

Evidence-Based and Promising Programs and Practices to Support Parents Who Are Incarcerated and Their Children and Families

Introduction

Parental incarceration impacts all members of a family unit, including parents who are incarcerated, their children, and the parents, legal guardians, or caregivers who aren't incarcerated. Implementing evidence-based programs and practices tailored to support parents who are incarcerated and their families is crucial for addressing their complex needs, mitigating the negative consequences of incarceration, and promoting positive outcomes for families. Investing in evidence-based programs and practices promotes long-term sustainability by allocating resources to interventions with proven effectiveness and fosters commitment by holding stakeholders accountable for achieving measurable outcomes.

While the landscape of programs and practices addressing the needs of parents who are incarcerated and their families is vast and continuously evolving, this brief will discuss examples from the field, providing a glimpse of the diversity of approaches. The following programs and practices are informed by research that reflects best practices, as well as input from practitioners and administrators on evidence-based and promising practices and programs used by the field collected through a survey of Second Chance Act Addressing the Needs of Incarcerated Parents and Their Minor Children grantees.

Keywords

- **Evidence-based programs and practices** are grounded in empirical evidence, scientific research, and outcome evaluation that prove effectiveness in achieving the desired positive outcomes.
- **Promising programs and practices** show initial evidence or indicators of effectiveness in addressing a particular issue or achieving a desired outcome.

Supporting the Connection between Parents Who Are Incarcerated and Their Children

Maintaining meaningful connections between parents who are incarcerated and their children is essential for promoting family well-being, mitigating the trauma of family separation, and reducing recidivism upon release. This includes opportunities for parents to spend time in-person and communicate regularly with their children, through visiting, video calls, and phone calls. The most comprehensive resource on policies and practices to support parent-child relationships during incarceration is the National Institute of Corrections' [Model Practices for Parents in Prison and Jails: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections](#). Included below are a few of many evidence-based and promising programs and practices to support families with creating, maintaining, and mending relationships during parental incarceration. It's also important to include parents who are incarcerated, their children, and families in planning and implementing programs and practices.

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Child-friendly, contact visiting</p> <p>Children need to have opportunities to “speak with, see, and touch” their parent who is incarcerated.ⁱ In-person, contact, child-friendly visiting provides opportunities for parents who are incarcerated to spend quality family time together, which helps maintain parent-child attachment, reduces a child’s sense of abandonment, and preserves a sense of belonging as part of a family.ⁱⁱ</p>	<p>Joshua C. Cochran, “Breaches in the Wall: Imprisonment, Social Support, and Recidivism,” <i>Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency</i> 51, no. 2 (2014): 143-255.</p> <p>Meghan Mitchell, Kallee McCullough, Di Jia, and Yan Zhang, “The Effect of Prison Visitation on Reentry Success: A Meta-Analysis,” <i>Journal of Criminal Justice</i> 47, no. 2 (2016): 74-83.</p> <p>Lindsey Cramer, Margaret Goff, Bryce Peterson, and Heather Sandstrom, <i>Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails: A Synthesis of Research and Practice</i> (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017), https://www.urban.org/research/publication/parent-child-visiting-practices-prisons-and-jails.</p> <p>Nancy G. la Vigne, Rebecca L. Naser, Lisa E. Brooks, and Jennifer L. Castro, “Examining the Effects of Incarceration and In-Prison Family Contact on Prisoners’ Family Relationships,” <i>Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice</i> 21, no. 4 (2005): 314-335.</p> <p>Susan Roxburgh and Chivon Fitch, “Parental Status, Child Contact, and Well-Being Among Incarcerated Men and Women,” <i>Journal of Family Issues</i> 35, no. 10 (2014): 1394-1412.</p>
<p>Visit coaching</p> <p>Developed by Marty Beyer, visit coaching is an individualized model to meet the needs of the family before, during, and after visits.ⁱⁱⁱ Before visits, coaches support parents who are incarcerated with understanding their children’s needs, preparing for difficult questions, and coping with feelings of separation from their children.^{iv} Coaches can also work with children and families before visiting a parent who is incarcerated about what to expect during the visit process. During visits, coaches support the parent-child relationship. After visits, coaches help process feelings and debrief with all members of the family unit.</p>	<p>Sierra Fischer, Elizabeth Harris, Hailey S. Smith, and Rachel J. Polivka, “Family Visit Coaching: Improvement in Parenting Skills Through Coached Visitation,” <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> 119 (2020): 1-8.</p>

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Free phone calls</p> <p>The high cost of phone calls is often prohibitive for families to maintain frequent and consistent phone contact.^v By making phone calls accessible, families and caregivers in the community can better maintain contact between parents who are incarcerated and their children.</p>	<p>Nancy G. La Vigne, Rebecca L. Nasser, Lisa E. Brooks, and Jennifer L. Castro, “Examining the Effects of Incarceration and In-Prison Family Contact on Prisoners’ Family Relationships,” <i>Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice</i> 21, no. 4 (2005): 314-335.</p> <p>Saneta deVuono-Powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, and Azadeh Zohrabi, <i>Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families</i> (Oakland: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015).</p> <p>Nicole Loonstyn and Alice Galley, “Low-Cost Phone Calls Benefit Incarcerated People, Their Families, and Criminal Legal Institutions,” Urban Institute, August 30, 2023, https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/low-cost-phone-calls-benefit-incarcerated-people-their-families-and-criminal-legal.</p> <p>Kelly Barrick, Pamela K.Lattimore, and Christy A. Visher, “Reentering Women: The Impact of Social Ties on Long-Term Recidivism,” <i>The Prison Journal</i> (2014): 1-26.</p>
<p>Free video visiting</p> <p>Video visiting as a supplement, not a replacement, to in-person visiting offers ways for parents who are incarcerated to maintain frequent, consistent, and ongoing communication with their children. Best practices for video visiting create opportunities for families to access video visiting from flexible locations, including personal devices, for ease and comfort of the child. This allows parents who are incarcerated unique and meaningful opportunities to engage in their children’s lives in the communities.</p>	<p>Allison Hollihan and Michelle Portlock, <i>Video Visiting in Corrections: Benefits, Limitations, and Implementation Considerations</i> (Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections, 2014), https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/029609.pdf.</p> <p>Megan Pfeiffer, Valerie Carpico, and Ann Adalist-Estrin, <i>Strengthening and Maintaining Family Connections: Best Practices for Child-Friendly Video Visiting</i> (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2023), https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/strengthening-and-maintaining-family-connections-best-practices-for-child-friendly-video-visiting/.</p> <p>Grant Duwe and Susan McNeeley, “Just as Good as the Real Thing? The Effects of Prison Video Visitation on Recidivism,” <i>Crime and Delinquency</i> 67, no. 2 (2020): 1-23.</p>
<p>Free transportation for in-person visits</p> <p>Transportation to correctional facilities is often a barrier for families to maintain sustained in-person contact with their loved one.^{vi} Many correctional agencies, in partnership with community- and faith-based organizations, implement free or subsidized transportation for families for visits.^{vii}</p>	<p>Dylan Addison, “Miles and Bars Between: The Tertiary Prisonization and Layered Liminality of Prison Visitation Transportation Services,” <i>Journal of Contemporary Ethnography</i> 52, no. 1 (2023): 30-57.</p> <p>*See research above for the importance of child-friendly contact visiting.</p>

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Placing parents who are incarcerated in facilities close to home</p> <p>These practices allow parents who are incarcerated to request to be placed in facilities closest to where their children reside in the community. These practices alleviate many of the burdens of in-person visiting for families and encourage more frequent and consistent visits.</p>	<p>Melinda Tasca, “It’s Not All Cupcakes and Lollipops’: An Investigation of the Predictors and Effects of Prison Visitation for Children during Maternal and Paternal Incarceration” (Doctoral Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2014), https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/its-not-all-cupcakes-and-lollipops-investigation-predictors-and.</p> <p>Valerie A. Clark and Grant Duwe, “Distance Matters: Examining the Factors That Impact Prisoner Visitation in Minnesota,” <i>Criminal Justice and Behavior</i> 44, no. 2 (2017): 184-204.</p>
<p>Child welfare advocacy</p> <p>Parents who are incarcerated maintain the same rights as other parents with child welfare involvement to have consistent communication and visits with their children, be involved in case planning, and attend court hearings, with the goal of family reunification. Systems advocacy is essential to make sure that there is cooperation and coordination between child welfare and corrections agencies so that parents who are incarcerated are able to maintain ongoing contact and connection with their children and their case.</p> <p>Research shows that parents who are incarcerated and involved in the child welfare system are less likely to reunify with their children when there is lack of service coordination and consistent communication and visits with their children.^{viii} By providing child welfare advocacy, parents who are incarcerated will have access to education, support, and connection to necessary services and processes to successfully reunify with their children.</p>	<p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, <i>Child Welfare Practices With Families Affected by Parental Incarceration</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2021), https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parental_incarceration.pdf.</p> <p>Amy C. D’Andrade, “How Does Incarceration Affect the Likelihood of Reunification?,” in <i>Child Welfare 360: Criminal Justice Involvement of Families in Child Protection</i>, ed. Traci LaLiberte, Korina Berry, and Kate Walthour (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2018).</p> <p>Federal Interagency Working Group for Children of Incarcerated Parents, <i>Children in Foster Care with Parents in Federal Prison: A Toolkit for Child Welfare Agencies, Federal Prisons, and Residential Reentry Centers</i> (Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Working Group for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2013).</p>

Parenting Education

Parenting education curricula are structured programs designed to provide parents with knowledge, skills, and strategies to effectively navigate the challenges of raising children. These curricula are either specifically designed for parents who are incarcerated or can be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by parents who are incarcerated, such as maintaining connections through physical separation and preparing for family reunification. Parenting education is best paired with opportunities to practice skills through ongoing consistent communication and in-person contact visits. Many correctional agencies implement parenting education through partnerships with community organizations. This is also an opportunity for agencies to cofacilitate parenting groups with parents who are incarcerated. Many correctional agencies also adapt the following curricula to meet the needs of their population. For example, jails may modify a 12-week group to facilitate sessions twice per week for six weeks.

Curriculum and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Parenting Inside Out® (PIO)</p> <p>A cognitive-behavioral parenting skills training program developed for parents who are incarcerated, this program focuses on equipping parents with skills in communication and problem-solving as well as techniques for positive reinforcement and nonviolent discipline.^{ix}</p>	<p>J. Mark Eddy, Charles R. Martinez Jr., and Bert Burraston, “A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Parent Management Training Program for Incarcerated Parents: Proximal Impacts,” <i>Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development</i> 78, no. 3 (2013): 75-93.</p> <p>Bert O. Burraston and J. Mark Eddy, “The Moderating Effects of Living with a Child Before Incarceration on Postrelease Outcomes Related to a Prison-Based Parent Management Training Program,” <i>Smith College Studies in Social Work</i> 87, no. 1 (2017): 94-111.</p>
<p>InsideOut Dad®</p> <p>This program was designed specifically for fathers who are incarcerated. It covers skill-building and topics such as processing feelings related to parental incarceration, healthy communication with children, fathering from the inside, and positive co-parenting relationships.^x</p>	<p>Steven Block, Christopher A. Brown, Louis M. Barretti, Erin Walker, Michael Yudt, and Ralph Fretz, “A Mixed-Method Assessment of a Parenting Program for Incarcerated Fathers,” <i>The Journal of Correctional Education</i> 65, no. 1 (2014): 50-67, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26507640.</p> <p>Joshua J. Turner, Kay Bradford, Brian J. Higginbothan, and Andrea Coppin, “Examining the Outcomes of the InsideOut Dad Fatherhood Education Program for Incarcerated Minority Fathers,” <i>The Family Journal</i> 29, no. 3 (2020): 305-315.</p>

Curriculum and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Nurturing Parenting Programs®</p> <p>This set of programs was designed to use with families involved with the child welfare system to prevent and address child abuse and neglect. The programs work with parents to teach age-appropriate developmental expectations and nurturing, nonviolent discipline strategies. They help parents develop empathy, self-awareness, and positive patterns of communication.^{xi}</p>	<p>Esther Devall, “Positive Parenting for High-Risk Families,” <i>Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences</i> 96, no. 4 (2004): 22-28.</p> <p>Peter Slavik Cowen, “Effectiveness of a Parent Education Intervention for At-Risk Families,” <i>Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing</i> 6, no. 2 (2001): 73-82.</p> <p>Vincent J. Palusci, Pat Crum, Rosalynn Bliss, and Stephen J. Bavolek, “Changes in Parenting Attitudes and Knowledge among Inmates and Other At-Risk Populations after a Family Nurturing Program,” <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> 30, no. 1 (2008): 79-89.</p>
<p>Circle of Security</p> <p>Circle of Security is a video-based parenting program focused on supporting secure attachment in parent-child relationships. The program includes understanding the child’s emotional world and skill-building to learn to read children’s emotional needs, support children’s ability to manage their emotions, and build understanding of security in relationships.^{xii}</p>	<p>Jude Cassidy, Bonnie E. Brett, Jacquelyn T. Gross, Jessica A. Stern, David R. Martin, Jonathan J. Mohr, and Susan S. Woodhouse, “Circle of Security-Parenting: A Randomized Controlled Trial in Head Start,” <i>Development and Psychopathology</i> 29, no. 2 (2017): 651-673.</p> <p>Evette Horton and Christine Murray, “A Quantitative Exploratory Evaluation of the Circle of Security-Parenting Program with Mothers in Residential Substance-Abuse Treatment,” <i>Infant Mental Health Journal</i> 36, no. 3 (2015): 320-336.</p> <p>Anne-Marie Maxwell, Catherine McMahon, Anna Huber, Rebecca E. Reay, Erin Hawkins, and Bryanne Barnett, “Examining the Effectiveness of Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P): A Multi-Site Non-Randomized Study with Waitlist Control,” <i>Journal of Child and Family Studies</i> 30 (2021): 1123-1140.</p>
<p>Attachment Vitamins</p> <p>A trauma-informed parenting program designed for parents with young children ages 0–5, this program’s goal is to repair the impact of chronic stress and trauma through strengthening the child-parent relationship.^{xiii}</p>	<p>Sara F. Waters, Annmarie Hulette, Mindy Davis, Rosemary Bernstein, and Alicia Lieberman, “Evidence for Attachment Vitamins: A Trauma-Informed Universal Prevention Programme for Parents of Young Children,” <i>Early Child Development and Care</i> 190, no. 7 (2020): 1109-1114.</p>

Supporting Pregnant Women and Mothers with Infants Who Are Incarcerated

Pregnant women and mothers with infants who are incarcerated need support to ensure their health during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum, as well as opportunities to build and maintain strong bonds with their newborns. Without programs specifically designed for pregnant women and mothers with newborns who are incarcerated, many women would be separated from their infants within days of giving birth, a critical time for building attachment. These programs and practices should provide adequate care for the mother and baby, offer mothers agency and choices in selecting services, ensure privacy for medical appointments and procedures, and provide support before, during, and after childbirth.^{xiv}

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Prison nursery</p> <p>Prison nursery programs are implemented within correctional facilities to allow pregnant women who are incarcerated to keep their newborn infants with them in prison after the baby’s birth for a designated period. These programs provide a supportive environment where mothers can care for their babies while serving their sentences. They often offer parenting classes, counseling, and assistance with childcare to help mothers develop nurturing skills and bond with their infants.</p>	<p>Michal Gilad and Tal Gat, “U.S. v. My Mommy: Evaluation of Prison Nurseries as a Solution for Children of Incarcerated Women, <i>N.Y.U. Review of Law & Social Change</i> 37 (2013): 371-402.</p> <p>Lorie S. Goshin, Mary W. Byrne, and Alana M. Henninger, “Recidivism after Release from a Prison Nursery Program,” <i>Public Health Nursing</i> 31, no. 2 (2014): 109-117.</p> <p>Chandra Kring Villanueva, <i>Mothers, Infants and Imprisonment: A National Look at Prison Nurseries and Community-Based Alternatives</i> (New York: Women’s Prison Association, 2009).</p>
<p>Community-based residential parenting</p> <p>These programs offer a noninstitutional alternative for pregnant women and mothers who are incarcerated to live with their children and newborn infants in a community setting either pre-adjudication or while serving their sentences.</p>	<p>Anne E. Jbara, “The Price they Pay: Protecting the Mother-Child Relationship Through the Use of Prison Nurseries and Residential Parenting Programs,” <i>Indiana Law Journal</i> 87, no. 4 (2012): 1825-1845.</p>

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Doula support</p> <p>Doulas are professionals trained in childbirth and provide physical, emotional, and informational support during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.^{xv} Doulas also advocate for care for the mothers who are incarcerated.</p>	<p>Carole Schroeder and Janice Bell, “Labor Support for Incarcerated Pregnant Women: The Doula Project,” <i>The Prison Journal</i> 85, no. 3 (2005): 311-328.</p> <p>Rebecca Shlafer, Laurel Davis, Lauren Hindt, and Virginia Pendleton, “The Benefits of Doula Support for Women Who Are Pregnant in Prison and Their Newborns,” in <i>Children with Incarcerated Mothers</i>, ed. Julie Poehlmann-Tynan and Daneille H. Dallaire (Springer, 2021): 33-48.</p>
<p>Anti-shackling</p> <p>Shackling, or the use of restraints, is harmful to pregnant women and can be a barrier to medical professionals providing adequate medical care. Anti-shackling practices seek to mitigate the risks that shackling poses to the mother during transportation to the hospital, labor, delivery, and postpartum recovery.^{xvi}</p>	<p>Jennifer G. Clark and Rachel E. Simon, “Shackling and Separation: Motherhood in Prison,” <i>American Medical Association Journal of Ethics</i> 15, no. 9 (2013): 779-785.</p> <p>National Task Force on the Use of Restraints with Pregnant Women under Correctional Custody, <i>Best Practices in the Use of Restraints with Pregnant Women Under Correctional Custody</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012), https://cjinvolwedwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Best-Practices-Use-of-Restraints-Pregnant.pdf.</p>

Supporting Children with Parents Who Are Incarcerated

Children with parents who are incarcerated have varying and diverse needs, and the [Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights](#) offers a framework of best practices to support children in the community and to help them maintain relationships with their parent who is incarcerated. Children with parents who are incarcerated have many risk factors due to parental incarceration, including a higher risk of experiencing emotional distress and academic difficulties. Evidence-based and promising interventions provide targeted support to help children build resilience and cope with stressors. These programs are also about meeting the needs of children (as defined by children), independent of their relationship with their parent who is incarcerated.

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Youth mentoring</p> <p>Mentoring programs match children with trained, volunteer adult mentors to provide positive supportive relationships for youth through a set relationship and ongoing, consistent participation in one-on-one activities. Some mentoring programs are designed specifically to support children with parents who are incarcerated or children impacted by the justice system. Mentoring relationships have been found to improve mentee’s school performance, overall relationships with adults, and emotional well-being.^{xvii}</p>	<p>Rebecca J. Shlafer, Julie Poehlmann, Brianna Coffino, and Ashley Hanneman, “Mentoring Children with Incarcerated Parents: Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy,” <i>Family Relations</i> 58, no. 5 (2009): 507-519.</p> <p>Lisa Werder Brown and Jamie Clearfield, <i>Amachi Pittsburgh: Years 8 to 10 Evaluation Report</i> (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity, 2014), https://www.ceac.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Amachi%20Evaluation%20Report%20Years%208-10%20FINAL%20Revised.pdf.</p> <p>G. Roger Jargoura, David L. DuBois, Rebecca J. Shlafer, and Konrad A. Haight, <i>Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Synthesis of Research and Input from the Listening Session Held By the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, 2013).</p> <p>Belinda E. Bruster and Kim Foreman, “Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Program Evaluation,” <i>Social Work in Public Health</i> 27 (2012): 3-11.</p> <p>G. Roger Jargoura, <i>Mentoring for Children of Incarcerated Parents</i> (Boston: National Mentoring Resource Center, 2016).</p>

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Age-appropriate education about parental incarceration</p> <p>It is important to provide information to children on the impact of incarceration on children and families, ways to maintain contact during incarceration, preparing for the reentry of a parent who is incarcerated, and having difficult conversations with loved ones. Sesame Street’s Little Children Big Challenges: Incarceration toolkit has resources for families and practitioners on supporting children on understanding coping with parental incarceration. The toolkit includes videos, a storybook, worksheets, and a smartphone app, with tailored resources for different age groups.</p>	<p>Rebecca J. Shlafer, Amanda A. Wanous, and Erin C. Schubert, “Statewide Dissemination of Sesame Street Resources for Families Affected by Incarceration,” <i>Health Promotion Practice</i> 18, no. 2 (2017): 298-305.</p> <p>Julie Poehlmann-Tynan, Hilary Cuthrell, Lindsay Weymouth, Cynthia Burnson, Lexi Frerks, Luke Muentner, Nicole Holder, Zoe Milavetz, Lauren Lauter, Lauren Hindt, Laurel Davis, Erin Schubert, and Rebecca Shlafer, “Multisite Randomized Efficacy Trial of Educational Materials for Young Children with Incarcerated Parents,” <i>Dev Psychopathol</i> 33, no. 1 (2021): 323-339.</p>
<p>Individual and group therapy</p> <p>Individual and group therapy sessions are proven to be beneficial to supporting children through difficult experiences. Individual therapy for children with parents who are incarcerated gives them space to work with a therapist to process feelings related to parental incarceration, such as feelings of abandonment, confusion, and anger, and helps them develop coping skills. Group therapy and support groups are opportunities for children to process feelings of having a parent who is incarcerated with their peers in a supportive environment and to connect with others going through similar experiences.^{xviii} These services are often provided in school-based settings.</p>	<p>David W. Springer, Courtney Lynch, and Allen Rubin, “Effects of a Solution-Focused Mutual Aid Group for Hispanic Children of Incarcerated Parents,” <i>Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal</i> 17, no. 6 (2000): 431-442.</p> <p>Angelica Lopez and Isaac Burt, “Counseling Groups: A Creative Strategy Increasing Children of Incarcerated Parents’ Sociorelational Interactions,” <i>Journal of Creativity in Mental Health</i> 8, no. 4 (2013): 395-415.</p> <p>Emily C. Brown and Casey A. Barrio Minton, “Serving Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Case Study of School Counselors’ Experiences,” <i>Professional School Counseling</i> 2, no. 1 (2018): 1-11.</p>

Supporting Family Reunification

Supporting parents returning home from incarceration with reunifying with their children is crucial for promoting a smooth and healthy transition for the entire family. All of the above programs and practices support family reunification through sustained connections during incarceration and meeting the needs of different family members individually to mitigate the harms of family separation. In reentry, families need a safe and stable place to live in order to successfully reunify.

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Transitional and supportive housing</p> <p>Access to safe and secure housing is critical for formerly incarcerated parents to maintain regular relationships with their children in reentry.^{xix} There are many evidence-based housing practices to support people experiencing homelessness, such as rapid rehousing, transitional housing programs, vouchers, and affordable and subsidized housing. Some of these options provide short-term housing support while people transition home and provide additional supports, such as counseling and job training services. These have proven to be successful for families more broadly, though there is limited research in what works in particular for parents returning to the community.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, <i>Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016), https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Family-Options-Study-Full-Report.pdf.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, <i>Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families Demonstration Programs Evaluation Report: Part II: Demonstration Findings – Outcomes Evaluation</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016).</p> <p>Cael Warren, <i>Success in Housing: How Much Does Criminal Background Matter?</i> (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2022), https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/imports/AEON_HousingSuccess_CriminalBackground_Report_1-19.pdf.</p>
<p>Family reunification in public housing</p> <p>Many formerly incarcerated people with families who live in public housing are not able to reunify due to policies that prohibit tenants with criminal justice histories. Family reunification programs in public housing allow family members to return home, successfully reunify with their children, and find stability and reentry success. Implementing this type of program requires coordination with other local agencies, such as the local housing authority, and may benefit from additional partnerships to offer additional reentry services.^{xx}</p>	<p>John Bae, Margaret diZerega, Jacob Kang-Brown, Ryan Shanahan, and Ram Subramanian, <i>Coming Home: An Evaluation of the New York City Housing Authority’s Family Reentry Pilot Program</i> (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2016).</p>

Program/Practice and Description	Relevant Research
<p>Peer mentoring</p> <p>In peer mentorship programs, individuals with lived experience in the justice system provide support and guidance to people returning home from incarceration. These programs aim to build trust and rapport and offer a unique perspective on navigating challenges in reentry. Research has found positive results for both the mentee and mentor in these relationships.^{xxi}</p>	<p>Dave Sells, Anderson Curtis, Jehan Abdur-Raheem, Michele Kimczak, Charles Barber, Cathleen Meaden, Jacob Hasson, Patrick Fallon, and Meredith Emigh-Guy, "Peer-Mentored Community Reentry Reduces Recidivism," <i>Criminal Justice and Behavior</i> 47, no. 4 (2020); 437-456.</p> <p>Julia Lesnick, Laura Abrams, Cassandra Angel, and Elizabeth Barnert, "Credible Messenger Mentoring to Promote the Health of Youth Involved in the Juvenile Legal System: A Narrative Review," <i>Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care</i> 53, no. 6 (2023): 1-10.</p>
<p>Family-based sentencing alternatives</p> <p>These are programs that keep families together by diverting parents and primary caregivers from incarceration, reducing their length of incarceration, or allowing them to serve part of their sentence in the community to keep families together and support family reunification in the community.</p>	<p>Chyla M. Aguiar and Susan Leavell, "A Statewide Parenting Alternative Sentencing Program: Description and Preliminary Outcomes," <i>Smith College Studies in Social Work</i> 87, no. 1 (2017): 78-93.</p>

Grantee Highlights: Evidence-Based Practices in Action

These highlights show how Second Chance Act Addressing the Needs of Incarcerated Parents and Their Minor Children grantees are using evidence-based and promising programs and practices in the field.

Lead agency: Dorchester County Health Department (Maryland)

Partners: Dorchester County Department of Corrections, Dorchester County Public Schools

Overview: The Connecting for Success program offers a two-generational approach with three main service areas: child and child caregiver services, outreach and case management, and psychoeducational groups for justice-involved parents. Licensed clinical social workers provide mental health evaluations and **individual and group therapy** in elementary schools to children with a parent who is incarcerated or released from custody within the past year. Evidence-based treatments for children include trauma-sensitive yoga, eye movement desensitization therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, and the Yoga Calm group curriculum. Social workers also support caregivers and help connect them to resources. Outreach workers meet with parents who are incarcerated to assess needs, abilities, and barriers and to develop reentry support plans. When those

parents return to the community, staff continue to work with them toward predetermined goals. This planning and support is critical to reducing recidivism. The program also includes the **evidence-based parenting curriculum Parenting Inside Out**, designed specifically for justice-involved parents, and a self-regulation and skills building yoga class sanctioned by the Prison Yoga Project. Annual Officer Wellness training, including trauma-informed yoga, is offered to correctional officers at the partner correctional facility.

Lead agency: The Milwaukee County Community Reintegration Center (CRC) (Franklin, Wisconsin)

Partners: Center for Self-Sufficiency (CFSS)

Overview: The CRC developed the Family Engagement Center to provide a safe and supportive environment for parents who are incarcerated to strengthen and maintain the family unit while one parent is incarcerated. Through the Family Engagement Center, CRC partners with CFSS to provide **healthy relationship and parenting education classes** to residents in the facility using curricula such as Parenting Inside Out and Within My Reach. Other programming includes **group mentoring** and case management services to support reentry planning. Through the program, residents also participate in **in-person family contact visits**. The CRC created new visiting spaces that include child-friendly and age-appropriate games designed for parents to engage fully with their children and families. The program also provides post-release services in the community for six months, including assistance with fatherhood education, trauma education, and connections with jobs and job training programs.

Lead agency: Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC)

Partners: Fatherhood Council (DCYF), Children of Incarcerated Parents, Reentry Council

Overview: WADOC supports family-friendly programs with culturally relevant, gender-responsive programming that focuses on strengthening the relationship between parents who are incarcerated and their loved ones. Services for parents who are incarcerated include **evidence-based parenting classes** (using Parenting Inside Out, InsideOut Dad, and Partners in Parenting), advocacy maneuvering family court issues, child support mitigation assistance, intensive case management with reentry planning assistance, family reunification support, and referrals to other social services and support. Parents who are incarcerated are allowed **two free phone calls each week** and in-person contact visiting is offered at all state facilities, many with **child-friendly visiting rooms** and opportunities for extended family visits. Each facility is required to hold a minimum of four family-friendly events per year, such as back-to-school events to support parents with their role in their children's education. Children with incarcerated parents are able to attend a four-day outdoor camp run by WADOC staff. WADOC also offers case management services to caregivers and a monthly stipend of \$50 for travel fees.

Washington State has also created **prison nursery** and **family-based sentencing alternative programs**. The Residential Parenting Program allows pregnant individuals with sentences shorter than 30 months the opportunity to keep their babies with them after giving birth. The Parenting Sentencing Alternative program allows parents facing total confinement to remain in the community under supervision with their children or for those parents already incarcerated to transition to partial confinement. The Community Parenting Alternative program allows for parents with minor children to spend up to the last 12 months of their current sentence on community supervision. Similarly, the Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative program allows up to 12 months of their sentence in community custody for parenting purposes.

Additional Resources

Where to begin:

- [Coaching Packet: Implementing Evidence-Based Practices](#)
- [A Checklist for Implementing Evidence-Based Practices and Programs for Justice-Involved Adults with Behavioral Health Disorders](#)

Find evidence-based programs and practices to support parents who are incarcerated and their children:

- [The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide](#)
- [Office of Justice Programs Crime Solutions](#)
- [SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center](#)
- [California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#)
- [Department of Health and Human Services Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness](#)
- [Results First™ Clearinghouse Database](#)
- [What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse](#)

Endnotes

- ⁱ San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, *Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights* (Stockton: San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, 2005), https://sfonline.barnard.edu/children/SFCIPP_Bill_of_Rights.pdf.
- ⁱⁱ Casey Family Programs, *Strategy Brief Strong Families: How Can Frequent, Quality Family Time Promote Relationships and Permanency?* (Seattle: Case Family Programs, 2020), <https://www.casey.org/media/20.07-QFF-SF-Family-Time.pdf>; Melinda Tasca, Philip Mulvey, and Nancy Rodriguez, "Families Coming Together in Prison: An Examination of Visitation Encounters," *Punishment and Society* 18, no. 4 (2016): 459-478.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Marty Beyer, "Visit Coaching: Building on Family Strengths to Meet Children's Needs," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 59, no. 1 (2008): 47-60.
- ^{iv} Marty Beyer, Randi Blumenthal-Guigui, and Tanya Krupat, "Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships: Visit Coaching with Children and Their Incarcerated Parents," in *Children of Incarcerated Parents: Developmental and Clinical Issues*, ed. Yvette R. Harris, James A. Graham, and Gloria Oliver Carpenter (New York: Springer, 2010).
- ^v Kyle C. Ward et al., "Identifying the Impact of Incarceration on Parenting: An Examination of Incarcerated Parents' Perceptions in the 'Reading for a Change' Program in Colorado," *The Prison Journal* 102, no. 5 (2022): 626-647.
- ^{vi} Batya Y. Rubenstein, Elisa L. Toman, and Joshua C. Cochran, "Socioeconomic Barriers to Child Contact with Incarcerated Parents," *Justice Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2021): 725-751; Johnna Christian, "Riding the Bus: Barriers to Prison Visitation and Family Management Strategies," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 21, no. 1 (2005): 31-48.
- ^{vii} Heath C. Hoffman, Amy L. Byrd, and Alex M. Knightlinger, "Prison Programs and Services for Incarcerated Parents and Their Underage Children: Results from a National Survey of Correctional Facilities," *The Prison Journal* 90, no. 4 (2010): 397-416.
- ^{viii} Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Child Welfare Practice With Families Affected by Parental Incarceration* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2021), https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parental_incarceration.pdf; Amy C. D'Andrade, "How Does Incarceration Affect the Likelihood of Reunification?," in *Child Welfare 360: Criminal Justice Involvement of Families in Child Protection*, ed. Traci LaLiberte, Korina Berry, and Kate Walthour (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2018).
- ^{ix} "Parenting Inside Out," Parenting Inside Out, accessed March 5, 2024, <http://www.parentinginsideout.org/>.
- ^x "Complete Program Kit: InsideOut Dad 3rd Edition," FatherSource, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://store.fatherhood.org/complete-program-kit-insideout-dad-3rd-edition/>.
- ^{xi} "Family Development Resources," Nurturing Parenting, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.nurturingparenting.com/>.
- ^{xii} "Circle of Security," Circle of Security International, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/>.
- ^{xiii} Anmarie C. Hulette et al., *Early Intervention for Families Exposed to Chronic Stress and Trauma: The Attachment Vitamins Program* (Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2016), <https://childtrauma.ucsf.edu/sites/childtrauma.ucsf.edu/files/Hulette%20et%20al.%202016.pdf>.
- ^{xiv} Carolyn Sufrin, *Pregnancy and Postpartum Care in Correctional Settings* (Chicago: National Commission on Correctional Health Care, 2018), <https://www.ncchc.org/wp-content/uploads/Pregnancy-and-Postpartum-Care-2018.pdf>.
- ^{xv} Marilyn C. Moses and Roberto Hugh Potter, "The Use of Doulas for Inmates in Labor: Continuous Supportive Care with Positive Outcomes," *Corrections Today* (2008): 58-60, 73.

^{xvi} Susan Hatters Friedman, Aimee Kaempf, and Sarah Kauffman, “The Realities of Pregnancy and Mothering While Incarcerated,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 51, no. 4 (2023); Ginette G. Ferszt, Michelle Palmer, and Christine McGrane, “Where Does Your State Stand on Shackling of Pregnant Incarcerated Women?,” *Nursing for Women’s Health* 22, no. 1 (2018): 17-23.

^{xvii} David L. DuBois, Nelson Portillo, Jean E. Rhodes, Naida Silverthorn, and Jeffrey C. Valentine, “How Effective Are Youth Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 12, no. 2 (2011): 57-91; Carla Herrera, David L. DuBois, Janet Heubach, and Jean B. Grossman, “Effects of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Community-Based Mentoring Program on Social-Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Outcomes of Participating Youth: A Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 144 (2023): 1-13; Jean B. Grossman and Jean E. Rhodes, “The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30 (2002): 199-219.

^{xviii} Caroline Lopez-Perry and Christine Suniti Bhat, “Supporting Students with Incarcerated Parents in Schools: A Group Intervention,” *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work* 32, no. 2 (2007): 139-153.

^{xix} Bruce Western and Natalie Smith, “Formerly Incarcerated Parents and Their Children,” *Demography* 55, no. 3 (2018): 823-847

^{xx} Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Opening Doors, Returning Home: How Public Housing Authorities Across the Country Are Expanding Access for People with Conviction Histories* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022), <https://bjaojp.gov/doc/opening-doors-returning-home.pdf>.

^{xxi} Mayra Lopez-Humphreys and Barbra Treater, “It’s What’s on the Inside That Counts: A Pilot Study of the Subjective Changes Among Returned Citizens Participating in a Peer-Mentor Support Initiative,” *Journal of Social Science Research* (2019): 1-15.



Justice Center
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS



This project was supported by Grant No. 15PJDP-23-GK-02655-COIP awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.