



# **Supporting Families with an Incarcerated Parent**

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## Impact on Children & Families

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- Children of incarcerated parents are at risk for living in poverty or experiencing household instability
- Parental incarceration is now recognized as an “adverse childhood experience” (ACE); it is distinguished from other adverse childhood experiences by the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma
- Children who witnessed an arrest of a household member were 57% more likely to have elevated posttraumatic stress symptoms compared to children who did not witness an arrest

## Impact on Children & Families

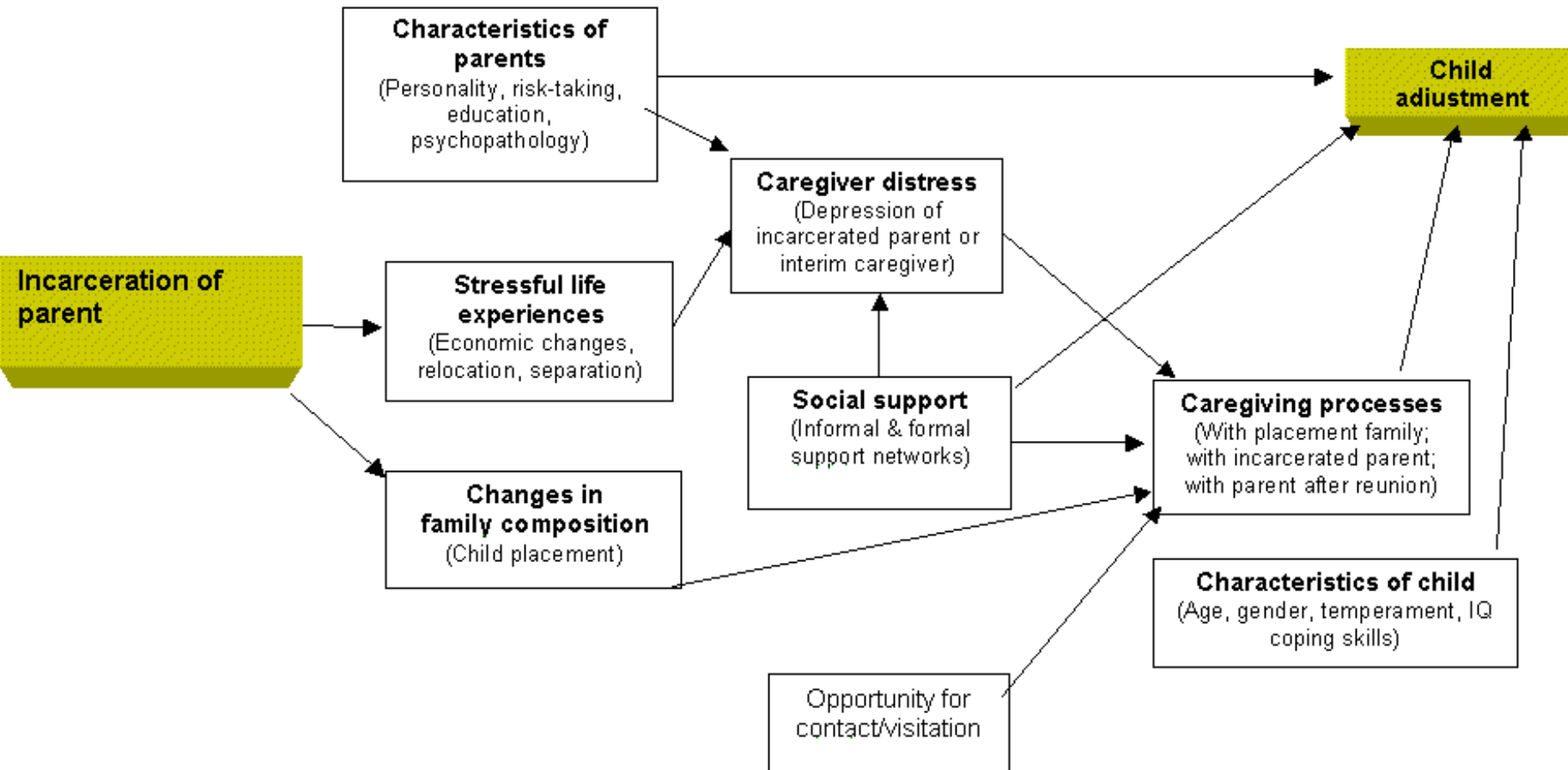
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Children with incarcerated parents are also...

- At a higher risk of teen pregnancy
- More likely to use drugs
- At an increased risk for mental health issues and behavioral problems (internalizing for girls and externalizing for boys)

# Transactional Model of Predictors of Children's Adjustment to Parental Incarceration

Retrieved from Park & Clarke-Stewart (2001)



## Impact on Re-entry

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Many incarcerated parents...

- Lose their parental rights at a disproportionate rate due to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)
- Do not want to appear weak in front of others
- Struggle to acknowledge their need for or interest in relationship or parenting skills training
- Prioritize other training needs (housing, education & employment)
- Are plagued by substance abuse & health problems upon reentry

## Issues Facing Parents Re-entering

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- Reconnecting with children
- Relationship with children's other parent
  - Child support
- Housing
- Getting a job—with a living wage
- Avoiding the “old crowd”
- Developing social skills
- Community support
- Training for better employment

# Barriers to Re-entry Co-parenting and Romantic Relationships

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- Unwillingness to invest more in the relationship with the incarcerated partner
- Extended lack of contact with the incarcerated partner
- Skepticism about the incarcerated partner's ability to change
- Perception that the incarcerated partner is the only one who needs such programming because they are “the one with the problem”

## Tips for Re-entering Parents

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- Find out about policies regarding how parent can connect with their child—visitation, letters, telephone calls
- Develop a plan and follow it on how often parents will connect with their child. Help parents be realistic about goals and expectations. Do not expect too much, too soon
- Even if the relationship with the child's other parent is over, there remains a need to establish and maintain a positive and respectful relationship with them
- Do not expect big changes right away
- When explaining to children why their parent is not living with them, be honest but respect their ability to understand it according to their age



## Tips for Ren-entering Parents

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- When telling your children how important they are to you, do not be surprised if they do not respond the way you want them to. Children are often angry that you did something wrong that prevents you from being with them.
- Use your time constructively. Get your GED, or take parenting classes, anger management, adult continuing education classes, anything that betters yourself.
- Make a realistic plan and follow through, no matter how bad things get, when re-connecting with your children after you are released from jail.
- Get some counseling from the appropriate staff if needed

## References & Resources

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- Overall Policy of Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships During Incarceration.  
<https://www.courts.wa.gov/subsite/mjc/docs/OverallPolicyArgumentsforIncarceratedParents.pdf>
- Children of Parents In Jail or Prison: Issues Related to Maintaining Contact.  
<http://ocd.pitt.edu/Default.aspx?webPageID=244>
- Children Visiting Incarcerated Parents.  
[https://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety\\_model/procedure\\_manual/appendices/ch4-app/4-16.pdf](https://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety_model/procedure_manual/appendices/ch4-app/4-16.pdf)
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Library. Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective.  
<http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/cipl105-visitingmomordad.pdf>
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Library. Jail and Prison Procedures: Information for Families.  
<http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/cipl106-jailandprisonprocedures.pdf>

## Resources & References

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- Supporting Children and Families of Prisoners. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Children's Bureau.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/supporting/support-services/prisoners/>

- Meeting the Needs of Children With an Incarcerated Parent American Bar Association.

<http://apps.americanbar.org/litigation/committees/childrights/content/articles/spring2012-0312-incarcerated-parentschild-development.html>

- How to Explain...Jails and Prisons...to Children: A Caregiver's Guide. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

<https://www.getonthebus.us/pdf/talking-to-children.pdf>

- Effects of Parental Incarceration on Young Children

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/effects-parental-incarceration-young-children>

## References & Resources

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- Children of Incarcerated Parents. Children of Incarcerated Parents Federal Website.  
<http://youth.gov/coip>
- FAQs About Children of Prisoners. Prison Fellowship.  
<http://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/family/ministry-basics/faqs-about-children-of-prisoners/>
- How to Explain Jails and Prisons to Children: A Caregivers Guide. Inside Out Connection Project.  
[http://www.ctcip.org/app/download/630784/IOC\\_CaregiversGuide\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.ctcip.org/app/download/630784/IOC_CaregiversGuide_Dec09.pdf)
- Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration. Sesame Street Workshop.  
<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration#sthash.vbW97npu.dpuf>