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Children of Incarcerated Parents: Not Their Crime, Still Their Sentence

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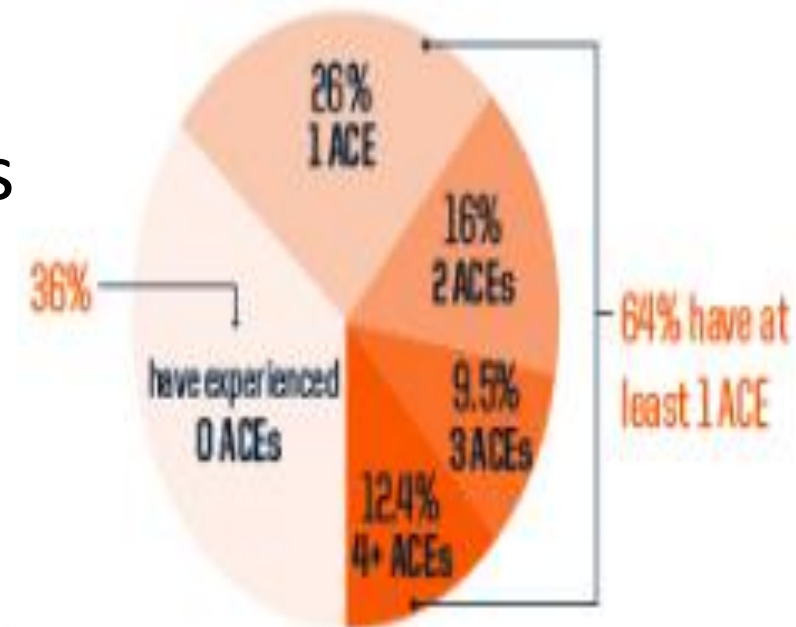
School of Medicine

Defining Trauma

- A trauma occurs when a child experiences an intense event that threatens or causes harm to the child's emotional/physical well-being
(National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003)
- Psychological and physiological reactions commonly occur after a trauma
- Trauma affects brain development
- Child traumatic stress: exposure to one or more traumas that impact child's daily functioning
- Traumatic stress reactions are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

- Collaboration between Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente
- Examined negative health and behavior outcomes in adulthood and exposure to ACEs
- 64% reported exposure to one or more ACEs
- Incarceration of a family member is an ACE
- 95% likelihood that additional types of childhood trauma accompany 1 ACE



The Impact of ACEs

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes



Possible Risk Outcomes:

BEHAVIOR



Lack of physical activity



Smoking



Alcoholism



Drug use



Missed work

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH



Severe obesity



Diabetes



Depression



Suicide attempts



STDs



Heart disease



Cancer



Stroke




COPD



Broken bones

Considerations

- Every experience varies
 - Risk and protective factors will vary
 - No youth has the same experience with parental incarceration
 - Every child is impacted by incarceration
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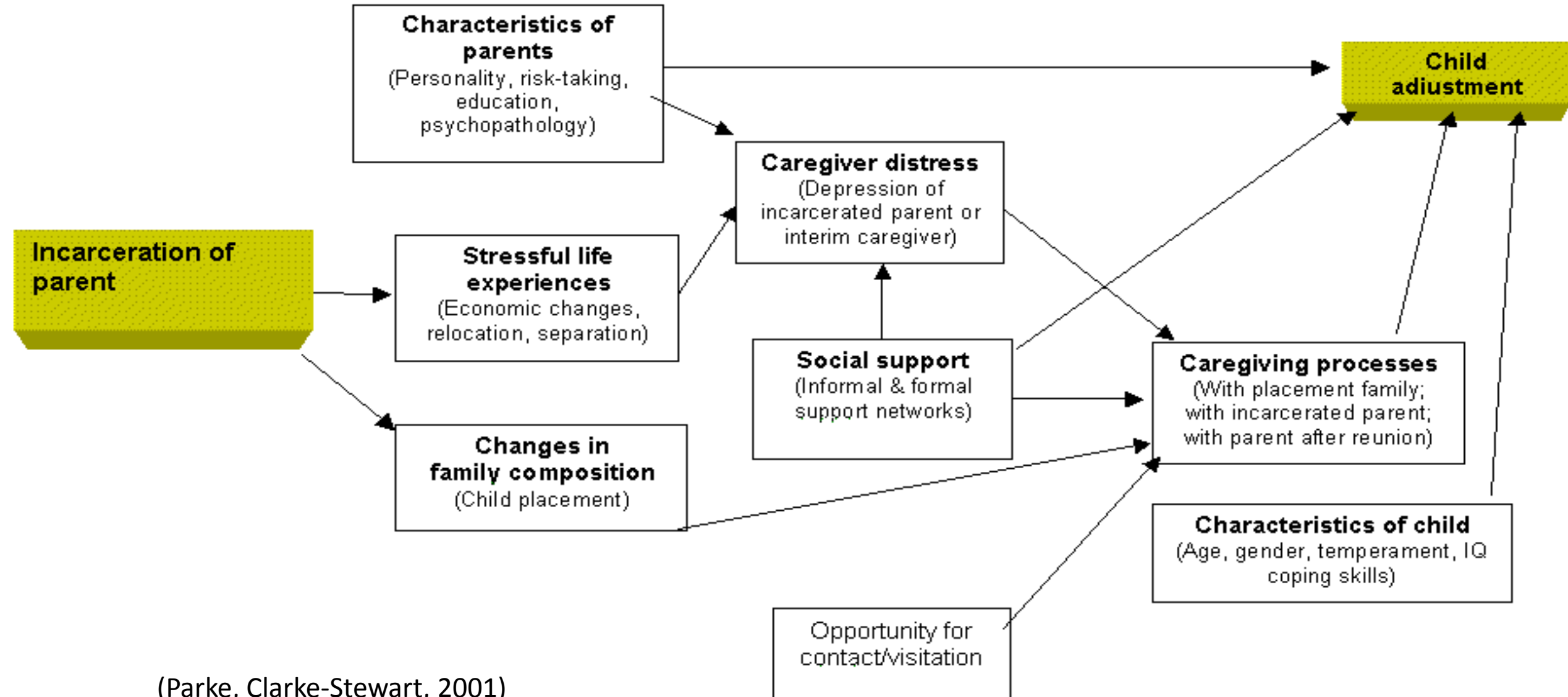
What impacts outcomes?

- Duration of the parental incarceration
- Was the incarcerated parent the primary caregiver?
- Attachment to parent & quality of relationship prior to arrest
- Family functioning after arrest
- Nature and quality of relationship with new caregiver(s)
- Will child be able to remain in their home?
- Caretaker's response to incarceration
- Previous losses
- Was the child exposed to the arrest?

Summary: What impacts outcomes?

- Degree of disruption
- Availability of Support
- Child and Caregiver functioning
 - Temperament
 - Coping style
 - Pre-existing conditions
 - Prior trauma & loss
 - Mental health

Transactional model of predictors of adjustment



(Parke, Clarke-Stewart, 2001)

COMMON EMOTIONS & REACTIONS

Echoes of Incarceration

Common Emotions & Reactions

- Fear/Anxiety
- Worry
- Sadness
- Isolation
- Anger
- Guilt
- Confusion about incarceration
- Stigma and Shame
- Family Role confusion
- Resentment

Fear/Worry

- Where did my parent go?
- Is my parent safe?
- Who will take care of me?
- Will other people I love go away?
- Will I be arrested?
- Will I be safe?


Separation Anxiety/Attachment Problems

- Developmentally inappropriate and excessive fear/anxiety regarding separation
- May be exhibited by:
 - Reluctance to go to school
 - Clinging behavior
 - Refusal to stay alone or go to sleep overs
 - Complaints of physical symptoms
 - Regressive behavior

Sadness/Depression

- Missing the parent
- Feeling abandoned and unloved by parent
- Sadness about change in life circumstances
- **May be exhibited by:**
 - Frequent crying
 - Depressed or irritable mood
 - Withdrawal
 - Changes in sleeping/eating patterns
 - Fatigue/loss of energy
 - Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt

Guilt

- Is it my fault? What did I do to cause this?
 - Guilt associated with being on the “outside”
 - Guilt can lead to feelings of depression and negative thoughts about self
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Anger

- Anger toward parent/police/family/system/world
- Anger toward peers whose parents live at home
- May be exhibited by:
 - Increased irritability and hostility
 - Fighting
 - Disruptive behavior
 - Defiant behavior
 - Temper tantrums

Stigma and Shame

- Teasing/taunts/rejection by peers and adults
- Unintended and intended isolation
- Implicit bias toward COIP
- All losses of parents are not viewed/treated equally
- Tendency to avoid discussion of incarceration OR discuss it without sensitivity
- Shame emanates from the responses of others

Anxiety
Stigma
Fear
Anticipation
Anger
Ambivalence
Worry
Stress

Returning Home

Considerations:

- Frequency/type of communication and contact during incarceration
- Status of parent-child relationship prior to imprisonment
- Status of problems that existed prior to incarceration
- Changes in child's developmental stage
- Shift in family role/responsibilities
- Stressful!

Returning Home

- Re-establishing relationships will take some time
- Re-unification should be child-focused
- Parents and caregivers should be prepared for changes in mood and interactions
- Child should be prepared for reality of the return
- Anxiety
- Excitement
- Shame and stigma
- Be patient

Parent's Release



“Greatest time of my life.”

“Made me feel good to finally have somebody to do the same things [other parents] did.”

Parent's Release



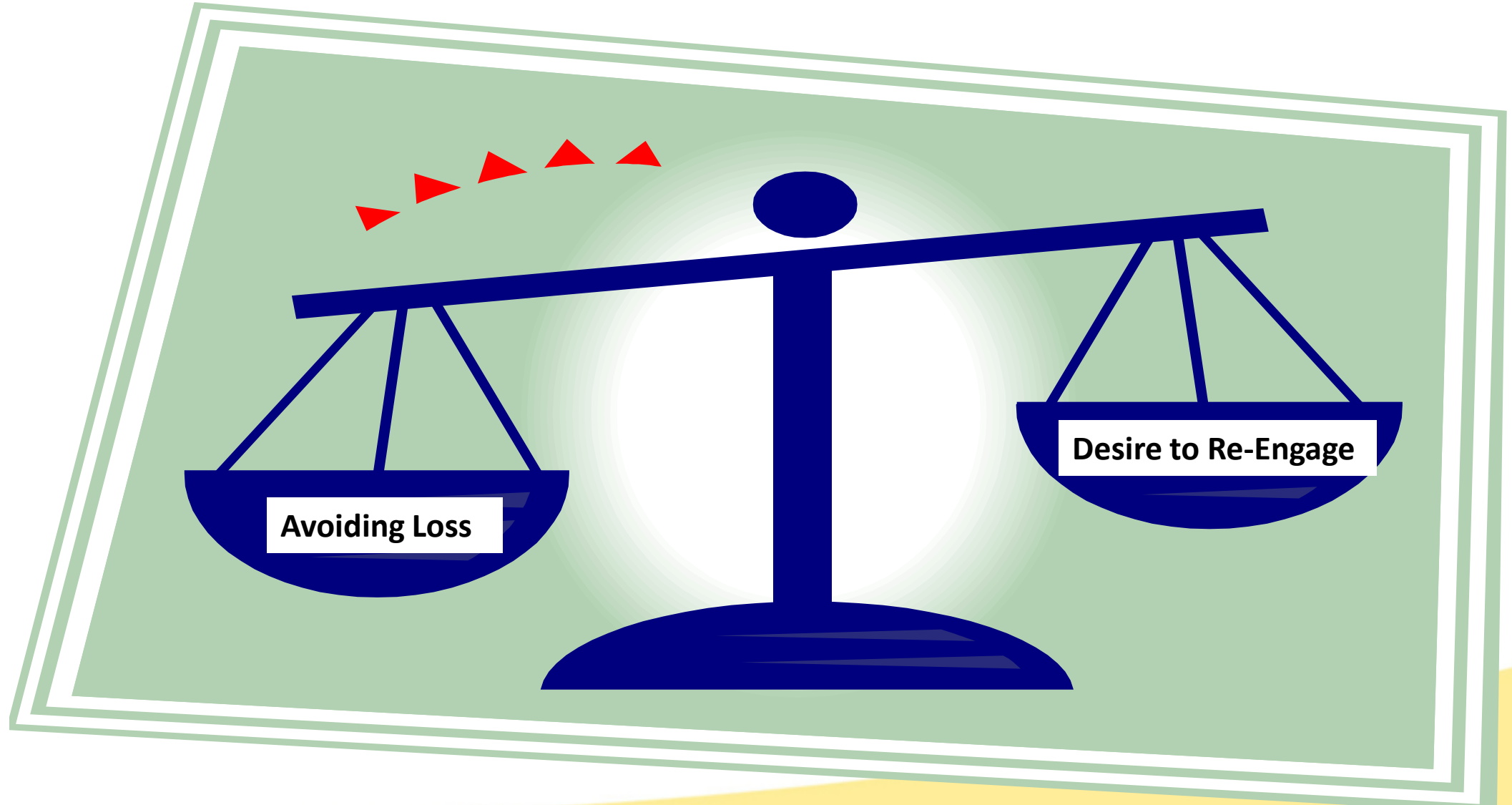
From: Newamericamedia.org

“I couldn't let her play Mom because she hadn't been Mom for so long.”


“It's hard to be hopeful when I'm used to a certain way. But, I'm expecting the best from her.”

“I can't just be done with my Mom.”


Adjustment Period



Supporting Students in School

- Educate staff about how parental incarceration affects behavior and ability to learn
 - Educate staff about impact of trauma on behavior and learning
 - Include relevant books in the library/classroom
 - Don't pry but be proactive
 - Provide opportunities for youth to express their feelings
 - Talk about it!
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Supporting Students in School

- Teach children how to respond to stress
 - Remain cognizant of stigmatizing language and actions
 - Implement trauma sensitive approaches
 - Use strength based approaches
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Supporting Students in School

- Schools need to provide:
 - Sense of safety (emotionally and physically safe)
 - Sense of competence
 - Connectedness
 - Engagement
 - Social Emotional Learning & Support

Supporting Students at Home/Community

- Be honest
 - Lay the foundation for re-entry
 - Discuss values and identity
 - Peer support
 - Talk about it!
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Communicating Effectively

- Acknowledge child's feelings
- Give youth opportunity to express thoughts and feelings
- Be non-judgmental
- Avoid easy answers like "Mom will be home soon," or "Everything will be alright."

Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

I HAVE THE RIGHT:

1. To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. To be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. To be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. To be well cared for in my parents absence.

From: San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership

Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

I HAVE THE RIGHT:

5. To speak with, see, and touch my parent.
6. To support, as I face my parent's incarceration.
7. Not to be judged, blamed, or labeled.
8. To a lifelong relationship with my parent.

Books for Your Library

- “Everyone Makes Mistakes: Living with My Daddy in Jail” by Madison Strempek
- “Ruby on the Outside” by Nora Raleigh Baskin
- “A Day I’ll Never Forget” by Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D.

Resources

Children of Incarcerated Parents. Children of Incarcerated Parents Federal Website. <http://www.youth.gov/coip>

Stronger Together. Volumes 1-3: <http://www.osborneny.org/>

Sesame Street- Little Children Big Challenges: Incarceration
<http://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/incarceration>

Behavioral Health Toolkit for Providers:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/dbhr/youthtxttoolkit.pdf>

National Organizations

- [National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated](#)
- [San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership](#)
- [National Institute of Corrections: Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)
- [The Osborne Association](#)

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Let's Connect!



Booksbydrdana