



DIGITAL DIALOGUE

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE FAMILIES



# *Families Impacted by Incarceration: A Dialogue on Practice Skills*



# Speakers

*Join the National  
Conversation  
on Child Abuse  
and Neglect*



WELCOME

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# Questions from Child Welfare Workers

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- How do you encourage families to reveal criminal justice involvement?
- How do you know if there is trauma, or if behaviors are developmentally appropriate coping strategies?
- How/who should talk to the children? What happens when parents/caregivers are not truthful?
- How do you successfully engage with incarcerated parents?
- Should children visit parents in jail or prison?

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Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Training Partnership

# Action Steps for Workers

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1. Check yourself/know yourself.
2. Create a safe space for families.
3. Support child well-being.
4. Engage with the incarcerated parent.
5. Support the child's relationship with the incarcerated parent.
6. Collaborate with community partners.

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# Check Yourself/Know Yourself

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***Know yourself***—the feelings, experiences, and attitudes of workers and program staff influence the way children of incarcerated parents and their families feel about you and about themselves.

## **AGREE or DISAGREE?**

- *People can commit a crime and still be good parents.*
- *Most children cope better when they visit their incarcerated parents.*

# Check Yourself/Know Yourself

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## Training and reflective supervision should include:

- The impact of **assumptions and perspectives** on working with children of incarcerated parents.
- **Feelings and reactions** about the impact of parental justice system involvement on children and youth across a continuum of needs and circumstances.
- The importance of attachment to and the impact of trauma and toxic stress on brain development, behavior, and child outcomes; and **including secondary trauma**.
- Understanding of protective factors for children and how incarcerated parents, caregivers, and **service providers can contribute towards these**.

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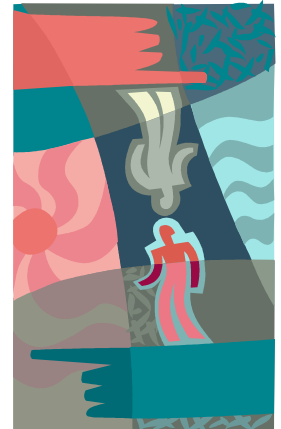
# Create a Safe Space for Families

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## Invisible by Choice:

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

*Families Shamed* by Rachel Condry, 2007



# Create a Safe Space for Families

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***Always include*** children of the incarcerated, their caregivers, incarcerated parents, and formerly incarcerated parents in defining the problems and designing the solutions. They should have a place on every board and advisory council and at every meeting or table where their needs and concerns are discussed and planned for. They are the experts!



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# Create a Safe Space for Families

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Creating an atmosphere of safety and trust to  
reduce shame and stigma and encourage  
conversation



- Consider asking about incarceration.
- Be clear about what information you need.
- Communicate with families about why you need it.
- Use universal outreach.

# Create a Safe Space for Families

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## Asking to get vs. asking to give



*“Is incarceration an issue for your family?  
We may have resources to help.”*

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# Create a Safe Space for Families

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***Display and provide resources***—include materials and articles about children of the incarcerated on bulletin boards and in parent materials for *all* families.

## Resource Libraries:

- Children of Incarcerated Parents Library  
<http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu>
- Sesame Workshop  
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/incarceration/>



# Support Child Well-Being

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## How do you know if there is trauma or if behaviors are developmentally appropriate coping strategies?

- For young children, the sudden absence of a parent or primary attachment figure is emotionally equivalent to a life-threatening event such as an adult being held at gunpoint.
- Children will react differently to trauma and toxic stress at different ages. Often their symptoms are exaggerations of developmentally typical behaviors.
- COIP may be especially reactive to caregiver depression and trauma.
- COIP who witness their parent's arrest are at higher risk for PTSD symptoms.

# Support Child Well-Being

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**Help** children talk about their feelings by acknowledging the confusion, pain, or anger felt by children with an incarcerated parent and by mentioning that this is a life circumstance for many children.

*Waiting for children to bring it up may make the child feel that the adult is uncomfortable with the topic.*

*This requires open dialogue with parents and caregivers.*

# Support Child Well-Being

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## Encourage truth telling and age-appropriate conversation with children.

- Children are often not told the truth about their parent's whereabouts; or
- They are told the truth but told not to tell; or
- They are told the truth, allowed to tell, but discouraged from speaking their feelings at home.



( NRCCFI 2009)

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# Engage the Incarcerated Parent

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**Explore** the possibility of including incarcerated parents in communications about the child, inclusion in IEP and case planning, and sending report cards and health records.

Consider providing visit support to children, caregivers and incarcerated parents—before and after.

*This may require collaboration with the prisons, jails and Departments of Corrections. Do you know who to contact to plan for this?*



# Engage the Incarcerated Parent

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- Incarcerated parents lose their parental rights at a disproportionate rate due to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).
- Engaging with both the incarcerated parent and the Department of Corrections may be necessary to ensure that the parent has access to the services required in the reunification plan.
- Many states now are extending the timeline when incarceration is the only reason for termination of parental rights.

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# Support the Child's Relationship with the Incarcerated Parent

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Three common effects of parental incarceration on children that can be remedied through visits:

1. Worrying
2. Regressions
3. Parentification

Byer, Blumenthal-Guigui, & Krupat. (2010). *Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships: Visit Coaching with Children of Incarcerated Parents*.

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# Support the Child's Relationship with the Incarcerated Parent

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- Help incarcerated parents identify their strengths in responding to each of their children.
- Assist incarcerated parents in coping with their feelings of guilt, sadness, anger, helplessness, and ambivalent or negative relationships with the child's caregiver.
- Facilitate co-parenting.

Byer, Blumenthal-Guigui, & Krupat. (2010). *Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships: Visit Coaching with Children of Incarcerated Parents*.

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# Support the Child's Relationship with the Incarcerated Parent

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- Support children before and after their visits.
- Help incarcerated parents identify and prepare for their children's feelings and behaviors in visits.
- Support incarcerated parents to take charge of their visits.
- Plan specifically for how they will meet their children's needs.

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# Collaborating for Families

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**Connect** with community agencies that may provide:

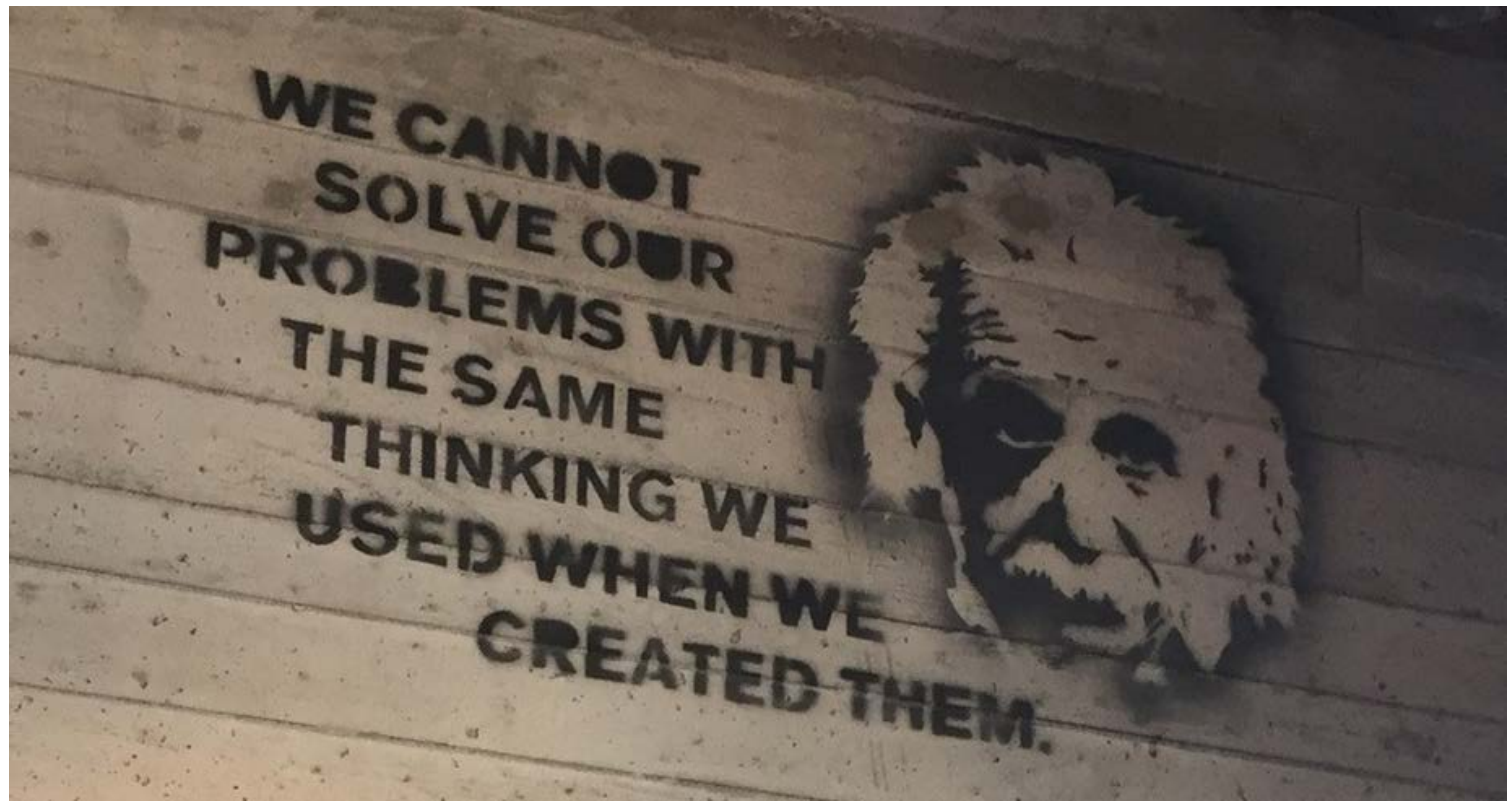
- Mentoring
- After-school programs
- Summer camps
- Transportation support
- Angel Tree programs
- Chaplain video programs

**Visit our Directory of Programs:**

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# Albert Einstein

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# Resources

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- [CANTASD.acf.hhs.gov](https://cantasd.acf.hhs.gov)
- [Youth.Gov](https://youth.gov)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](https://www.childwelfare.gov)
- [National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated](https://nrcfci.camden.rutgers.edu/files/cipl105-visitingmomordad.pdf)
- Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective  
<https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/cipl105-visitingmomordad.pdf>

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# References

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- Byer, Blumenthal-Guigui, & Krupat. (2010). *Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships: Visit Coaching with Children of Incarcerated Parents*.
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- Chui, W. H. (2016). Association Between Caregiver Stress and Behavioral Problems in the Children of Incarcerated Fathers in Hong Kong. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 20(10), 2074-2083.
- Phillips, S. D. & Zhao, J. (2010). The relationship between witnessing arrests and elevated symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Findings from a national study of children involved in child welfare systems. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 1246-1254.

# Thank You and Next Steps

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- Download the handouts to learn more. Click on the files in the “Handouts” box on your screen.
- Do you have innovative ideas, questions, or concerns about supporting vulnerable families? Tell us about your work. Send an e-mail to **hello@CANTASD.org** with “supporting vulnerable families” in the subject line.

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# Participant Feedback

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Thank you for your participation!

How useful was this session?

**Additional Comments:** [hello@CANTASD.org](mailto:hello@CANTASD.org)

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