcerated parents, as they would for any other family reunification case, unless there is a court ruling releasing them from that obligation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). (For more information about reasonable efforts at reunification, refer to the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/courts/processes/related-perm/#reasonable_efforts or *Reasonable Efforts to Preserve or Reunify Families and Achieve Permanency for Children* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/reunify/?hasBeenRedirected=1>.) Although locating and contacting incarcerated parents can be difficult, caseworkers should continue to attempt to maintain regular communication with them as they would with non-incarcerated parents. Caseworkers should contact their supervisors or administrators if they have questions about State or agency requirements for case planning and reunification when working with incarcerated parents.

Incarcerated parents face multiple interrelated challenges in avoiding having their parental rights terminated and in reunifying their families:

- **Participating in case planning and hearings.** It may be difficult for incarcerated parents to attend and fully participate in case planning meetings, dependency hearings, family group decision-making meetings, or other meetings. Their attendance could help them contribute to the decision-making process for their children's cases and show the courts that they are actively involved in their children's lives. (For more information about involving parents, refer to *Engaging Families in Case Planning* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/engaging-families/>.)
- **Having regular contact with their children.** Incarcerated parents face multiple barriers to having regular contact, including visits, with their children. Contact is important to helping maintain or strengthen parent-child relationships and to showing the courts that the parents are maintaining meaningful contact with their children, which can help prevent the termination of parental rights. (More information about contact and visitation is presented later in this section.)

- **Accessing services.** Similarly to non-incarcerated parents, incarcerated parents frequently require a variety of services to assist them as they seek to reunify with their children. Incarcerated parents often have mental health issues (57 percent in State prisons and 43 percent in Federal prisons) and substance dependence or abuse issues (67 percent in State prisons and 56 percent in Federal prisons) (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Obtaining services while incarcerated, however, may be very difficult. In State prisons, only 31 percent of incarcerated parents with mental health issues received any treatment since entering prison, and only 43 percent of incarcerated parents with substance dependence or abuse issues received any treatment since entering prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Additionally, only 12 percent of all parents in State prison reported receiving any parenting or childrearing classes, which can greatly assist them after reunification or in meeting the requirements of their case plans.
- **Maintaining parental rights.** As mentioned earlier in this bulletin, incarcerated parents are frequently affected by the 15 of 22 months provision in ASFA. Although many States have their own laws to make special exemptions for incarcerated parents, incarceration can still affect parents' ability to take the necessary steps to successfully reunify with their children.

There is limited and mixed information about how parental incarceration affects reunification. One study found that incarcerated parents were much less likely to reunify with their children and that reunifications took longer when they did occur (D'Andrade & Valdez, 2012). The results of this study also indicated incarcerated parents' decreased access to and use of services were responsible for these reunification outcomes. Another study noted that children in out-of-home care with incarcerated parents reunify at similar rates overall to those with non-incarcerated parents, but they are less likely to reunify when they are in a kinship care setting, are African-American, are under age 2, have a disability, have been removed previously, are in a family with housing problems, or have a single-parent family structure (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007).

Caseworkers should seek out ways to further involve incarcerated parents in case activities in order to increase the chances of successful reunification. For example, they should ensure incarcerated parents know about upcoming hearings or meetings and assist in making arrangements for their participation. Some courts are able to include parents via phone or videoconference (GAO, 2011). Caseworkers also can check whether they can hold case planning meetings in correctional facilities or include incarcerated parents by phone or videoconference.

Incarcerated parents face many challenges leading up to and upon their release. They often need to secure jobs, housing, health care, and supportive services (e.g., substance abuse treatment) and also pay off any accrued debts and avoid future justice involvement (Christian, 2009). These steps often may be connected with their child welfare service or reentry plans. Parents may not be aware of the challenges they face upon release, both in terms of general reentry and reunification with their children. As incarcerated parents' near their release dates, caseworkers should discuss with them how they can continue to complete their service plans, including requirements for reunification (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Caseworkers also can determine how the child welfare agency can support parents' reentry plans (Federal Interagency Working Group for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2013). Children also may experience stress during their parents' release (Christian, 2009). Their relationships with their parents may have changed, or they may have developed strong bonds with their current caregivers. The current caregivers also may be reluctant to allow the child to reestablish a relationship with the released parent, which may cause additional conflict. Caseworkers should address these issues with the parents and caregivers, as well as with older children and youth when appropriate.

Many States and communities have reentry councils or other services available to individuals released from correctional facilities. The Council of State Governments Justice Center maintains a directory of reentry services at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/reentry-services-directory/>. Additionally, the Second Chance Act (P.L. 110-199), which was signed in 2008, provides for Federal grants to government and nonprofit agencies to support individuals released from jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities. Grants may be authorized for a wide range of services, including family-based treatment programs for parents, substance abuse treatment, employment assistance, mentoring, and others. For more information about the Second Chance Act, visit https://www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program_ID=90#horizontalTab1.

Visitation and Other Contact

Maintaining connections between children and their parents, when safe, is a critical component of good casework practice. Caseworkers play a key role in facilitating visits or other contact, such as phone calls or letters, between incarcerated parents and their children. These contacts provide children with opportunities to maintain positive relationships with their parents, alleviate fears about their parents' well-being, and help them deal with the reality of their parents' situations (Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center et al., 2011). Studies of children in the general foster care population have found a number of benefits for children when they have regular, frequent contact with their parents, including lower rates of depression and fewer externalizing behaviors (McWey, Acock, & Porter, 2010). A study of parent-child contact amongst children in the general foster care population found that incarcerated parents maintain their rights to visitation until their parental rights are terminated or the courts suspend the visits, such as when the visits are not in the best interests of the children (e.g., the parent physically or sexually abused the child, the parent was a perpetrator of domestic violence) (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). In cases where children do not want to visit their parents, caseworkers should address the negative feelings about the visits and try to alleviate any fears or concerns. Children may not want to visit or have contact with their parents for a variety of reasons, including strained relationships, discomfort in the corrections environment, shame, stress, or even boredom (Adalist-Estrin, 2014). Children also may not want to visit or have other contact with incarcerated parents who maltreated them, and caseworkers should recognize these circumstances and be sensitive to the children's desires. Caseworkers also should provide children with opportunities to confer with their guardians ad litem or other representatives to ensure their wishes are properly considered by the court.

In a study of parents in State prisons, almost 80 percent had some form of contact with their children, with 70 percent exchanging letters, 53 percent speaking by telephone, and 42 percent meeting in person (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Incarcerated mothers are more likely than incarcerated fathers to have any contact, but they both have about equal rates of visitation. Nearly 40 percent of incarcerated parents reported having weekly contact or more, and 39 percent reported having monthly contact or less. Contact is more likely for parents who lived with their children prior to incarceration.

Setting up visits. There are many rules and procedures associated with setting up and conducting visits in correctional facilities, and each facility may have its own requirements. (For rules regarding visits to Federal prisons, visit www.bop.gov/inmate_programs/visiting.jsp.) Child welfare professionals should familiarize themselves with the rules and procedures of the facilities relevant to their caseloads. The following are questions to consider when scheduling and preparing for a visit:

- Who must initiate the process? How?
- How far in advance does the visit need to be scheduled?
- What is the visiting schedule?

- What types of documentation or identification are required?
- What are the facility's security procedures for the day of the visit?
- Is there a dress code for the child or chaperone?
- Are there any prohibited items (e.g., food, gifts)?
- Are there any age minimums for visiting children?
- Are there any facility or community programs that can assist with the visit (e.g., travel or financial assistance)?
- Is contact visitation allowed (i.e., can the parent and child have physical contact)?

For additional questions that caseworkers should consider when working with families affected by incarceration, refer to the Knowledge Checklist section of this bulletin. The checklist highlights a variety of topics, including caseworker biases, understanding of State and local policies, and community resources.

Preparing for visits. Caseworkers should ensure that the visits are comfortable for children. This includes bringing food, if allowed, or change for vending machines as well as other items to occupy the children while they wait. A GAO (2011) study of correctional agencies in 10 States found that many agencies had strategies to enhance children's visits, with some strategies intended specifically for children in foster care. Strategies include being able to schedule visits on weekdays in addition to the usual weekends, extended visits (e.g., full day), child-friendly visiting areas, special entry and other procedures, and staff trained to handle the particular issues of this population.

Many correctional facilities are far away from children and their caregivers. Since there are fewer prisons for women, this is especially true when mothers are incarcerated (Mignon & Ransford, 2012). Long distances can make visits difficult due to the extra time and expense (e.g., transportation, hotels) they may require. Caseworkers should ensure they have factored these issues into their visit planning and check whether their agencies have methods to support long-distance visits, such as staff to drive or accompany children on visits (GAO, 2011). Caseworkers also should determine if an overnight stay will be required and make arrangements for where the child and chaperone will stay.

Prior to the visit, caseworkers should talk with the child, the incarcerated parent, and the child's current caregiver(s) about their expectations and preparations for the visit (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011; Oregon Department of Human Services, 2007). Children and caregivers should understand the variety of emotions and reactions the children may have before, during, or after the visit. Caseworkers should talk with children about possible changes to their parents' appearance (e.g., clothing, handcuffs, being behind a partition) or behavior (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2007). Children should also know about the potential for long waits, crowded waiting rooms, and security procedures to which they may be subjected. Additionally, caseworkers should have discussions with the incarcerated parents about expectations for the visits, how to make them productive, and their children's possible reactions. Since rules or schedules can change without notice at correctional facilities, caseworkers should contact the facilities the day before any visit to confirm the specifics.

What Should I Say?

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated has developed a suite of publications for incarcerated parents, caregivers, and service providers about visits, other contact, and additional issues that affect this population. Two publications in particular, *Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective and Communication Tips for the Incarcerated and Their Families*, provide information that caseworkers can use with caregivers and incarcerated parents to help them—and the child—prepare for successful visits and other contact. They address the discomfort that some children and parents may encounter (e.g., what to say) and provide concrete tips. These and other publications are available at <https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/library/children-of-prisoners-library/>.

Supporting visits. Some correctional facilities, child welfare agencies, and communities have special programs to support or enhance visits between incarcerated parents and their children. The Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) program, which was developed in partnership with the DOJ National Institute of Justice, supports girls across the country ages 5 to 17 and their incarcerated mothers. GSBB typically includes twice monthly mother/daughter troop meetings in the correctional facility, other activities for the daughters outside the facility, and monthly meetings for the incarcerated mothers to plan events and discuss parenting issues. For more information, visit http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/our_partners/initiatives/gsbb.asp.

If visits are not possible, or to supplement the visits that do occur, caseworkers can help children and parents connect through other media. Phone calls are a good option, especially when overcoming distance issues, but correctional facilities often require inmates to make collect calls or have an account into which funds must be deposited, both of which can be expensive. Caseworkers should inquire whether their agencies can provide calling cards or have other programs to fund calls between parents and children.

Some correctional facilities may have videoconferencing capabilities to allow for virtual visits. Although in-person visits are usually preferred, video visitation can help families overcome some of the barriers to in-person visits, such as travel costs, potentially stressful facility environments, no-child visitation policies, and limited in-person visiting hours (U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2014). They also can be a valuable supplement to in-person contact. Some correctional facilities, however, may charge inmates a fee to use videoconferencing services, with the fee generally going to the facility or a community organization that hosts the remote visitation sites. Caseworkers can work with incarcerated parents to find ways to fund these visits. Parents and children also can send letters, but they should be aware that both incoming and outgoing letters can be reviewed by correctional facility staff. When sending letters, caregivers or children could include photographs, report cards, drawings, tape recordings, or other items, but caseworkers should check with the correctional facility to ensure any additional items are allowed. There may be separate rules regarding the confidentiality of communications between inmates and professionals with which they are working (e.g., caseworkers, attorneys).

Programs for Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

Numerous national, State, and local programs are available to support incarcerated parents and their children. These programs may be provided in the correctional facility to the incarcerated parent, to the family in the community, or both. Child welfare and correctional facility staff can work together to ensure their agencies and the community have the proper resources to support these families. The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated maintains a directory of national and local programs at <http://nrcffi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/directory/>. Caseworkers and caregivers also can search for mentoring, afterschool, and other programs, as well as camps, in their communities.

The following provide additional information about programs for families affected by incarceration:

- The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a report describing projects designed to provide parenting support to incarcerated fathers. The report is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/mfs-ip/Innovative/rb.pdf>.
- The Parenting Inside Out program (<http://www.parentinginsideout.org/>) assists mothers and fathers who are parenting from prison. The program is listed in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices of the HHS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=345>.
- The U.S. Dream Academy (<http://www.usdreamacademy.org/>) provides afterschool and mentoring programs for at-risk youth, especially those with incarcerated parents, in eight communities across the United States.
- Amachi (<http://www.amachimentoring.org/>) provides training and technical assistance to local mentoring programs throughout the United States.
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention within DOJ released a synthesis of research, as well as findings from a 2013 listening session it held jointly with the White House, about mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents. The synthesis is available at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/about/MentoringCOIP2013.pdf>.

Working With Caregivers

Caseworkers should ensure that relatives and other caregivers have the information and support they need to provide safe, loving homes for children in their care. Much of the information and support they require will be the same as with other resource parents, such as establishing boundaries with birth parents, assisting with reunification efforts, and learning about children's possible reactions to separation from their parents, but they may need guidance about incarceration-specific issues, such as visits or other contact in a correctional setting (Hairston, 2009). In cases where reunification with the incarcerated parent is not likely, child welfare professionals can look to relative caregivers to become permanent families through adoption or guardianship. Relative caregivers are more likely to adopt the children of incarcerated parents in their care when they believe their needs and the needs of the children in their care are being met and when they feel ready to raise a child (Denby, 2012). Relative caregivers who are experiencing more stress and strain are more likely to seek a guardianship arrangement rather than adoption.

In cases where a parent has been incarcerated and the child is in need of a permanent or temporary home, caseworkers should seek out relatives to be potential resource families or to otherwise help support the child and family during a difficult time. For more information about finding and working with relative caregivers, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship/locating/> or refer to *Placement of Children With Relatives* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/placement/>.

When Parents Are Detained or Deported For Immigration Issues

Although there are no official nationwide statistics, it is likely more than 5,000 children are in foster care because their parents have been detained or deported for immigration issues (Wessler, 2011). Families with detained or deported parents often experience many of the same challenges as families with incarcerated parents (e.g., participation in case plans and court hearings, visits), but child welfare professionals generally are not as familiar with the immigration system as they are with the criminal justice system.

Individuals detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security may be placed in distant detention centers, and communication with them may be very difficult. To locate a detained parent, use the ICE Online Detainee Locator System at <https://locator.ice.gov/odls/homePage.do>. Detained individuals can only make outgoing calls if they have enough money in their accounts to purchase a phone card, and they cannot receive incoming calls (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). They can send and receive mail, but they must purchase stamps through their own accounts. Parents who are detained have the right to visits with their children if visits are included in their case plans (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Caseworkers should contact parents' detention centers to learn about the procedures for scheduling and conducting visits.

In 2013, ICE issued the Parental Interests Directive to ensure the parental rights of detainees are not unnecessarily disrupted. The directive includes provisions to designate a contact person at each field office for parental-interest matters, take distance into account when placing a parent in a detention center, facilitate court participation and visits, and allow parents to coordinate the care of their children if the parent is being deported. For more information about the directive, visit the ICE website at <http://www.ice.gov/parental-interest>. Caseworkers should familiarize themselves with the directive if they work with detained parents in order to gain a better understanding of those parents' rights within the immigration system.

When parents are detained, child welfare agencies must ensure their children are cared for. Some child welfare agencies may be reluctant or refuse to place children with noncustodial parents or other relatives if their immigration statuses are in question, which may cause the children to be placed in nonrelative foster care rather than the generally preferred kinship care (Wessler, 2011). A detained parent may be able to appoint a temporary guardian for his or her child rather than having the child enter foster care (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

If the parent has already been deported, child welfare professionals may be able to work with the applicable foreign consulate to locate the parent, provide case plan services, and help reunify the family, but few child welfare agencies contact consulates in these cases (Wessler, 2011). Most child welfare agencies do not have formal policies regarding reunification when parents have been deported (Park, 2014). Child welfare professionals should work with their agencies to ensure there is clear, written guidance about how to proceed in these cases.

For more information about how immigration issues affect child welfare cases, refer to *The Perilous Intersection of Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System* at <https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/shattered-families> and the Child Welfare and Immigration web section at http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/what_we_do/projects/immigration.html.

Child Welfare Information Gateway offers an issue brief on the intersection of child welfare and immigration. *Immigration and Child Welfare* is available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/immigration/>.

Additional Resources

- General
 - DOJ, National Institute of Corrections – Children of Incarcerated Parents [website]
<http://nicic.gov/coip>
 - Echoes of Incarceration [a documentary initiative produced by youth with incarcerated parents]
<http://echoesofincarceration.org/>
 - FindYouthInfo.gov – Children of Incarcerated Parents [website]
<http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents>
 - National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated [website]
<https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/>
- For child welfare and other professionals
 - Child Welfare Information Gateway – Children in Out-of-Home Care With Incarcerated Parents [website]
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/casework/children/incarcerated/>
 - Child Welfare Information Gateway – Supporting Children and Families of Prisoners [website]
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/supporting/support-services/prisoners/>
 - Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center – Online Curriculum: Engaging Incarcerated Parents [website]
<http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/curriculum/305%20Engaging%20Incarcerated%20Parents.htm>
 - Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts – “Dependent Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Educational Video for Judges and Legal Professionals” [video]
<http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroups/dependent-children-of-incarcerated-parents/an-educational-video-for-judges-and-legal-professionals>
 - Urban Institute – Promising and Innovative Practices for Children of Incarcerated Parents: Arrest Through Pre-Adjudication [website, publications, and webinars]
<http://www.urban.org/events/promising-and-innovative-practices-children-incarcerated-parents-arrest-through-pre-adjudication>
- For parents and caregivers
 - KARE Family Center & Pima Prevention Partnership – *Arizona Family Members Behind Bars: Difficult Questions Children Ask... And Answers That Might Help*
[http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/resources/azfamilymembersbehindbars%20\(1\).pdf](http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/resources/azfamilymembersbehindbars%20(1).pdf)
 - The Osbourne Association – *Stronger Together* [handbooks]
<http://www.osborneny.org/programSubPage.cfm?subPageID=52>
 - Parenting from Prison Guide Committee – *Parenting From Prison: A Resource Guide for Parents Incarcerated in Colorado*
<http://www.ccjrc.org/pdf/ParentingFromPrison.pdf>
- For children and youth
 - Family to Family California – Resources Produced for Youth, Parents, Caregivers and Child Welfare Agencies [website]
<http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res-YouthParents.htm>

- National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated - Books for Parents, Caregivers and Professionals to Read With Children of the Incarcerated [website]
<http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/books-films/#ChildrenBooks>
- Project What! – *Resource Guide for Teens With a Parent in Prison or Jail*
<http://communityworkswest.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/projectwhat2008.pdf>.
- San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents – A Bill of Rights [website]
<http://www.sfcipp.org/index.html>
- Sesame Street – “Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration” [toolkit]
<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration>.

Knowledge Checklist

Child welfare professionals should explore the following to help prepare them to work with incarcerated parents and their families:

- Do you have any opinions, biases, or discomfort about working with families affected by incarceration or possibly visiting a correctional facility?
- Does your agency have any specific protocols for working with incarcerated parents and their families?
- Do you know your State’s laws governing how incarceration affects the termination of parental rights or other aspects of casework with incarcerated parents?
- Do you have contact information for the State and local correctional facilities near your community?
- What are the procedures for scheduling visits or having other contact with incarcerated parents at correctional facilities in the area? Are there special procedures or considerations for child visits?
- Are you aware of the services in your agency, in the community, or in the nearby correctional facilities to support inmates in being involved parents? Fulfilling their case plans? Reentering the community?
- Does your agency allow case planning meetings to occur in a correctional facility or be conducted by phone or videoconference?
- Do the courts in your jurisdiction allow incarcerated parents to participate in hearings by phone or videoconference? If so, what is the process for setting that up?
- Do the police departments in your area have protocols, including agreements with the child welfare agency, regarding arrests when children are present or when a parent is arrested?
- What trainings are available within your agency or State about working with incarcerated parents and their families?
- Do the correctional facilities in your area have liaisons for working with child welfare professionals?
- What services or supports are available in your agency or community for relatives caring for children with incarcerated parents? For foster parents?

Child welfare professionals can also explore similar questions regarding possible work with parents detained for immigration issues.

Conclusion

Families with incarcerated parents are an especially vulnerable population, often facing a number of issues (e.g., substance abuse, mental health problems) in addition to the incarceration. To remain fully involved in their children's lives and the case-planning process, parents must navigate the relationships with the caregivers and the child welfare system. Although incarceration is a barrier to parental involvement and reunification, it is not insurmountable. Child welfare professionals can support and strengthen these families by familiarizing themselves about the unique issues parents, children, and caregivers may face and how to work within the correctional system.

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