**Teacher’s Guide**

**for**

**Children of Incarcerated Parents**

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**Glossary**

* **Attachment Security:** child’s sense of feeling safe, comforted, and able to bond with adult figures. Established when adults are consistently responsive to a child’s needs.
* **Externalizing Behaviors:** negative behaviors directed to something in the outside environment. Examples: aggression, verbal outbursts, defiance, and bullying.
* **Internalizing Behaviors:** emotions directed to an internal state. Examples: anxiety, withdrawal, and depression.
* **Mentor:** a person who guides or teaches and serves as a role model.
* **Protective Factors:** conditions or attributes that enable an individual to deal more effectively with adverse situations. Examples: supports, resources, and coping skills.
* **Resilience:** the ability to recover from being in or witnessing an adverse situation.
* **Risk Factors:** conditions that place an individual at an increased chance of developing a problem. Example: a child witnessing a parent’s arrest.
* **Stigma:** negative perceptions of an individual who is associated with a particular issue or person, which cause distress, hopelessness, and separation from a larger group. The perceptions can lead to negative actions, such as discrimination, exclusion, and labeling as “different.”

**Case Study**

Jane is 7 years old and is in second grade. Her academic performance is typical, but recently, her teacher has noticed that she has become withdrawn and moody with occasional angry outbursts. Her teacher is aware that Jane has recently been living with her grandparents and attributes her different behaviors to adjusting to the new change. However, her teacher is not aware that Jane’s family situation changed because last week, the police came to her home and arrested her mother. Jane felt confused, angry, and sad all at the same time. Her grandparents have strictly told her not to tell anyone about what happened. She finds comfort in talking to her puppy at home. Jane misses playing outside with her mom and eating dinner together at night. She has mixed feelings when she thinks about what happened. Jane hopes that it was not her fault that her mother did something bad and that she will not be taken to jail too. She worries about how her peers and teacher at school will treat her if they discover her secret.

**Key Points and Statistics**

* More than 2.7 million children in the U.S. have an incarcerated parent (1 in 28 children).
* Greater than 50% of children affected are under the age of 10.
* 40% of children witness a parent’s arrest, and 67% of parents are handcuffed in front of their children.
* More fathers than mothers are incarcerated. Children’s adjustment is more negatively impacted when the mother is incarcerated, and mothers are typically sent to facilities that are farther away.

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* Children experience loss of daily contact, emotional support, and guidance from their parent. Separation from a parent is often traumatic and can lead to problems with attachment security that can result in psychopathology.
* Common feelings experienced by children include: anger, guilt, confusion, sadness, fear, disbelief, anxiety, and powerlessness.
* Children are often conflicted about whether they should confide in others.
* Feelings of loneliness and isolation contribute to stress due to stigma from teachers and peers.
* Children often express emotions through behaviors and developmental regressions.

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* Children experience changes in living arrangements and often must live with extended family or in foster care. Even if they live in a positive environment, they may experience conflict. They often are separated from siblings, friends, classmates, teachers, and other important adults.
* Family members/caregivers experience financial strain, physical and emotional stress, lack of resources, and grief. Both adults and children are forced to take on different roles.
* Caregivers often do not know how to talk to children or do not talk at all, leaving children to deal with confusing, ambiguous loss without needed support.
* Visitation often involves traveling long distances, and public transportation is often limited. Phone calls can be expensive.
* Both caregivers and children can have mixed feelings about prison visitation. Many children experience emotional distress during visitation when exposed to the harsh, controlled environment in prison facilities.

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* Children of incarcerated parents are twice as likely to develop behavioral or mental health problems, including increased aggression, depression, and anxiety. They are more likely to associate with delinquent peers, get into fights, skip school, have trouble concentrating, and perform poorly in school.
* Effects of parental incarceration on children last long after a parent returns home.

**What You Can Do to Help**

* Provide a supportive environment where the child of an incarcerated parent can establish a sense of trust with other adult figures.
* Serve as a positive role model and source of guidance. Help make the child feel like you are someone he/she can talk to, confide in, and trust.
* Encourage mentoring programs, advocate for the child, and provide resources.
* Be aware of the stigma associated with parental incarceration and how your own personal views/biases can affect interactions with the child.
* Intervene if the child is being teased or bullied because support is vital.
* Understand that the child may have behavioral reactions, like excitability and hyperactivity, before and after prison visitation. The child may also appear tired and distracted in school.
* Help the child find effective coping strategies and healthy outlets for his/her feelings.
* Use bibliotherapy to help the child understand adverse situations.
* Attempt to increase communication between the school and caregivers, which can help improve the child's outcomes. Schools and families should work together.
* Realize that individuals who assume caregiving responsibilities face many issues that can affect both their interactions with the child and the child’s interactions with others.
* Be respectful and supportive of caregivers when they decide not to share information about incarceration, BUT also encourage them to be truthful with their child. Explain the situation in real terms, so the child does not fill the void with fantasizing.
* Remember that it is the parent who is incarcerated, not the child. Children are innocent victims who need help and support from society.

**Resources**

* **For overall, detailed information:**
  + <http://www.state.nj.us/corrections/pdf/OTS/090311_What_About_Me.pdf>
* **For free educational materials:**
  + https://www.prisonactivist.org/resources/center-children-incarcerated-parents
* **Resources for families and friends:**
  + https://www.getonthebus.us/pdf/talking-to-children.pdf
  + http://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/prisoners-families-friends/resources-for-families-friends/
  + http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration#
  + http://www.familiesincrisis.org/sites/default/files/what\_to\_tell\_children.pdf
  + http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents
  + https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/library/children-of-prisoners-library/
  + https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/casework/children/incarcerated/
* **For girls ages 5-17 whose mothers are incarcerated:**
  + http://www.girlscouts.org/who\_we\_are/our\_partners/initiatives/gsbb.asp
* **To target literacy and maintain the bond with an incarcerated parent:**
  + http://www.cjtinc.org/aunt-mary
* **For fact sheets with statistics information:**
  + http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/factsheets/pdfs/Factsheet7-Incarceration.pdf
  + http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/nrccfi-fact-sheet-2014.pdf
* **For Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights:**

http://www.sfcipp.org/

* **For Pittsburgh agencies:**

[www.f2f.ca.gov/res/pdf/MakingTheBillofRights.pdf](http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/pdf/MakingTheBillofRights.pdf)

* + Page 55. Also see Page 3 for other information.

**Children’s Books**

Bender, Janet. M. *My Daddy is in Jail*

Brisson, Pat. *Mama Loves Me From Away*

Butterworth, Oliver*. A Visit to the Big House*

Gesme, Carole. *Help for Kids!: Understanding Your Feelings About Having a Parent in Prison or Jail* (Grades 1-6)

Hickman, Martha Whitmore. *When Andy's Father Went to Prison*

Higgins, Melissa. *The Night Dad Went to Jail: What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*

Hodgkins, Kathleen & Bergen, Suzanne. *My Mom Went to Jail*

Muhammad, Bahiyyah M. *The Prison Alphabet: An Educational Coloring Book for Children of*

*Incarcerated Parents* (Project Iron Kids)

Paterson, Katherine. *The Same Stuff as Stars* (middle grade chapter book)

Russell-Brown, Katheryn. *This Sunday Coming*

Stanglin, Jackie. *What is Jail, Mommy?*

Testa, Maria. *Nine Candles*

Williams, Vera B. *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart*

Wittbold, Maureen K. *Let's Talk About When Your Parent is in Jail*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Our Gracie Aunt*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Visiting Day*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *After Tupac and D Foster* (middle grade-young adult)

**Children of Incarcerated Parents Annotated Bibliography**

Clopton, K. L., & East, K. K. (2008). "Are there other kids like me?" Children with a parent in prison. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 36*(2), 195-198.

doi:10.1007/s10643-008-0266-z

The authors, both instructors in educational psychology at the University of Northern Iowa, wanted to inform and educate the public and individuals who work with children about some of the many problems and life changes that children face when their parents are incarcerated. Changes in living arrangements are common when either a child's mother or father is imprisoned. More fathers than mothers are incarcerated, but the number of mothers in prison has been steadily rising. While most children live with their mothers when their fathers are incarcerated, children are more likely to live with a relative, usually a grandmother or an aunt, when their mothers are in prison. Other children are placed in foster care or in various other facilities when their mothers are incarcerated. Children are separated not only from the incarcerated parent but from siblings, friends, and classmates. Schools and daycare settings change. Even if children live in positive situations with people who are not their parents, they still experience conflict about their living arrangements and about missing their parents. Caregivers also become stressed, and many are not adequately prepared to care for the children. Stressors include: finances, employment, family responsibilities, health care, dealing with school systems, and handling the emotional and behavioral issues of the children. In addition, children are aware of their caregivers' emotions as well as the stigmatizing effects of incarceration. Many have been told to be secretive and not to share information with others, so they feel they have no one to talk with about these issues, and they worry about how to answer questions that pertain to their families.

Visitation with incarcerated parents is another major issue. Even though prison visitation is difficult for children, it is important because it reassures children of their parents' well-being and helps them cope with negative feelings about the separation, like guilt and rejection. Visiting a parent in prison can also assist in the process of later reunification of the family. In this article, when adults who had accompanied children on such visits were surveyed, they indicated that about half of the children had behavioral reactions before the prison visit, such as excitability and hyperactivity that also continued after the visit. Barriers to visits to the prison were also discussed. Visitations are expensive because travel usually involves long distances, lodging, and food. Children are dependent on others to take them for visits, and many of the remaining caregivers are not willing to make the trips. Prison policies that make visits more difficult include: long waits prior to visitation, short periods of time for visitation, little or no physical contact, dreary facilities that are not child-friendly, and frightening and unkind guards. If children are unable to visit, phone calls are costly to families.

This article is especially pertinent and relevant to professionals who work with children because it stressed the importance of all the issues that should be considered when dealing with a child who has an incarcerated parent. For example, a child can attend school on a Monday and have a difficult time readjusting to the school environment after a lengthy weekend trip to visit a parent in prison, or after experiencing problems with caregiver arrangements, or after being involved in caregiver issues. The authors stressed that establishment of trust is important, so teachers and other professionals must be respectful and supportive of caregivers when they decide not to share information about incarceration. Also, because of the stigma associated with parental incarceration, an awareness of personal views and perceptions and how good and bad situations are portrayed when working with children is important. Suggestions were given about the importance of teachers and school personnel being willing to intervene if children are being teased or bullied because support is vital.

Dallaire, D. H., Ciccone, A., & Wilson, L. C. (2010). Teachers' experiences with and expectations of children with incarcerated parents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31*(4), 281-290. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2010.04.001

The researchers, Dallaire and Ciccone, Virginia psychology professors at the College of William and Mary, and Wilson, a psychology professor at Virginia Tech, wanted to extend previous research on children of incarcerated parents to the academic domain. For the first time, they examined teachers' experiences with children who have incarcerated mothers and teachers' expectations of children's competence. Dallaire's previous research had indicated that children of incarcerated parents are at-risk for delinquency and later maladjustment in life.

This study was divided into two parts. The first part was a descriptive qualitative study, utilizing questionnaires of school teachers' experiences with incarcerated children, and it resulted in some unexpected findings. Younger children of incarcerated parents seemed more vulnerable than older children, and elementary school teachers seemed more aware than high school teachers that a student in their classrooms had a parent in prison. Stigmatization in school settings was prevalent, and children who had a mother in prison were most at-risk. When teachers responded to questions about children's stigmatization, they admitted they had lowered expectations of children who had a parent in prison.

In the second part of the study, an experiment was designed to further examine teachers' expectations about different children's competencies. Researchers designed hypothetical scenarios about teachers having new girls or boys in their classes. The hypothetical boys and girls provided different reasons for being in a new school that were related to separation from their mothers, and teachers were to rate the children's competencies. Eighty-three percent of teachers reported having students separated from their mothers because of incarceration. The teachers rated hypothetical children whose mothers were in prison as less competent than students separated from their mothers for other reasons, such as going to school or being away. Gender differences were also noted. Teachers rated female children as more competent than males, but they rated female children whose mothers were incarcerated as less competent than females whose mothers were separated from them for other reasons.

This study has important implications for professionals and teachers. The results were troubling because they indicated that all teachers referred to other teachers as the source of the stigmatization children with incarcerated parents experienced in school settings. Stigmatization by peers and teachers can result in negative perceptions and expectations of children with incarcerated parents. In turn, this can lead to more emotional disturbances, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and academic problems at a time when children affected by parental incarceration need support and encouragement. The article stressed the importance of increased communication between teachers and caregivers, which could help improve children's outcomes. Even though professionals can be concerned and compassionate, they must also become informed because many of them have limited experience with parent incarceration, or they may have distorted perceptions that interfere with the improvement of children's outcomes.

Greenberg, R. (2006). Children and families: Mothers who are incarcerated. *Women & Therapy, 29*(3/4), 165-179. doi:10.1300/J015v29n03\_09

Greenberg is an independent consultant from California who has worked directly with at-risk children and families. The purpose of her article was to inform others about risk factors and protective factors of children of incarcerated mothers and to discuss helpful interventions. One out of five children maintains contact with his or her parent after parental incarceration. Greenberg stressed what she called the *Five S's*, or five negative effects of such an experience. She defined and discussed the stigma, shame, separation, secrecy, and silence that are attached to parental incarceration. Children also feel abandoned and experience trauma from separation as their attachment security is disrupted. They often respond by communicating their feelings in their behaviors.

Additionally, Greenberg discussed the importance of therapeutic interventions to address issues surrounding parental incarceration. First, an understanding of risk factors that affect children is necessary for professionals who work with children and families of incarcerated mothers. For example, when mothers are incarcerated, children are five times more likely to enter foster care than when fathers are incarcerated. After professionals become aware and knowledgeable about the risk factors, they must promote the rights of children, help create systems to support those rights, and continue to provide support over time. Greenberg discussed bibliotherapy as one important way to keep families connected. The use of stories can be beneficial when working with children because it provides them with accurate information and shows how lives are affected by incarceration. Children who are affected by parental incarceration are able to relate, and they can begin to process their feelings. Bibliotherapy can also support caregivers and provide them with valuable information they can use to support the children. In addition, mental health support is important for incarcerated mothers and families.

This article is relevant for professionals who work with children because it provided important information from the point of view of a counselor or therapist. The article provided suggestions on positive ways to support and enhance resiliency in all individuals who are affected by a mother's incarceration. It stressed the importance of individuals remembering that it is the parent who is incarcerated, not the child. Children who are innocent victims need help and support from society.

Laakso, J., & Nygaard, J. (2012). Children of incarcerated parents: How a mentoring program can make a difference. *Social Work in Public Health, 27*(1-2), 12-28. doi:10.1080/19371918.2012.629892.

In this article, the authors, who are researchers involved in the Social Work Program at the University of Washington, stressed the importance of community programs in supporting at-risk children who have incarcerated parents. They emphasized that the needs of such children have often been ignored because they are invisible. The researchers conducted interviews with incarcerated parents, their children, parents or guardians who were not incarcerated, and mentors to include multiple perspectives in their study on outcomes of a mentoring program. The quality and intensity of children's relationships with mentors, who were described as individuals outside the family, were analyzed. Age and gender of the mentors were not considered factors in the program's success. All participants agreed that expectations of the mentoring program were met. The quality and intensity of relationships of those involved in the program varied from the formation of friendships to bonding, but the personal connections and meaningful interactions were the aspects that made all of the matches successful. Through these connections, mentors succeeded in helping to reduce the possible negative responses of the children. Positive outcomes in the children included: increased happiness and self-confidence, improved school performance, and increased openness, sociability, and trust.

This article is relevant for professionals who work with children because it adds to current research, which has demonstrated many positive effects of mentoring as an intervention for children with incarcerated parents. Schools are in a position to encourage and support such programs, which could help to reduce future negative consequences for these children. Interested professionals could become involved, either individually, as role models or sources of guidance, or in groups, to advocate for such programs. The support of a caring and interested adult could make a significant difference in both a child’s academic performance and adjustment. Because formation of trust is important for such children, having someone to talk with and confide in could also make a major impact in the lives of children who have a parent who is incarcerated.

Mackintosh, V. H., Myers, B. J., & Kennon, S. S. (2006). Children of incarcerated mothers and their caregivers: Factors affecting the quality of their relationship. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 15*(5), 581-596. doi:10.1007/s10826-006-9030-4

The authors, Mackintosh, a psychology doctoral candidate at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Myers, a university psychology associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Kennon, a parent education coordinator at the Virginia Department of Correctional Education, investigated how the warmth and acceptance of caregivers of a sample of girls, who had incarcerated mothers, affected the girls' levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. After analyzing data that researchers obtained in discussions with the girls, who were attending a summer camp, and their caregivers, all of the researchers' hypotheses were supported. The first hypothesis was that caregivers with children who had more behavioral problems would experience more parenting stress. The second hypothesis was that caregivers caring for children with fewer behavioral problems and experiencing low parenting stress would feel a higher level of warmth for and less rejection of the children. Lastly, researchers hypothesized that children who experienced fewer life stressors and who felt more accepted would demonstrate fewer externalizing behaviors. In addition, children who experienced more life stressors and felt less warmth and acceptance from their caregivers reported more internalizing problems.

The article thoroughly discussed relevant issues that all children who have parents in prison and their caregivers face when their lives are impacted by incarceration. This is important for professionals who work with children because support of both children and their caregivers is vital for the children's overall development and well-being. The article helped to describe the issues caregivers face when they assume caregiving responsibilities and how those issues affect their interactions with the children they are caring for, which, in turn, affects the children's feelings and behaviors. This information is important and relevant for professionals who work with children because such feelings and behaviors could affect children's interactions with peers, teachers, parents, and others.

Morgan, J., Leeson, C., Dillon, R. C., Wirgman, A. L., & Needham, M. (2014). 'A hidden group of children': Support in schools for children who experience parental imprisonment. *Children & Society, 28*(4), 269-279. doi:10.1111/chso.12012

In their study, the authors, all research faculty members at Plymouth University in the United Kingdom, interviewed children of incarcerated fathers, their mother caregivers, and other school and community representatives. They wanted to identify effective strategies that schools might develop and employ to provide needed support to vulnerable children early in their lives before issues become problems when parents are imprisoned. Provision of support has been a difficult issue to address because there has been a lack of ways to identify such children, so they remain hidden unless parents or caregivers tell the families' secrets. Schools are important places to intervene in the provision of much needed support because attendance is required for children. Also, children with incarcerated parents might be more easily identified at school because they are more likely to struggle and demonstrate behavioral, emotional, and academic problems there, which often result in truancy and exclusions.

The article elaborated on some of the effects on children that school personnel have identified. Children's worries about secrecy or sharing information about their parents’ imprisonment affect their relationships with peers and teachers. Worries and stress are often displayed as behavioral problems, such as physical or verbal aggression and angry and uncooperative behaviors. Emotional problems can be manifested in crying, whining, wetting pants, and needing lots of reassurance. In addition, when parents are incarcerated, children often attempt to assume additional responsibilities at home. Parents and caregivers also need support because of an increase in their caring responsibilities. In the article, children stated that schools could help by mentoring, so it was suggested that trusting and caring relationships could be developed with school staff members, which would help children with feelings of isolation. Balancing support and the right to privacy is difficult, but schools are in a prime position to work with both children who have a parent in prison as well as with their families and caregivers.

This article is useful, especially for professionals who work in schools, because it stressed the important role schools play in children's lives. Schools could help such children and families, but awareness is necessary. Many times, it is difficult to help and prevent further problems when there is no awareness of an issue, such as parental incarceration. Additionally, the article stressed that school professionals often remark that they lack training about what to do with children of incarcerated parents, so suggestions were given about how professionals could help, such as writing letters, emailing, and using authorized absences to allow children to have prison visits. There is a great need for school and families to work together for the benefit of the children in such situations. Likewise, support services also need to be maintained over time because the effects of parental incarceration on children continue even after the parents have been released.

Murray, J., & Murray, L. (2010). Parental incarceration, attachment, and child psychopathology. *Attachment & Human Development, 12*(4), 289-309. doi:10.1080/14751790903416889

United Kingdom authors, Joseph Murray from the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, and Lynne Murray, a researcher in the Winnicott Research Unit in the School of Psychology at the University of Reading, discussed and summarized evidence on the risk for increased insecure attachment and child psychopathology following parental incarceration. The authors stressed that even though parental incarceration can contribute to psychopathology, multiple pathways linking parental incarceration, attachment security, and child psychopathology may be present, so other mechanisms might also explain psychopathology after imprisonment. There are also differences noted in the effects on children of maternal incarceration when compared to the effects of paternal incarceration.

Evidence is lacking on the attachment relations of children of incarcerated parents. Typically, over time as children grow, they develop expectations about their caregivers' responsiveness, which leads to secure attachment as needs are met. This process can change in response to adversities or threats, such as parental incarceration. When such a situation occurs, insecure attachment to a parent or caregiver can develop, or a generalized sense of insecurity can be experienced by children. Difficulties that children experience during the arrest, trial, and incarceration of a parent can also affect a child's attachment. Arrests often occur at night or early in the morning, and they can be sudden, unexpected, unexplained, angry, and violent. One in five children is present at a mother's arrest, and most experience a sense of loss, which threatens their attachment security. When they are separated, children become unsure of a parent's availability, and alternative child-care arrangements are uncertain. Many children are not given honest and developmentally sensitive information, so they become confused and are not able to integrate their experiences. There is more disruption with maternal incarceration than paternal incarceration, which can also lead to an increased risk of insecure attachment and psychopathology. Possible reasons for this include that child care arrangements are disrupted more, and there are often more risk factors experienced, such as maternal drug use, maternal mental health problems, or financial difficulties. There are fewer facilities for women inmates, and those facilities are often located further away. All of these factors make it difficult to determine causation because children have varying experiences with parents before incarceration. It is also possible that insecure attachment prior to parental incarceration interacts with and increases undesirable effects on children that can result in even more severe problems. On the other hand, if disruptive influences were present prior to parental incarceration, it is also possible that children's outcomes could improve.

Another major difficulty is the stigmatization of incarceration, which passes to the children. The stigma associated with incarceration reduces open communication, which is important in fostering a sense of attachment security, so it contributes to a negative effect on children's representations of their parents. Contact with a parent is often undependable, and intimate contact is forbidden. Likewise, stable caregiver arrangements, which are needed by children during stressful times, are often lacking following parental incarceration. Furthermore, caregivers also experience reduced social support.

This article is pertinent to professionals who work with children because it reviewed and summarized much research on parental incarceration. It provided information on ways parental incarceration could contribute to psychopathology through insecure attachment, disruption of caregiving arrangements, and stigmatization. It is important for professionals to recognize how parental incarceration can threaten children's attachment relations and result in psychopathology, so they can help to promote children's continuing relationships with their incarcerated parents. When working with children who have an incarcerated parent, it is also important to realize that it is often difficult to differentiate the effects of parental incarceration from the effects of other adversities.

Nesmith, A., & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency, in their own words*. Children and Youth Services Review, 30*(10), 1119-1130. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.02.006

The authors, Nesmith, who works at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and Ruhland, a member of the United States Minnesota Council on Crime and Justice, researched how parental incarceration affects children's relationships with their families and peers. They also provided details about children's experiences in school and when visiting their parents in prison by focusing on the children's own thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and descriptions. The researchers categorized their findings into five main topics or issues, which the children discussed in depth.

The first topic the children discussed pertained to the social challenges they faced and how they experienced feelings of isolation, loneliness, and conflict over the decision to either confide in others or remain secretive. The second theme involved children's awareness of their caregivers' needs and problems. When parents were incarcerated, many children tried to assume greater responsibilities. Change in caregivers' roles and circumstances after children's parents were incarcerated was a third theme. A fourth issue revolved around the children's perceptions, both real and imagined, of living in prison. Many of the children who had never visited their parents in prison had to imagine what it must be like while most of the children who had visited their incarcerated parents described negative experiences. Lastly, children discussed ways of coping with their circumstances and the importance of support.

This article is quite useful and relevant for professionals who work with children of incarcerated parents because in past research studies, adults have provided the majority of information obtained about such children, which has been based on behavioral observations. This article presented information that used the children's direct quotations, explanations, and descriptions of their experiences. The researchers provided suggestions on ways to help support the children and their caregivers during a time of great need in each of the five main categories of concern that they had identified. They concluded with recommendations for policy changes and community action to address children's needs.

Oslick, M. E. (2013). Children's voices: Reactions to a criminal justice issue picture book. *The Reading Teacher, 66*(7), 543-552. doi:10.1002/TRTR.1157

The author, an assistant professor at the University of Central Arkansas and a former elementary school teacher, wanted to explain to teachers the importance of using multicultural children's literature in their classrooms to connect information the children learn at home, like that on criminal justice issues, to that which they are learning in school. First, Oslick explained how multicultural children's literature is important because it provides accurate information about various cultures, and it allows children to see themselves in books, which validates and affirms their experiences. Other children, who have never experienced certain situations, are able to learn about differing types of people and their experiences, so they are able to imagine what it would feel like to be those individuals. In doing so, empathy, tolerance, and understanding are fostered. Children's literature can support children of incarcerated parents as well as demonstrate to others how those children may be feeling and what they are experiencing.

The article provides valuable information about the issues that children of incarcerated parents face, such as visitation and living arrangements. The author had previously worked as a graduate assistant to a law professor, and the two of them visited various elementary schools to research children's reactions about incarceration by reading aloud and discussing the professor's manuscript, *This* *Sunday Coming*, with the students. The story revolved around an incarcerated mother, who would be returning home, and it described the typical life of a child in this situation. The prison was located far away, and the child was forced to live with caregivers who were not her parents. Results of the author's visits with the school students indicated that reading aloud engaged the children and encouraged discussions. Children learned valuable information about what a child with an incarcerated parent experiences. Oslick noted that in every group, at least one child volunteered that he or she had a member of the family in prison.

This article is pertinent to teachers and other professionals who work with children, because bibliotherapy is one important way to engage and help at-risk children who are thrust into various situations that are out of their control. Those children are able to see themselves in books. Bibliotherapy is a useful method, especially with young children, in the discussion of pertinent issues in today's world that are difficult to talk about, such as having a parent in prison. The use of bibliotherapy could also help to provide a way for children in similar situations to connect, communicate, and support one another, and it could also give children's peers a chance to understand some of the issues involved in a different type of living arrangement.

Shlafer, R. J., & Poehlmann, J. (2010). Attachment and caregiving relationships in families affected by parental incarceration. *Attachment & Human Development, 12*(4), 395-415. doi:10.1080/14616730903417052

In an attempt to build on Poehlmann's previous research on security of attachment in children of incarcerated parents, Shlafer, working at the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, and Poehlmann, working at the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin, conducted a thorough study over a six-month period of time to assess children’s perceptions about their parents’ incarceration. They also wanted to include perceptions about children's contact with incarcerated parents, the stability of caregiving, and the behavioral problems of such children. Telephone interviews and questionnaire responses from teachers, caregivers, and mentors were analyzed.

Results pertaining to children's feelings and perceptions about their relationships with parents who were in prison revealed that children missed their parents, but many reported mixed feelings, such as being worried, confused, and afraid. Many children had been instructed not to share thoughts, feelings, or information about their situations. Thirty-nine percent of children would not discuss their incarcerated parents, 41% expressed positive feelings and perceptions, and 31% reported negative feelings. There were no significant differences noted between children's feelings about their incarcerated parents and feelings about their current caregivers. There was a greater deal of variability in children's responses about their contact with incarcerated parents. Some children discussed their visits to prisons, some provided reasons why they had no contact with an incarcerated parent, and others expressed conflicting feelings about continued contact with their incarcerated parents. Most children had some form of contact over the six-month period of time, such as writing letters and making phone calls, but few had face-to-face contact. All of the children who discussed visits to prisons expressed negative experiences. Children who had contact with their parents before entering the study reported fewer feelings of anger and alienation toward their parents when compared to children who had no contact.

Caregivers also expressed mixed feelings. Many wanted to protect the children, some discussed the problems with maintaining contact, such as transportation and phone-call expenses, and others restricted all contact between children and parents. Furthermore, contact with incarcerated parents was not associated with children's problem behaviors, but some caregivers worried about an increase in problem behaviors following contact with the incarcerated parents. Caregivers also mentioned social stigma as a reason for some of the problem behaviors children exhibited. Teachers and mentors indicated that children's behavior problems, like crying, arguing, fighting, bullying, defiance, impulsivity, being distracted or withdrawn, and negative interactions with peers, were major issues. Developmental regressions and a need for extra attention were also common. Finally, results indicated that one third of the children exhibited borderline or clinically significant externalizing and internalizing behaviors when compared to **children who had not experienced incarceration of a parent**, so higher rates of such behaviors were common in children who had a parent in prison.

This study is pertinent to professionals who work with children who have imprisoned parents because data included teachers' actual ratings of children's behaviors. Results indicated a wide range of different feelings and perceptions expressed by the children relating to their attachment security with parents. Stability in caregiving arrangements was not a focus, but researchers decided to also include this area in their study. It was interesting to note that findings revealed that children exhibited more externalizing behaviors at the end of the six-month period when their caregivers had reported more negative feelings about them at the beginning of the study. Therefore, it is important for professionals to assess children's relationships and behaviors on an individual basis and to be aware of how parental incarceration can result in stigmatization, which can lead to children's demonstration of negative attitudes and behaviors with their peers and teachers.

**Grade 1-3**

**Children’s Lesson Guide**

**on**

**Children of Incarcerated Parents**

**Lauralee Neale**

**University of Pittsburgh**

**PREPARATION**

**Items Needed:**

* Children’s book:

Higgins, M. (2012). *The Night Dad Went To Jail*. North Mankato,

MN: Picture Window Books.

* + Chosen based on reviews, plot, presentation of important issues, and developmental and cultural appropriateness.
  + Can be obtained through a library or bought online.
* Feelings faces sheets and crayons for activities.
* Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, it would be beneficial to consult with the school psychologist or guidance counselor prior to the lesson. He/she could be invited to be present during the lesson. This way, if a child in the classroom is dealing with the situation or if further issues arise, the individual will be aware of the circumstances.

**INTRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN**

**Discussion (5 minutes):**

* Today, we will be talking about a special kind of separation.
* There are many kinds of separation someone might experience.
* Some examples include:
  + The death of a family member or friend,
  + The illness of a grandparent that requires hospitalization,
  + The loss of a pet,
  + Parents getting a divorce,
  + A family member leaving for the military,
  + AND a parent being sent to prison
    - This is the type of separation we will discuss today.
    - Write the word “INCARCERATION” on the board.
    - Tell the children that incarceration is when someone goes to jail or prison. People go to jail for different reasons when they do not obey rules that are called laws.

**CHILDREN’S BOOK**

**Read and Discuss the Book (20 minutes):**

“Think-Pair-Share” Method

* THINK:
  + After reading page 4, instruct the children to individually think for a few moments about what feelings Sketch, the bunny, had when his father was taken away.
* PAIR:
  + Instruct the children to turn to the person next to them and talk about their ideas. Give them a few moments.
* SHARE:
  + Call on each pair, and ask them to share with the rest of the class what feelings they identified. Write their responses on the board.
  + Review and confirm all feelings the children identified.
    - Examples: afraid, sad, confused, guilty, etc.
    - Tell the children it is not their fault when their parent does something bad.
* After reading page 5, explain what laws are and why the father bunny went to jail.
* After reading pages 10-12, discuss how teasing and name-calling made Sketch, the bunny, feel badly to the point that he became upset and misbehaved.
  + Ask the children, “How would you feel if other peers teased you?”
  + Discuss appropriate ways the peers could have responded. Example: instead of teasing, ask Sketch how he is doing, or invite him to play.
* After reading pages 16-19, discuss visiting a parent in jail and how Sketch, the bunny, felt both scared and excited about seeing his father. Discuss how jails are often located far away and have strict rules.
  + Tell the children that people in jail are called inmates and live in small rooms called cells. They wear the same uniform clothing, eat in a place like a cafeteria, and do chores to help. In their spare time, many receive schooling, read books, watch TV, and do hobbies.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Feelings Faces and Drawing (15 minutes):**

* Pass out feelings faces sheets and crayons.
  + Tell the children to circle the face that represents how they are feeling today.
* Ask the children, “Who are some people you can talk to?”
* Tell the children to turn over their feelings faces page, and like the Bunny, Sketch, who used drawing to feel better about all his emotions, “draw a picture of someone you know who is always there and who you can talk to.”

**Feelings Faces Sheet**

