



Promoting Family Resilience

IN THE FACE OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION



On December 14, 2016, CANTASD (the National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center) hosted a Digital Dialogue with Dr. Crystallee Crain from the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Project to discuss how to better support families impacted by parental incarceration. This document summarizes what we heard from nearly 80 individuals from around the country who joined the call.

Poll Question 1: DOES AN ARREST MEAN THAT A PARENT IS NOT FIT TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR CHILDREN?

The broad consensus was that the answer was “no,” and that those working with families need to keep the following in mind:

- Arrest does not necessarily mean conviction or guilt.
- The nature of the crime should be considered—does the crime involve the child, or does it reflect behaviors and patterns that might negatively impact the child?
- There are strong intersections between economics and arrest, and some parents may be getting arrested for economic reasons—e.g., the inability to pay a fine—that do not indicate a lack of willingness or capacity to adequately care for their children.

Poll Question 2: WHAT ARE YOUR CHALLENGES IN CREATING GREATER ACCESS AND PATHWAYS FOR FAMILY UNITY BEFORE AND AFTER INCARCERATION?

- Many participants talked about the logistical challenges related to visitation:
 - Distance—and the fact that often parents are placed in prisons far from their home communities.
 - Transportation and coordination to support visitation.
 - Concerns and bias some professionals have against taking children to visit a parent who is in jail or prison.
 - Two participants talked about the need for visitation spaces that are neutral and family friendly.
- Stigma and societal beliefs that do not value those who are incarcerated as parents were mentioned repeatedly.
- Coordination was raised as a challenge in different ways:

Locate all our resources:

- Access the [Digital Dialogue recording and handouts](#)
- Go to CANTASD’s page on [Families Impacted by Incarceration](#)
- Go to the [SFCIPP](#) home page
- [Stay connected](#) to our ongoing work in this area

- A participant voiced frustration with the experience of trying to work with prison systems.
- Another talked about the confidentiality challenges of trying to support children of incarcerated parents through the schools.
- Others talked about the complexity of the interagency collaboration that is needed to serve these families effectively.
- A few individuals talked about the specific challenge of supporting fathers who do not have custody of their children and who may not have a positive relationship with the mothers.
- Several people described specific challenges that arise when a parent is incarcerated and the child is in out-of-home care:
 - The need to engage the foster parent (and difficulty of doing so).
 - The added difficulty of parental visitation for youth in foster care.

"Just because a parent is arrested doesn't mean that they are not a fit parent."

-- Crystallee Crain, SFCIPP

Poll Question 3: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BETTER SUPPORT FAMILIES IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION?

- Services:
 - Family support and parenting classes.
 - Community support staff to work with these families.
 - Support for those exiting jail or prisons—especially around jobs and housing.
 - More programs within prisons.
 - Counseling for the children of incarcerated parents.
 - Extending the period of time that post-release supports are available.
- Systemic changes:
 - More complete and more reliable information about the family structure of those being incarcerated—and, specifically, whether they have children.
 - More openness within the correctional system, and more willingness to bring outside service providers into the prison system.
 - Greater communication and coordination across agencies to serve these families.
 - Increased funding.
 - Addressing the stigma that keeps families from asking for support.
 - Creating family-friendly options for incarceration.
 - Offering new ways to keep families connected—e.g., Skype and FaceTime.

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