

CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

A Journey of Children, Caregivers and Parents in New York State



Council on Children and Families
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
METHOD	7
FINDINGS	9
Disclosure of Parents' Incarceration	9
Experiences During Parents' Arrest	11
Parent-Child Communications During Incarceration	13
Impact of Parent Incarceration on Children and Youth	21
Coping Strategies Used by Children and Youth	32
Family Reunification	36
RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHILDREN, CAREGIVERS AND PARENTS	40
REFERENCES	46
APPENDICES	47



INTRODUCTION

The parent-child relationship is one of the most fundamental relationships in children's lives. In most families, the parent-child relationship develops as a result of regular, ongoing interactions and this continuous contact serves as a stabilizing force that promotes children's healthy development, fostering their sense of belonging, security, and self-assurance. While this scenario is common for many children, the ongoing relationship described here is disrupted for children whose parents are not present due to incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents are presented with considerable challenges, including not only loss of a parent but loss of family stability, changes in living arrangements and stressors due to the stigma associated with having an incarcerated family member.

The experience of losing a parent to incarceration has been likened to the experience of losing a parent to death or divorce (1, 2). We have learned children with incarcerated parents experience a two-fold increase in risk for mental health problems compared to the general population of youth (3) and are more likely than their peers to fail or drop out of school (4). Furthermore, children's sense of loss can be compounded when their sole caregiver who has custody is incarcerated, increasing the risk of family instability and the possibility that children may be placed in foster care (1, 2, 5). The stresses associated with loss, both physical and emotional, are further complicated by the social stigma associated with this circumstance where the loss of a family member due to incarceration does not elicit

sympathy or support from others (6). Children respond to this by internalizing the stigma and experiencing lower self-esteem (1, 2, 5). The unique factors that bring children to these circumstances often leave them feeling isolated, disconnected, and with few opportunities to interact with other children in similar situations.

A considerable portion of children in New York have been exposed to the challenges associated with an incarcerated parent as evident by the fact that about six in ten (59%) individuals admitted to correctional facilities reported they had children at the time of their admission (Appendix A) and a recent statewide survey on adverse childhood experiences indicated that approximately six percent of adults in New York had experienced the incarceration of a family member during their childhood. Given the scope of this circumstance, the purpose of this study was to examine how the adverse childhood experience of a parent's incarceration impacted children during their childhood and young adulthood. The experience was examined from the perspective of children's caregivers, the incarcerated parent, and the children and young adults themselves to better understand how they dealt with this challenge and to inform policy-makers and advocates of strategies and policies that could support children and families during this experience. Throughout this report, the words of those directly impacted by a parent's incarceration are used to describe their circumstance.

METHOD

A series of focus groups were conducted in two regions of the state. The Capital District region, located in upstate New York, includes Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer and some small surrounding counties. The New York City region is located downstate and includes the five counties of the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Kings and Richmond. Council on Children and Families staff partnered with advocacy groups in each region to identify community-based organizations that provide services to families of incarcerated individuals (Appendix B). As a result, sessions were conducted with assistance from the following community organizations:

Abraham House
 Children of Promise NYC
 Correctional Association of New York
 Hour Children
 Osborne Association
 Prison Families of New York
 The Door
 Women's Prison Association
 Schenectady County Cornell Cooperative Extension
 Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program

The primary mission of all but one of these organizations is to serve individuals who have experienced incarceration, either directly or through a family member. However, in one instance focus group participants were recruited from a Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program and the reason for including

this group was to determine whether families served by such organizations have different experiences. Three sessions were hosted with participants recruited through WIC and the issues raised were highly consistent with those raised in other groups.

Staff at the participating organizations were provided recruitment fliers that described the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, benefits of participation and details regarding the time and location of sessions. Staff informed clients about the focus group opportunity and assumed responsibility for logistics. Focus groups were conducted at the organization or at locations familiar to participants (e.g., community outreach program, local public library).

Individuals who participated in sessions included: (1) adolescents and young adults with an incarcerated parent, (2) caregivers of the children and youth, and (3) formerly incarcerated parents. It was expected that adolescents (ages 12-16) and young adults (ages 17-24) might have different perspectives of this experience so separate sessions were conducted for the different age groups. Council staff conducted a total of 32 sessions (caregiver groups N=11; parent groups N=10; adolescents and young adults groups N=11) with 262 participants.

During sessions with caregivers and youth, information was gathered using a two-step approach. First, participants described their own experiences

with having a family member in prison. The interview protocol followed the trajectory of families from the point of arrest through incarceration and, when possible, to re-entry. Topics included:

- (1) parent arrest and/or disclosure of parent's incarceration;
- (2) issues related to maintaining a parent-child relationship during incarceration;
- (3) the impact of this experience on children's social and emotional well-being; and
- (4) changes, challenges and supports encountered as a result of this adverse event (e.g., custody, housing, finances).

In addition to the discussion, caregivers and youth were asked to complete a brief standardized instrument. Specifically, caregivers were asked to identify the child in their care that had the most difficulty adjusting to his/her parent's incarceration and to complete the Strengths and Difficulties Survey for that child. This survey is a brief assessment of children's social and emotional well-being. Youth were asked to complete the Coping Skills Survey, which is used to measure the extent individuals use a combination of positive and negative coping strategies to deal with difficult experiences. Each session was conducted by the Council on Children and Families research team. All information was confidential and participants were given \$50 in gift cards for their participation.



FINDINGS

An overarching theme clearly evident in each session was that caregivers wanted “the best” for children. Although the experience, which often was the source of considerable social, emotional and financial difficulty, tended to be preceded by a range of family challenges, caregivers used the skills and resources they had available to them to negotiate this hardship and support the children in their care.

Disclosure of Parents' Incarceration

I told him I was arrested but he didn't understand that meant I was in jail and he didn't know what jail was like or that I'd be going to prison. He didn't comprehend what that really meant or what that meant for him.

We told them that their father made some bad choices and would be going to prison for a while. The older child listened and accepted it. The younger child was very upset. She asked about whether he'd have handcuffs and asked about all the images she saw on TV.

I told them mommy is not well. She made some bad decisions so now she has to fix things.

If you tell the kids that mommy is away and she'll be back in a while they are not going to go for that. You need to tell them the truth.

I have been reunited with my son for eight years but he still doesn't know where I was. I can't bring myself to tell him. The therapist tells me I should let him know the truth but it is too hard for me.

One of the most difficult challenges related to parent incarceration was providing children with an explanation of what happened to their parent and how incarceration would influence the children's future circumstances. Most families recognized that a more open, honest approach helped children understand their parents' situation and caregivers, often the children's other parent or grandmother, attempted to provide explanations that were based on the children's developmental stage. Frequently, caregivers discussed the challenges they faced when finding ways to describe to children why the parent was incarcerated. The immediate goal of most caregivers was to ensure that children had adequate information about the parent's circumstances and it was assumed additional information would be provided as children began to absorb what this truly meant and made additional inquiries. Caregivers noted it was important to convey to the children that they would be “okay.” Many caregivers also expressed the importance of maintaining a degree of dignity for the incarcerated parent, avoiding a portrayal of the parent as totally wrong or totally innocent. Frequently, caregivers explained that the incarcerated parent's situation was associated with an illness, which was often the case of parents incarcerated for drug use and addiction, or explained that the parent exercised poor judgment or behavior and had to assume responsibility and pay the consequences.

Similar to caregivers, youth acknowledged that they preferred when family members gave an honest account of what happened to their parents. They noted it was more disturbing for them when they had to learn about their parents' incarceration from their peers or the media.

You don't expect your parent to do something to get them locked up and you keep asking them, what happened, what happened and they don't answer you and it gets more confusing.

My grandmother was one for keeping it real. She told me my mother got locked up for using coke again. Tell kids exactly how it is.

To tell you the truth, I'd hate to find out on my own. It was better that my grandmother was honest with me and my brothers.

Just speak from the heart. Don't sugar-coat it when explaining this to kids. Dad made a big mistake and he is paying for it now.

While candid disclosure tended to be the most frequent approach taken, some families did not feel it was helpful for children to know their parents were incarcerated. In these instances, children were told their parents were out of town to attend college or helping other family members who were ill. This tended to result in increased confusion and angst for children rather than have the insulating effect that was intended. For example, although family members were not forthcoming in terms of where the parent was, they would still bring the children for visits and children would question why parents "in college" were not able to leave. For other children, they would learn the truth about their parents when they were harshly confronted with the reality of prison when they went through security.

I told her that her father was in college. Then we'd go visit and she'd ask, "Why can't he leave the college, why do they make us do that stuff to get in?" and then I had to tell her that her father was not in college, he was in prison.

I don't think my daughter still knows what happened. She hears kids talk about it but she isn't sure.

They told me my father was in college. But when you see your parent you say, "Hey, this doesn't look like a college." And then you know this is a prison. My father is in prison!

In certain instances, the pain of disclosing family circumstances was so overwhelming that some caregivers totally assumed the role as well as title of parent and did not disclose their true familial relationship with the child. In more than one case, children learned about their biological parent when they were required to take a school exam. Each exam booklet listed the name of the child's biological mother and legal guardian. The children recognized the name of the legal guardian as the individual they knew as their parent.

I didn't tell my nephew I was his aunt. One day his doctor was talking to me and my nephew overheard what we were discussing. My nephew said he knew what we were talking about and that he already knew he had two moms. He learned about it when he was taking a test in school. The test booklet has mother's name and legal guardian's name. That's where he saw I was his legal guardian, not his mother. But he never told me about it.

You don't tell them unless they ask. My grandson found out when he took a test in school.

Many family members explained they did not reveal the parents' circumstances due to their belief that children would be traumatized or unable to deal with the stigma associated with having a parent in prison. While their actions were motivated by good intentions, the lack of candor tended to result in more confusion for children where they assumed that being in prison was so shameful that their caregivers were unwilling, unable or too humiliated to reveal it to the children.

Experiences During Parents' Arrest

A particularly traumatizing experience can be the point when police arrive on a scene and arrest a parent. The frightening reality of being separated from one's parent can be compounded if force or violence is part of the arrest.

In most instances, the children and youth represented in the focus groups were not present at the time of their parents' arrest. However, in those cases where the youth were present, police actions varied in how they conducted the arrest. In some cases, the arresting officers took into consideration that children were present and removed the parent from the home before placing handcuffs on the parent. Other officers tended to exacerbate the trauma, treating the parent harshly, using profanity and in one instance approaching the child with the purpose of telling him that his mother was not a good person. The differences observed in police behavior could not be attributed to the level of the crime committed or a particular area of the state since the variations occurred in instances where the parent was charged with murder as well as lesser crimes and mixed practices were noted among arresting officers within the same police department.

The police walked him outside; they did not let his son see him with handcuffs.

The father called the police when it happened. I was with the children. There was no confusion when the police came. The father knew what he did [he had just murdered the mother]. I stayed with the children in another room and they just cried and cried. The police took their father out of the house.



The detective took me aside and told me they wanted me to bring the children in the other room and they would walk my husband outside. They didn't use handcuffs or force him [husband] in any way. They were very sensitive to my kids. They told me everything they were planning to do and made sure the kids didn't see anything.

They took my daughter out handcuffed and one cop told the kids, “This is the last time you’ll see your mother.” When my daughter asked if she could kiss her children good-bye, the officer said, “No bitch, you’re going outside.”



I asked if I could say goodbye to my son. She didn’t let me but then she walked up to my son when I was standing there and told my son his mother was a very bad person.

It was 5:00 in the morning when the police came. They do that so they catch everyone when they’re sleeping. I told the police there were kids in the house and I wanted to go get my grandkids. The hallway to their rooms was pitch black and those police had their guns drawn. If one of the kids heard them, got up and started walking down the hall, there was going to be some dead something or other and they [the police] didn’t care. You literally couldn’t see down the hall and I kept saying to let me get my grandkids.

In one New York City community, Mott Haven, focus group participants noted the changes that were underway where the police department was making strides to improve community relationships overall and to encourage residents to call upon police when necessary. The focus group participants noted that this approach was effective in healing previous poor relationships and increased the likelihood that residents would contact police in the future. However, in another community, the relationship between police officers and residents was summed up by one youth who stated what he viewed as the inevitable—“Sooner or later we are all harassed by the cops.”

It was interesting to note that the varied approaches employed by the arresting officers had mixed effects on youth. While some were extremely upset by the abrupt actions of arresting officers, others stated the officers’ behavior made youth reconsider whether they would pursue illegal behavior.

November 14th, 2008—they came in and kicked down the door and I’m just acting asleep. I wasn’t really asleep; I was just lying in my bed. I was already exposed to it. I was at the point where I wanted to do what my mom was doing. It was like, that is easy money. I wanted to get on that train. But when it happened [mother arrested], I thought I’m not good with that.

Parent-Child Communication During Incarceration

Parent-child separation has been identified as one of the leading sources of adverse childhood experiences. While often associated with divorce, this experience can be particularly difficult when the reason for that separation is parents’ incarceration. Despite the difficulty this experience brings, it is well-documented that ongoing parent-child communication, through phone calls, letters and visits can be especially beneficial since the contact can alleviate, to a certain extent, the fears children have of the unknown or fears they have as a result of prison images portrayed in movies and television. Being able to communicate with their parent allows children to put to rest some of those fears. Additionally, ongoing communication allows children to share their daily lives with their parents, adding a degree of normalcy, and it is this ongoing communication that is particularly helpful in minimizing the pre-post prison gap when parents and children are able to be reunited.

The children and youth represented in the focus groups communicated with their parents in a variety of ways with the most common forms of communication being letters, telephone calls and face-to-face visits. A limited number of children had access to parents through teleconferences, where children went to a given location in their community at a given time (e.g., office in the community) and “visited” with their parents. Also, some parents had access to the Precious Moments program where they were able to read a children’s book on tape and send that tape to their children. While this last form of communication was one-way, it offered parents a meaningful way to bond with their young children and to have a presence in their lives.

During focus groups, participants shared observations regarding the benefits of parent-child communications and described factors that influence the amount and type of contact children had with their parents. These findings are shared below.

Benefits of parent-child communications

In most instances, caregivers recognized the overwhelming benefits of ongoing parent-child communication and supported contact as much as possible, citing improvements in children’s behavior, their ability to get along with siblings and peers, as well as children’s improvements in school performance. However, the adverse impact this experience had on children was underscored by caregiver observations that children experienced a roller coaster of emotions and behavior, first displaying substantial deterioration in behavior following their separation from their parents and then a leveling off once they began communications through telephone calls, letters or visits. At times, the communication served to give children a sense of hope that their current situation was not endless and eventually they could be reunited with their parents. Additionally, communication during the incarceration allowed parents and children to rebuild their relationship and was one way that parents attempted to regain their children’s trust. Many formerly incarcerated parents noted they were too ashamed to speak directly to their children after their arrest or incarceration so ongoing communication through letters was particularly helpful in the healing process.

The more contact they have with them the better they are. You can actually tell the difference when they have or don’t have contact with him. When they don’t go, the grades drop, their attitude changes.

The kid was so happy. He's happy to go see him but when they leave that's the hard part. It's getting better though. Each time we go it gets easier.

They used to cry every time they left the prison but now they say they'll write and call one another and they really enjoy seeing their mother.

I think it's a good idea to take the kids because they get a bond with their father and that's a good thing.

My grandson has his mother and father in prison and I'd take him to see both of them. It was tough on him. But he is doing so much better. His mother is out now and I still take him to see his father. He would always act out but he is doing much better by just the communication alone, knowing his father is going to get out and that they will be together again. He was kicked out of every school in the district. Now he is in school and not getting into trouble and has great grades.

I wrote a letter to my son and told him I was doing drugs and made a lot of mistakes so I would have to go to prison. It was hard for us to talk to one another face-to-face because he didn't know what to say and I was embarrassed so we wrote lots of letters.

When they go to see their father, I need him to tell the truth. I make sure their father tells them the truth. I don't want their father glamorizing things so they grow up and end up there.

Some youth were not able to see their parents for extended periods of time since the distance and cost of travel prohibited frequent face-to-face encounters. However, one young man recognized that ongoing communication with his father played a valuable role in minimizing the strain and awkwardness incarceration placed on their relationship. Also, it was noted that the ongoing communication between parents and children during incarceration supported efforts for family reunification once parents were released.

It's important to keep in touch on a regular basis so we have something to talk about during our visits. Otherwise, it feels uncomfortable.

While the traditional hourly visits afford children and youth with an opportunity to maintain a connection with their parents and foster an ongoing relationship that supports family reunification, young adults and caregivers discerned differences in the quality of a weekend visit that may be for a few hours compared to a more extended stay. Many young adults interviewed explained that the controlled circumstances of their visits resulted in a less than satisfactory interaction and the limited number of hours they had with their parents did not allow them to have the kind of interactions they might have in less controlled environments. Their comments highlighted the longtime debate of whether it is the quantity or quality of time parents spend with children that is most beneficial.

I think a trailer visit gives you time to relax and it's a more natural and safer way of being with him [incarcerated parent].

I did the summer camp and stayed a week. It was great. The host family did all kinds of stuff with us and that's when I saw my first Broadway play. It was good because you could spend time with your mother.

A somewhat unique position on the benefit of visits was shared by a mother who only took one of her three children to visit the father. The decision was based on the mother's belief that it was appropriate for her daughter to see the inside of a prison since the mother believed her daughter's behavior placed the daughter at risk of becoming a juvenile delinquent. The mother felt the other children, who were not at risk, should not be exposed to the harsh reality that comes with prison visitations.

Factors influencing type and amount of parent-child communication

Each focus group participant had personal circumstances that distinguished him/her from other participants; yet, a small set of factors tended to influence the amount and type of contact children had with parents. The predominant factors that influenced parent-child contact were: the age of the children, preferences of the children, and the quality of the relationship between the caregiver and incarcerated parent.

Age of child/youth

A recurring concern among families with young children was that infants and toddlers had their diapers searched prior to admission to the visiting area. As a result of this concern, some caregivers decided to avoid face-to-face visits. Individuals' perceptions of search practices were often influenced by their own experiences where one young mother

associated this practice with her childhood experience of being molested; others with family members who were formerly involved in drug trafficking recognized it as a means to prevent contraband from entering the prison. Many noted the environment was not always child friendly so they avoided taking young children.

My [2 year old] son knows his father is not around and he asks all the time where he is. I don't like to bring him because they check the kids [diaper] so I don't take him. I'm not letting him go through that.

You have no idea what some people will do, even to little kids, to get those drugs inside.

It's hard to take young kids to visit because you can't bring in any good food and the only thing in the vending machine is candy so the kids are spinning around and who knows what's on TV that they can see.

Among older youth, interest in contact waned as they assumed responsibility for communicating with their parents and made their own decisions of whether to visit and write. At times, the change in contact was sparked by anger they felt for their parents. In one instance, the son of an incarcerated parent came to the realization of all he lost due to his father's poor judgment while another youth felt the quality of the relationship he had with his parent had become artificial due to the controlled environment of their visits. In the end, both



youth decided they no longer wanted to continue visits with their parents. While one continued to write, the other totally terminated his relationship.

*At first it was interesting but then it got sickening, like going to church. I didn't want to go. I got to the point I told my mother he was a [****] for being locked up. It was embarrassing. Everyone would ask where's your father and I had to say he's in prison. I couldn't take it so I stopped going. I don't have any contact with him now and I feel much better.*

I didn't want to be there. No offense to my mother but I wanted to say hi and get out of there. I'll write but I'm not going to that place.

Preferences of children and youth for communicating with parents

For some young adults the visits became increasingly difficult as they became more fully aware of their parents' circumstances and began to recognize the subtle ways their incarcerated parents tried to deal with the situation. Young adults appreciated their parents' coping strategies and efforts to make the young adult comfortable about the difficult conditions in which they were seeing one another but also recognized that the incarcerated parent was dealing with considerable challenges, making their visit bittersweet.



I like to phone my father because it feels more like he is at home. The visit is more real because you see him sitting there and it hits you hard where he is.

As you get older, you realize what's happening and you decide to either stick with your parent or not.

When you are young, it's just a trip. But as you get older, you realize what the deal is with your parent and it's really depressing.

It's hard every day to think about the circumstances and more so to go and see him like that. I'm sure he's having a hard time but won't admit it until he gets out.

The visit is like a tease. I'd go visit my father and then had it all taken away from me when I had to leave. It's a traumatic feeling.

I always felt better talking to my dad over the phone or reading a letter from him than when I visited. It was always tough leaving him and seeing him walk back into the prison.

I want to see my father but I don't want to see him there.

Caregivers noted they often made decisions about the amount and type of contact children had based on children's reactions to the experience. Some of the younger children, especially those who were unfamiliar with the experience, struggled with face-to-face visits and initially were intimidated by their surroundings. In those instances when face-to-face contacts were not helpful for children, caregivers maintained parent-child communication through other means.

In some instances, caregivers never attempted to bring children to visit their parents and when asked what prompted this type of decision, caregivers often cited the best interest of the child. Many caregivers who never took children raised concerns that the visit potentially could traumatize children or that the visiting area was not child-friendly and inadequate for youngsters. These beliefs were confirmed by some youth who recounted what it was like walking into some visiting areas. Of course, there were some situations where visiting was inappropriate and too traumatizing to the child (e.g., parent charged with murder of another parent).

My mother never took my nephew to visit either of his parents because it was too stressful for him.

My granddaughter wants to go visit but I don't want her to go. That really is no place for children. They can call and write to him.

It's scary to go see my father sometimes because we don't know what will happen and if someone will yell at me or my grandmother.

The notion that visits could be traumatizing was underscored by a teenager's commitment to protect his younger brother and sisters. The teenager assumed responsibility for visiting his father and went regularly; however, he was unwilling to expose his younger

siblings to the experience. When asked if this was his way of setting aside special time for him to spend with his father, the youth strongly objected to that as a motive and repeated that this was not a good place to bring children.

I'm the only one who visits my father. My little brother and sisters don't go visit my father. I tell them they can't come with me when they ask if they can go up there. They are little kids and it's not a good place for them to be. I don't want them going to any prison.



In one instance a mother described a situation where her daughter's father wrote to his children about the suicidal thoughts he had and following receipt of the letters, the daughter began expressing suicidal ideation when she was scolded or encountered difficult situations.

We don't let them read all that is in their father's letters because sometimes he talks about suicide. Then he puts the guilt trip on them. Originally, he expected the judge to have me bring the kids to the prison every week. The judge recognized we live five hours away so he told my husband it's not going to happen. And I just can't see exposing my daughters to him when he's not even taking into consideration how his actions affect them.



Videoconferencing is a relatively new form of communication available at a handful of prisons and provided to parents for good behavior. Those who used this type of communication appreciated the ability to see one another; however, it was also noted that the visit was somewhat artificial since a correctional officer was in the same room as the incarcerated parents when they spoke with their children. One daughter recounted how she was apprehensive to fully share with her mother how she was feeling and felt as though someone was intruding on her time with her mother.

Of course, communication during parents' incarceration is not totally in the control of the caregivers or children. Some focus group participants described scenarios where the incarcerated parent refused to have visitors. From the incarcerated parents' perspective, it was too difficult to visit with family members then have to go back to a cell. This placed a tremendous strain on caregivers who had to explain this to the children. Additionally, children described feeling rejected and unable to address concerns of whether their parents were safe or whether their parents still cared about them. In one instance, a father who refused to have family visits was required to face his son when his son unexpectedly showed up at the prison—not as a visitor but as an inmate.

My husband wouldn't let the children visit. I told him they wanted to see him but he didn't care about them. He said it was too hard for him. Then one day he was at prayer group and he saw my son. He went up to him and grabbed him and asked what he was doing there. Maybe if he was willing to see the kids my son wouldn't have ended up there. And, of course, no matter what, it was my fault. Whatever happened was always my fault.

In one instance a mother was concerned that her daughter should stay at home and participate in activities with her friend rather than make the long visit to see her. However, this young girl was determined to visit with her mother and called the prison to get the visiting schedule. Then, on her own, she took public transportation to the prison and arrived in time to visit with her mother, underscoring the need for some children to be with their parents.

Parents' relationship with caregivers

The relationship incarcerated parents had with their children's caregiver was an extremely influential factor in whether children had contact with their incarcerated parents. In many instances, children had someone in their lives, either caregivers or relatives of the incarcerated parents, who would make the effort to bring children to see their parents. However, there were situations where the caregiver made no effort to help maintain a parent-child bond. This occurred in instances where the caregiver felt justified in punishing the incarcerated parent and at times the caregiver, often the other parent in the community, used visiting as a means to control the behavior of the incarcerated parent.

My mother would never let my daughter come see me but I was okay with that because I put myself there. My daughter would write and send me pictures but my mother said I put myself there and that didn't mean my daughter had to go there.

My husband would bring my son for visits but he would use it to control me. If I didn't do or say what he wanted my son wouldn't come see me.

In many ways, the arrangement between the caregiver and incarcerated parent is similar to that of divorced parents who need to determine an effective way to co-parent. A formerly incarcerated mother underscored the impact a positive parent-caregiver relationship can have on children when she explained how she continues to take her son to visit his foster mother whenever he expresses a need to see her since it was the foster mother who regularly took the son on visits when his mother was incarcerated. The mutual respect shown for each adult only benefited the child. Conversely, a number of mothers noted the need to distance themselves from the father of their children due to

the hardship the incarcerated parents had caused that individual and the entire family.

Barriers to parent-child communication

Caregivers who made visits to the prison frequently identified the substantial expenses associated with visiting as a deterrent to how often they visited and were greatly appreciative of the transportation provided through the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS).

That's a lot of money to take kids to visit.

She [the granddaughter] wanted to go every week but we could only afford to visit every month.

Situations that were particularly frustrating for focus group participants were when they attempted to visit with incarcerated parents but were unable to enter the visiting area due to the clothing they wore (e.g., T-shirts with metal decorations, underwire bra) or arrived at the prison only to find the incarcerated parents had been transferred. As a security precaution, current prison practice is to inform family members of an inmate's transfer to another prison only after the transfer is completed. However, caregivers described times when they were approved to visit parents then arrived at the prison after a long trip and were informed the parents were transferred to another prison during the week. The considerable disappointment was compounded by the fact that the caregivers spent funds from an often already limited budget without ever having the children see their parents.

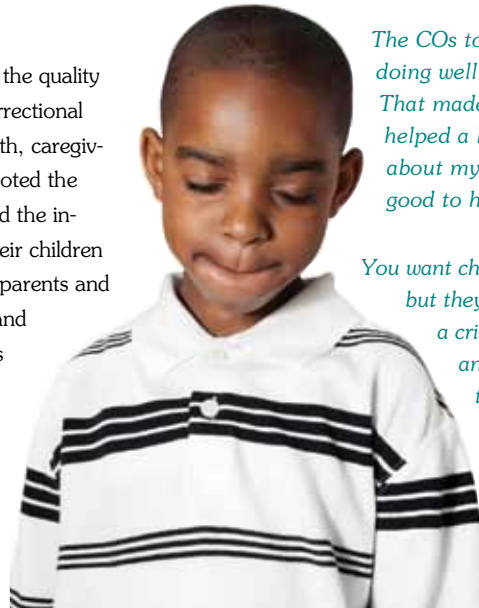
Half the time I was wearing something that wouldn't allow me to get in (e.g., tee shirt with decorative metal studs, underwire bra) so I'd take that trip for nothing.

I was 11 years old and would have to take my bra off. My mother started bringing extra clothes so I could change and get through the detectors.

We get a number and then we may or may not be called and let in.

I saved up all my quarters because I thought I'd need them for the machines. I got up there and didn't see anyone. My husband had been transferred and I never knew about it. There I was with this small child and rolls of quarters. I was able to go to a Friendly's and get him something to eat. It's a good thing they take quarters so I could feed him but what about all that money I spent getting there? I didn't have that kind of money to just take a trip. That could have gone to diapers or something the baby needed and he didn't even see his father.

Focus group participants explained that the quality of a visit often was influenced by the correctional officers (COs) on duty. Repeatedly, youth, caregivers, and formerly incarcerated parents noted the way that COs interacted with visitors and the incarcerated parents in the presence of their children influenced how children perceived their parents and the experience of visiting. Some youth and young adults described their experiences as “frightening” saying it reduced their willingness to return, which obviously impeded communication and their ability to maintain a relationship with their parents. Furthermore, the experience was particularly unsettling, depending on the developmental age of the visi-



tor. For instance, one young teen described how she did not want to return to visit her father and felt traumatized when asked to lift her shirt. While she understood why this was being done, she questioned how it was conducted and felt particularly vulnerable, given the changes she was experiencing in her own physical development. While they may have been unintended, the actions of the COs were anxiety-provoking for children who did not understand the interaction between COs and family members. An even more substantial consequence was that the experience had the long-term detrimental impact on children's sense of identity and self-esteem. Many youth stated that they felt they were viewed as inferior or as a criminal due to their association with their incarcerated parents.

The whole experience of visiting depends on the CO. They can make a fuss over the kids and make the kids feel good about being there or they can be nasty and make the whole thing miserable for everyone. You can't predict what it will be. It all depends on the CO.

The COs told me my father was doing well and is a good guy. That made me feel good and helped a little. I always worry about my father but that was good to hear.

You want children to feel attached but they treat you like you are a criminal when you go and I don't want them treating my child like that. We are human beings and there is no need to treat us the way they do.

I would take my foster child to visit her mother every two weeks. And she knows when we go because we have a calendar in my house. She is two years old and she would get all excited and count the days till our visit. She wanted to know what she would wear and was so happy about going. When we arrived at the prison, I have no words to explain how they treated me even when they saw me with this little girl. The two year old started biting her nails and getting very anxious. When she saw how the CO treated me, her whole expression changed. She got very quiet. When we got home, she ran to a saint I have and said a prayer. The next week we went to church and she asked if we were going to see God. I told her she would feel God but wouldn't see Him. When the priest walked into the church, she thought he was God and yelled, "It's God! God, bring mommy home!"

One CO had to stop the other because of how she was harassing my elderly mother. Now my mother won't go. She is terrified.

I took my grandson and he kept saying, "Grandma why are they doing that to you?" I couldn't even explain it to him because I didn't even know myself.

I couldn't stand going. I saw how they treated my mother and my whole family. They just made you feel like you were some criminal.

When the boss is there, they do things correct. You can tell when the sergeant is on the floor. The CO will do everything correct.

Impact of Parent Incarceration on Children and Youth

The incarceration of a parent brought with it numerous significant changes for children, which were both concrete and psychological. This event was moderated by various factors including the parent-child relationship prior to incarceration, the child's age, length of parent imprisonment and the stability of the primary caregiver; yet, it was clear that this life altering experience required considerable adjustments. Adjustments included shifts in where children lived, with whom they lived, as well as changes in their quality or standard of living. At times, parents' incarceration also influenced family dynamics, requiring children to express loyalty to one parent at the expense of another and possibly one of the most fundamental ways children were impacted by this adverse experience was that it reshaped how they perceived themselves and how they were perceived by others, often resulting in adaptations in their sense of self and the way they approached future experiences.

Changes in families, roles and quality of life

New families

An immediate adjustment children often faced was a change in family structure, shifting from a two-parent to a one-parent household or moving from a mother-headed household to one headed by a family caregiver. Some mothers did not consider this change to be difficult for children and viewed it merely as a matter of substitutions where children who had lived with two parents would now have two adults – a mother and a grandmother. However, most parents recognized the impact of this change and stated that the shift in household structure had led to additional changes where children were uprooted from their

homes, friends, schools and communities. Caregivers repeatedly described instances where children longed to “be back in their old home and old school.”



Many mothers in the focus groups who became the primary caregivers acknowledged that the change in family structure took a substantial personal toll on them when they became totally responsible for family finances. The burden was upon them to determine how to survive and find ways to raise their children. These mothers often expressed a need to make a new life for themselves following the considerable turmoil they experienced and explained that it was important for them to establish new relationships so that their extended family members would not have the expectation that they would reunite with the fathers once the fathers were released. One mother recounted her deliberate effort to have children with another partner to make it clear to family members she no longer wanted to continue with her current situation. A mother's practice of distancing herself from the children's father was not lost on the children who expressed sadness and a mixed sense of loyalty to both par-

ents. Children who found themselves in blended families articulated their dissatisfaction. From their perspective, they had to deal with the absence of a parent, the addition of new siblings and an adult who was trying to assume the role of their parent.

I had to have another baby before our families understood I no longer wanted to be with my children's father. It was over for me and I had to move on. I was through with it. My children can see their father but I need to make a life for myself. I can't always be waiting for him and having to deal with his actions. I'm through cleaning up his messes.

Some children whose mothers were formerly incarcerated dealt with changes that resulted in family structures when families were not blended. This was the case in instances where mothers would begin new relationships and have additional children upon their release, yet the children they had prior to their incarceration were not united with their mothers. Instead, the formerly incarcerated mothers maintained two separate families, causing considerable resentment among children from their first family. Youth noted a keen sense of abandonment and betrayal, first at the point of incarceration and then when their mothers began a new life with new children but without them.

My son is still with my parents even now that I'm out. They are able to provide better for him and he wouldn't have as much if he was with me. I see him about every other week. But he is angry about it because I have my youngest children with me. He feels I love them more. When I first came home he couldn't stand the babies and tried to sell them on e-bay.

Another example of family fragmentation occurred when half-siblings had an incarcerated parent in common but a different parent in the community. The community-based parent or family member would assume responsibility for their blood relation, resulting in siblings going to different homes and different communities. The change was difficult for children to understand and made it particularly challenging for the caregivers who were perceived as being uncaring about the other siblings.

My nephew is one of six children and every child has a different father, except for a set of twins. When the mother went to prison, each child was sent to live with his/her family member. So children were separated from their siblings and that is a big part of my nephew's lashing out. He wants to be with his brothers and sisters. He asked his grandmother why she wouldn't take his brothers and sisters and would say his grandmother didn't love his brothers and sisters. He doesn't understand their family would not let them live with us. The other children's families wanted them.

She asks why she can't see her [half] brother. He's living with his grandparents and I can't tell her why her grandfather won't let her see her brother. I know she shouldn't be deprived of seeing her other family but when the kids are split up you can't do nothing about it. I do the best I can.

The incarceration of a parent was particularly complex for children of immigrants. The caregivers of these children, typically their aunts and uncles, explained that the children in their care were unlike other children of incarcerated parents because the children of incarcerated immigrant parents were unable to visit the parent in prison. This was due to the fact that incarcerated immigrant parents were quickly deported, leaving other family members as

caregivers of the children. The children often remained in the US since the family could not afford the cost of transporting the children back to their parents' country of origin. Furthermore, caregivers noted that even if they had resources to reunite the children with their parents, the move would be particularly traumatizing since the children were assimilated and part of their identity was grounded in their US citizenship.

It would be very hard for my nieces and nephews to be with their mother. They think of my wife as their mother and call her mommy. They think of my sister as their second mother. Even if I could afford to send them back to their mother, they wouldn't know what to do there [Mexico]. They were born here, raised here, go to school. It would be so difficult for them there. They would be lost.

They put the papers in front of them and they didn't know what they were signing. They were gone before they could say goodbye to their kids.

Youth and parents described instances where the adverse event of incarceration tested family dynamics in that extended family members used the circumstances to sabotage bonds children had with their parents by berating the incarcerated parent, leaving the youth in an awkward position of deciding where to place their loyalty in a time when they needed support and reassurance from as many sources as possible. Additionally, there were times the incarcerated parents' extended families looked for opportunities to portray the community-based parent as an unfit parent and threatened to have the child removed.

No one would talk to us. My whole family split. Everybody hated my mom so I didn't have support from anyone.

My family would support me 100 percent but they don't live here and I need to ask for help from his family. I asked my child's grandparent if I could have \$20. She said if I couldn't take care of my child, she'd take her from me. For \$20? You mean if I am short \$20 you are going to take my child? I have no connections and it's hard when you have no support. It has to do with support, at least emotionally.

On the other hand, most caregivers described scenarios where their extended family provided supports and assumed additional responsibilities. Frequently, aunts and uncles provided direct care to the children or would support the primary caregivers who tended to be the grandparents. This was best described by a young boy who recounted an instance when he inadvertently referred to his uncle as "Uncle Daddy." Caregivers were quick to recognize the invaluable support they received from family members and cited their support as the primary way they were able to deal with their situation and move forward on a daily basis.

Possibly the ultimate change in family structure was when children were placed in foster care. Youth and family members described how children were moved multiple times during their placement. Often, children and youth explained they would isolate themselves so they did not have to talk or deal with their new surroundings and believed their experience could have been cushioned if they were placed with siblings. One boy who was placed in familiar surroundings (i.e., placed with neighbor who was the parent of his playmates) still was unable to feel comfortable and sensed the differential treatment he received. He quietly reflected how he was "never treated like her



other kids." Family members also cited instances where children were placed in homes where the foster parent had been approved by the placement agency; however the children were confronted with serious safety issues due to other family members in the home who were not required to be cleared for approval. The issue of safety and oversight was also raised by formerly incarcerated parents who had been placed in foster care while their own parents were incarcerated. These individuals underscored the importance of being provided with ongoing adult guidance, adequate supervision and opportunities to engage in activities that reduced the likelihood they could become involved in risk behaviors.

My daughter was in therapeutic foster care and was able to run the streets. She didn't have an ounce of structure and now she doesn't want to come home because there are rules she has to follow.

When I was homeless, one of the worst feelings was to run into those kids who were in foster care and ran away. They were 15 years old and running from a horror somebody had sent them to. Seeing that was enough to shake me out of my addiction. There needs to be someone to follow those kids.

My son constantly ran away and would try to come home to me. It didn't matter where he was, he would find his way back home.

My son would say, "Don't tell me I can't be with my mother just because she's into drugs. You had me in foster homes where the mother was an alcoholic and in facilities where the staff was abusive."

New roles

Throughout the course of interviews, youth frequently described times when they assumed new responsibilities, often as caretaker of their younger siblings, requiring the older youth to abandon their own childhood prematurely and, at times bury their own feelings and fears about their circumstance. The additional responsibility was undertaken at the request of a parent or because the youth intrinsically recognized the need to do so. While many older siblings recognized the importance of their new role and accepted it with a great deal of seriousness, some felt a certain degree of resentment. One mother described how her 19 year old daughter who was caring for her siblings realized she did not have the resources to help them and eventually sought help from the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). At first, the mother was very upset and felt betrayed until she was able to recognize that her daughter was too young for the responsibility the mother had given her.

I wanted to take care of my brothers and sisters because my mother was on drugs and couldn't stay out of prison.

I have to be strong because I don't want my younger brother and sister seeing me down because that's the way they'll feel so I have to be strong.

When I went to prison my daughter was angry with me because she had to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. She didn't want all that responsibility but she did it.

I went in in October and in November she had to make her first Thanksgiving meal. She didn't know what to do and I sent her directions for everything. She sent me pictures and she did a really good job. I was really proud of her.



Quality of life

Young adults were especially candid about changes in their quality of life and how their standard of living declined as a result of their parents' incarceration. Most notably, youth described the way in which their parents' incarceration impacted family finances, the quantity and quality of goods they could afford, but ultimately the way in which their families were positioned in society. Youth explained they tried to make the best of the situation, forming new friendships and adapting to their current status; however, a degree of resentment was expressed toward the parent who had changed their lives in such a meaningful way, requiring their other parent to take on greater responsibility, stress and feelings of guilt since they could not provide their children with the quality of life they had in the past.

It's awful having your parent in prison. Before my dad left we had money and Christmas gifts then we had nothing. We had to move into substandard housing, never had enough – it was lousy. You always felt you were second class.

A sense of loss, abandonment, insecurity, relief

A very clear pattern that resulted from all focus group sessions, regardless of whether they were conducted with children, youth, caregivers or formerly incarcerated parents was that this experience leaves children with a keen sense of loss. This loss was manifested in many ways where some children displayed a quiet, lingering disappointment that seemed to continuously be with them while others revealed it through actions of intense anger and hostility.



When children and youth described what they missed about not having their parents with them, they typically expressed disappointment that their parents were not able to emotionally support and care for them. While many had caregivers who assumed this role, youth were very clear that it was not the same as having parents to serve in this capacity. They also recognized that this made them unique from other children who had parents

available so youth with incarcerated parents tended to distance themselves from these peers.

You're supposed to be here for me and you're locked up.

There is no one around to teach you.

I look around and see other kids with their fathers and it makes me sad.

I don't talk to my friends about it because they have their fathers and don't know what it's like for someone like me.

The deep sense of loss experienced by children and youth, at times, resulted in youth idealizing parents. For instance, some children created scenarios of what the release of their parents would be like, setting expectations unreasonably high and many mothers expressed concern about their children's eventual disappointment. The mothers did not want to dismiss their children's hopes but realized the fathers were erratic in the attention they paid to their children and the mothers wanted to try to avoid further instances where the children would be disappointed. As an example, a young teen expressed fear that she would more likely be vulnerable to negative outcomes, such as teen pregnancy, without a father to watch over her. However, other children merely longed to know more about their incarcerated parent – their likes, dislikes and whether their parent shared common interests. One young boy would continuously ask his grandmother whether his father had similar hobbies when he was the same age as the boy and the stepmother of this boy described family holidays where he would go around to each family member asking them to share stories of his father so he could understand who he was and what they had in common. The sense of loss children experienced was inextricably associated with how children perceived themselves.

Children who experienced the multiple incarceration of parents or who had several incarcerated family members were conditioned to the reality that key adults in their lives may not be reliable supports for them, underscoring the lack of control they had in their lives. Children tended to respond with anger, often lashing out at their peers or siblings. Another way children dealt with this was to become more isolated and in a limited number of instances caregivers described children's expressions of suicidal ideation or attempts to commit suicide.

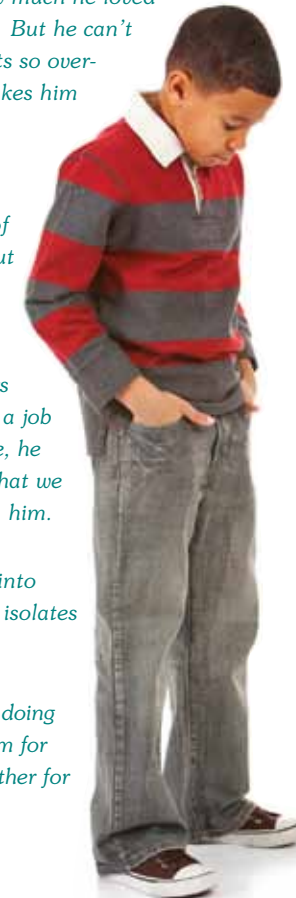
Every day he's bitter, bitter, bitter. He has awful hostility and animosity in the heart.

I hadn't seen my son in ten years. When I saw him he kept saying how much he loved me but I knew he was mad. But he can't express his feelings. He gets so overwhelmed that his anger chokes him and he becomes enraged.

When my sister went to prison, it was like the end of the world for my nephew but I was there to take care of him. Then, when I went to prison it was a double dose. Even after almost four years of being home, I'm keeping a job and getting a college degree, he still has doubts. That fear that we all let him down is still with him.

Every time he [father] goes into prison, she [granddaughter] isolates herself.

I was mad at him [father] for doing what he did, I was mad at him for leaving, I was mad at my mother for keeping it from me.



You hope your parents will learn their lesson and never do it again but they don't.

Children's multiple losses were accompanied by increased insecurities and an inability to function independently in school, with friends or on their own. This was the case for young children but it was also apparent in young adults who displayed an insecurity that extended over several years and were never quite sure of their parents' well-being. Furthermore, children's and youth's insecurities tended to be preceded and compounded by the degree that the parent-child relationship was unstable prior to the parent's incarceration.

My daughter has this thing about abandonment. She always wonders what's going to happen. When her father leaves for work, my daughter holds on to him and won't let him go.

He [grandson] won't let me go anywhere. Any time I try to go out he grabs me and cries "Don't go, don't go." I spend a lot of one-on-one time with him.

I [formerly incarcerated mother] was addicted and would relapse repeatedly. Even now, that trust is not there and I've been home for two years. And I'm not even mad at her [daughter]. She loves me but she keeps a long arm. Some moments she wants to be with me and sometimes she doesn't want to have anything to do with me. It's tough.

When I was running the streets my daughter was at my mother's and she'd see me good and bad. Now that I'm out, she's overprotective and calls me every day. She's an adult living on her own but she still wants to call and check to be sure I'm here.

For my kids, grandma was security. She was like a security blanket. She was consistent, she was going to be there, there wouldn't be any fighting, and she isn't going to go to jail because grandma doesn't do that.

It was pointed out that repeated incarcerations served as a source of relief in some instances since the chaos that existed prior to each arrest interfered with family functioning.



Every time my daughter found out her father was in prison, she felt a sense of relief and peace. When her father was home he was such a menace she'd have to worry he would be front page news or that our house would be surrounded by cops. She would worry we wouldn't have rent money because he would come home and steal it. He caused major chaos in our lives. When she found out her mother was in prison, again, she felt relief. To get a phone call your mom is in prison was a relief. It was better than a phone call that her mother was dead.

Still other children faced losses so complex that even an adult with a lifetime of experiences would find it difficult to process the events.

It was the 11 year old's father that got killed and his mother and the other kids' father had something to do with it. He hated his mother. The other two children were close to their mother and they would always cry. Their older brother would tell them to stop crying. He had all that anger within him. I didn't know how to approach it with him. He was getting suspended from school. I had to put him in counseling.

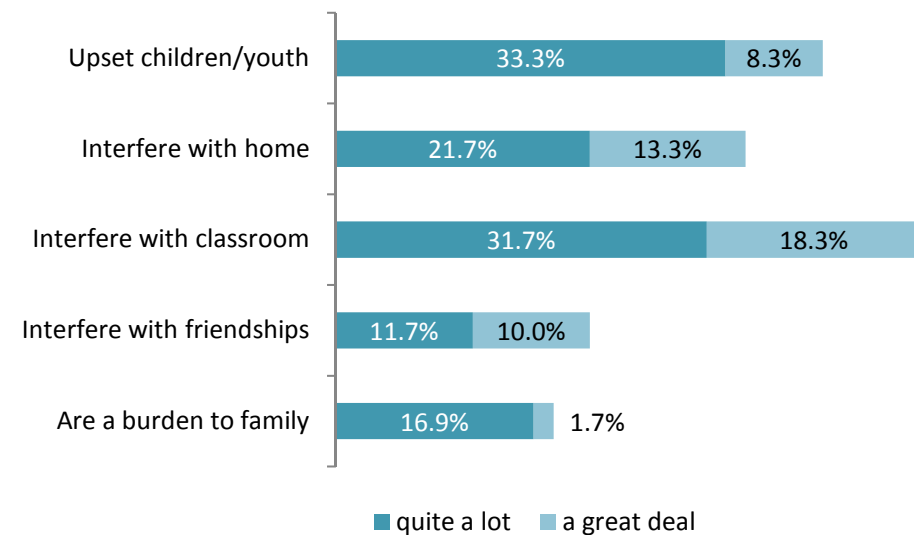
During several focus group discussions, there were times when an incongruity appeared to exist between perceptions and behaviors regarding how parents' incarceration influenced children and youth. Specifically, some mothers stated very clearly that their children were not impacted negatively by their parents' incarceration and youth echoed this response. Yet, when this was followed by questions about the youth's behavior, mothers and youth then described situations where the youth slept extended periods of time, avoided engaging in activities with peers and did not have any friends. This incongruity raised questions of possibly missed opportunities for counseling or other supports.

Strengths and difficulties

To further explore the way parents' incarceration impacts the social and emotional well-being of children and youth, caregivers were asked to reflect on which child in their care had the most difficulty and to complete a brief standardized instrument that captured information regarding child well-being. This approach was used to more carefully define the extent this adverse experience impacted children and youth represented in the focus groups. It is understood that these results reflect only those individuals and do not generalize back to all children with incarcerated parents; however, it begins to quantify in a systematic way the type and degree of impact for children most influenced by this experience.

About three in four caregivers (73.2%) reported the children and youth in their care had at least one good friend and were generally liked by peers (62.3%). Caregivers reported children who struggled with their parent's incarceration tended to exhibit difficulty with behavior (34.9%), often losing their temper (32.4%), acting in an impulsive manner by not thinking before acting (31.0%). About two in five caregivers (42.7%) reported that children had difficulty with emotions, preferred to play alone (18.3%) had many worries (18.6%) and often found it difficult to concentrate (26.4%). These difficulties tended to influence their functioning in school, at home and with peers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Extent difficulties influence child/youth functioning



Dealing with stigma

When people find out about my father, I'm never sure how much that taints their perspective of me.

When you start getting into an intimate relationship with someone it's typical to talk about your family and then you have to go down that very uncomfortable road and it's hard to do.

People found out about it because it was on the news. No one said anything but you could feel it. They didn't have to say anything, I just could feel it. Some learned from the media but not all that was true but I didn't want to talk about it. It was horrible.

When they see the mother as having poor values like being an addict or prostitute, they try to use those labels against the children.

When you are in prison, you lose everybody. I went to trial and was found not guilty. But of the hundreds of people who knew me, only one stayed with me. You are a criminal, period, because of the stigma.

You are going to be just like your father.



The image we have of ourselves is shaped in subtle and not so subtle ways by the people, experiences and messages we encounter and youth in the focus groups frequently described the embarrassment that accompanied having incarcerated parents. This emotion was a source of considerable ambivalence and confusion for them since they loved their parents, and often wanted to remain in contact with them; yet, youth would protect this part of their lives from people they met due to the overwhelming stigma associated with it and their trepidation that others assumed youth shared a self-fulfilling prophecy with their parents. It is interesting to note that some youth initially used the fact that their parents were incarcerated as bragging rights in their neighborhoods, with the type of crime raising their “stock” among their peers. However, they acknowledged this attitude subsided when as they grew older and recognized how closely others linked their perception of the youth with that of their parents. Youth recounted times when they felt it was important to conceal this information from others, including employers and new friends. Youth noted this complicated their ability to establish intimate relationships and described the challenge of knowing when to share this information with someone.

The embarrassment of having an incarcerated parent was also felt by young children as noted by one mother who described how she was always very candid with her son and spoke matter-of-factly about his father's incarceration. Yet, one day as the two of them were driving alone in their car, the young boy acted

startled when his mother mentioned his father was in prison. The boy responded, “Shh, we don't talk about that! It's embarrassing.” Others described instances where the children in their care attempted to make sense of their situation by assuming they were at fault or had done something that led to their parents' incarceration.

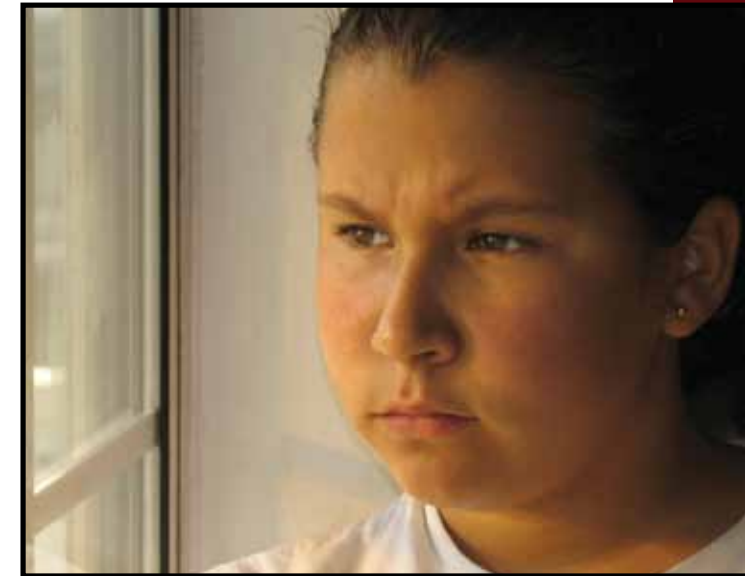
Some families described longstanding cultural preferences to not disclose family issues with others in the community. Still other families tended to bury it within the family and preferred to not discuss it with other family members, which made this particularly difficult for children and youth to reconcile in their own minds how they should perceive the situation. It is interesting to note that the stigma associated with this event was so ingrained that some children who were in school counseling programs explained they did not wish to talk about this issue in group settings and preferred to have individual sessions to discuss it.

I don't talk about it to anybody. We were taught to keep our business to ourselves. I don't tell any of my friends.

It's not hard for me [having a parent in prison]. I don't need to worry about what to say to my friends because I don't have friends. I do stuff by myself.

Another way stigma affected children and youth was to diminish their potential. Specifically, caregivers noted numerous occasions where school staff lowered their expectations of children, assuming they would be unable to achieve at high academic levels. This meant children were not expected to perform well academically but it also lowered expectations that teachers would be able to help them. Conversely, caregivers also noted a considerable difference when staff had the ability to deal with such issues and were able to provide support in a way that allowed children to excel.

Don't allow this experience to be an excuse. Teachers would have low standards for children. They would pigeon hole my kids and not require much of him.



They'd suspend him instead of give him counseling.

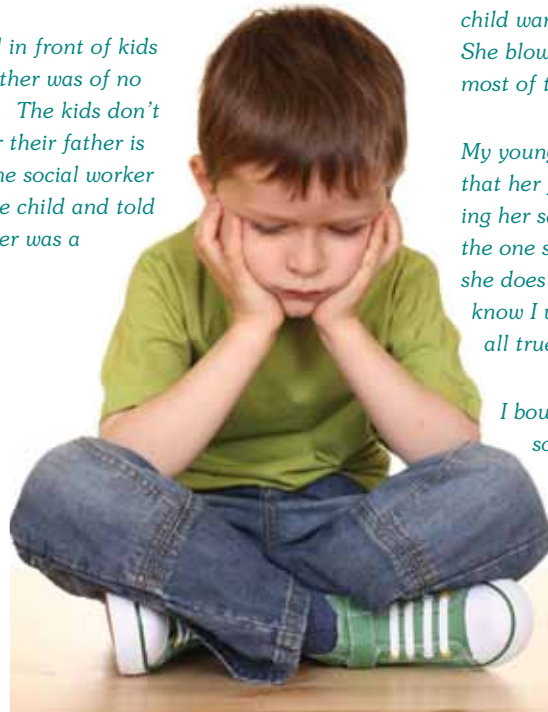
The schools stereotype my child. If she acts out in school they explain it's because her stepfather is in prison but I don't want them to label her like that. Don't make her feel like she's less than another child. And they don't know why he was incarcerated so don't make it look like my child acts like her incarcerated father.

They make the kids feel like they did something wrong.

A lack of awareness was noted among other professionals including court judges and social workers. Caregivers described instances when derogatory comments were made regarding parents when they

appeared before judges for their sentencing. At times, children were not visible so the judge may not have seen the children; yet, other times it was clear that children were present and judges berated the parents in front of the children. Caregivers noted children were frightened and traumatized by this experience. When asked if it would be more appropriate to remove the children from the courtroom, caregivers explained there was concern that this would be the last time children would be able to see their parents before being admitted to prison. Colleagues of social workers also cited instances when individuals would describe parents in a demoralizing way and in some cases the comments were directed toward the children. While it is unclear about the frequency of these events, it is evident that professionals require a degree of sensitivity when working with family members of incarcerated individuals, especially since children form their own identity and self-worth from these experiences.

A judge said in front of kids that their father was of no use to them. The kids don't have to hear their father is worthless. The social worker turned to the child and told him his father was a monster.



Coping Strategies Used by Children and Youth

Children and youth used a range of positive and negative coping mechanisms to deal with their sense of loss, feelings of helplessness and concerns that resulted from the stigma they experienced. Many children coped in a negative fashion, often directing anger toward their caregivers and siblings. In a limited number of cases, the sense of helplessness children experienced from their inability to control their life circumstances resulted in violent responses that led to psychiatric hospitalizations. Other children and youth became highly introverted and unwilling to participate in supports that may assist them.

He explodes. He won't place his hands on his siblings but he berates them.

My granddaughter has a lot of anger. The child wants to be in control of everything. She blows up and doesn't express feelings most of the time.

My youngest daughter takes it out on me that her father is in prison. It is hard hearing her say the things she says to me. I'm the one she lashes out at and they tell me she does that because she can trust me and know I won't be angry with her and that's all true but it's hard.

I bought my grandson a punching bag so he could get out all that tension.

My granddaughter is quiet. She keeps a lot inside her. She said if I took her to therapy I'd lose my money because she won't talk to anyone.

At first I didn't want to go to a therapist or say anything out loud because it's hard to say it and hear yourself talk about it.

Children who were aware of how negative coping mechanisms influenced their own parents' circumstances sought alternative ways to deal with stress. Often, youth described the benefit of engaging in activities that diverted their attention, associating with other youth who shared their experiences. In particular, two young boys were philosophical about what they had lost as a result of poor anger management and were mindful of the consequences. This prompted them to seek alternative ways to deal with loss.

Being angry about it won't help anything. We see what happened to our parents when they tried to be aggressive and we have to learn from their mistakes. I try to keep focused on other things like hobbies and school so I don't think about it [11 year old boy].

We have to learn to be patient. You lose important things when you react quickly—you lose what's important to you. We have to learn new ways [8 year old boy].

Children and youth also coped by seeking perfection in themselves, excelling in schoolwork or after school activities. Perfection in citizenship was another way of coping, adhering closely to the law. Children and youth explained this was a way to make their parents proud but they also commented that at times it was their way to offset stigma and fears that they may be like their parents.

My son is 19. His brother and father are there. He sees where his people are at so he tries to stay away from crime.

Part of my effort to counter my father's situation was to get involved in helping professions. However, it resulted in post traumatic stress. It was what I was trying to do to survive.

When I went to prison my daughter wouldn't do anything but study. She is a perfect student – gets all A's.

Another strategy used to offset the stigma associated with an incarcerated parent was to engage in activities that provided support to others and, in some instances, youth attempted to become people pleasers. A young adult explained how he became a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician in an effort to create a positive identity of himself. This also provided him with adult role models who could reassure him of his worth as an individual.

I think volunteering was my drug of choice. I would focus on high stress stuff to keep my mind off my family situation. It was my way of trying to get control. And I had to keep a façade of everything is under control but inside I was screaming.

Some children and youth explained they believed it would be helpful to their caregivers to behave as though this experience was not a problem for them, often burying their feelings and maintaining a brave demeanor. Male youth were especially likely to assume this burden in an effort to protect younger siblings and their caregivers.

Fortunately, many children and youth recognized the stress they were experiencing and looked to others to help them through their troubling times. However, they were very thoughtful in who they sought out, often ensuring that their selected confidants would not be burdened by what the youth disclosed. While some children confided in trusted adults, others sought the

support of friends who were dealing with their own stigmatizing issues and could be trusted to maintain a degree of secrecy.

Me and my friends, most of our dads are not there for us and we try to get through it the best way we can and do stuff together.

I could talk to my sister because she was going through the same thing. I couldn't talk to my mother because that would just make her sad and she was dealing with enough problems.

My aunt and grandmother help me because I can talk to them about some things I can't say to my mother. She would get worried about me.

She [daughter] found a group of friends who had their own issues. One had divorced parents, another had an alcoholic mother. They knew each other's secrets and protected one another.

My granddaughter talks to her mentor. It's good because she can tell the mentor things she can't tell me. I know they talk about boyfriends but she also tells her mentor things she thinks might make me worry.

A certain number of youth came to the realization that the way to cope with the situation was to find their own way to regain control and did this by severing ties with their incarcerated parent.

Two years ago my daughter's father called and wanted to be a part of her life. She asked him where he had been her entire childhood. She hung up the phone and changed the phone number and hasn't spoken to her father since. For her, she needed to walk out of her father's life because he always walked out of her life.

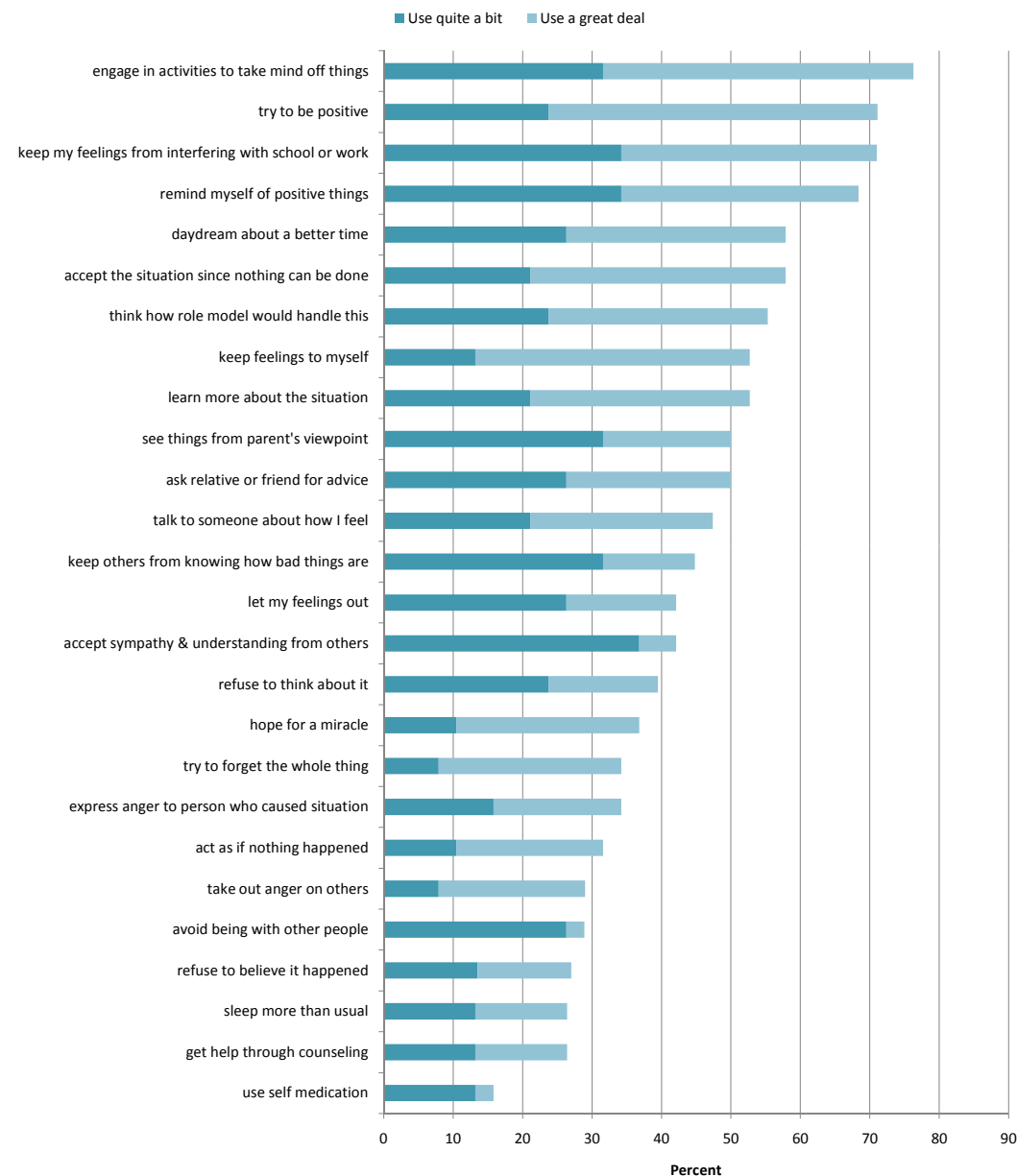
She felt like he always abandoned her. Now she's an adult and has control of her life so she walked away from him.

Following focus group discussions, youth were asked to complete a survey that gathered information on the extent they used various coping skills. Results indicated most used positive forms of coping (Figure 2). Similar to results from the survey on strengths and weaknesses, the results reflect approaches of youth in this study and do not generalize to a broader group of youth with incarcerated parents. However, this allowed us to review in a systematic and quantifiable way the types of coping skills that were commonly used among focus group participants.

The coping skills used by older youth varied somewhat from their younger peers. For example, older youth (ages 16-24) were more likely to seek supports from others, through counseling or by making inquiries from individuals who may know more about their parents' situation. However, older youth also were more likely to report they self-medicated to deal with their stressful situation. Differences by age are depicted in Appendix C.



Figure 2. Types of coping skills used by children and youth to deal with stress of parent incarceration



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Family Reunification

I always wonder what it would have been like to have a family. I don't care how much counseling you get, that feeling never leaves you.

It took years to be a mother again.

The dichotomy of he is my parent but also there was chaos before. The chaos we had in our family before all of this must have chipped away the relationship.



Rebuilding the role of parent

Many parents acknowledged that the road back to parenthood was very difficult and cited several occasions where their children, especially adolescents, challenged parents' credibility as authority figures. Parents explained this was often the case when their children had limited structure during their absence but youth were very clear to point out that it also was due to the

fact that they felt they had been let down and wanted to protect themselves from future abandonment and betrayal. From the perspective of youth, parents had to earn back their role as parent.

At times, the shame and guilt parents felt from being separated resulted in poor parenting practices upon their release where parents would overcompensate and were reluctant to set boundaries for their children. Also, similar to children of divorced parents, the children recognized this as an opportunity to play parents and caregivers against one another in an effort to get what they wanted. Parents identified family and individual counseling as well as parenting programs as helping them regain their role as parents.

Parenting following incarceration also was influenced by very practical issues, such as housing. A mother described the pain she felt because she was unable to afford housing that had enough space to accommodate her and her teenage children. Her identity as a mother was also linked with her role as provider and her inability to provide for her children was the source of considerable sorrow and guilt.

Youth struggled with how to reconcile the images they held of their parents before prison with those they had following their release. The shift was attributed to their individual experiences but also to the stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent. Parents explained how they used various opportunities to recreate their image and build respectability. As an example, one mother took on each job that became available and volunteered in an organization that supported formerly incarcerated individuals. She explained that this helped rebuild her relationship with her child since her child saw that she was sincere about becoming a law abiding individual. In essence, each opportunity was used to help her shift from her former role of inmate to that of employee, community volunteer,

and respected mother. Other parents described the value of programs that included currently incarcerated parents with recently released parents. These groups would meet to help one another address potential and real parenting issues.

While most discussions focused on how parents could and would rebuild their role as parents in the community, it was evident that some would never have the opportunity, due to life sentences. This was extremely troubling for their children, especially young children who saw peers being reconnected to their formerly incarcerated parents and it raised the issue of how visiting opportunities might be modeled so that children might have opportunities to interact with parents in a less institutionalized manner.

Addressing issues related to parents' incarceration

Many parents acknowledged that the time spent in prison helped them rectify many of the issues that brought them there and used their time for self-improvement. Mothers and fathers described their participation in various counseling and treatment programs, crediting these services for the improvements in their lives and the way they were able to transition to the community. Several individuals noted the importance of such programs for helping them assume a role in the community that was more consistent with that of a responsible individual and parent.

In some cases it was the children and youth who set down conditions for reunification. Many youth who had witnessed multiple incarcerations due to drugs were reluctant to be a part of a revolving door scenario. Therefore, they made it clear to parents that their reconnection was contingent upon parents' receipt of services (e.g., drug addiction counseling). Unfortunately, for other parents

their work toward recovery was not completed and the issues that brought them to prison remained, making it apparent to caregivers and children that family reunification was unlikely.

The alternatives to violence and ART programs were beneficial to me. I was not the same person when I went in there. It wasn't all bad. God removes you from a situation and I looked at my time there like that. I didn't need to be in the situation I was before. I'm not transporting drugs and running my son from here to there. It feels great to be a normal person. There were many ways those programs helped me.

I'm supposed to be a mother, I'm supposed to take care of my child but I'm not ready. My [5 year old son] said, "Mommy, tell me what's wrong with you that you can't take care of me." I explained I wasn't well and needed to get better. He told me, "You know I'll never live with you again. I better stay where I am." I didn't tell him but I agree with him.

Dealing with family changes

Families had to make a number of adjustments when a family member was incarcerated and, similarly, they had to adjust when that person returned. Focus group participants described this as a time warp where their lives had moved on but the incarcerated parents expected to return and step back into their families as they were when they left. This could be particularly difficult for individuals who were away for several years but it remained a problem for those who were separated for shorter periods of time as well. Part of the difficulty was that the family members in the community assumed new roles, responsibilities, often assuming responsibilities previously held by the incarcerated parents.

Additionally, part of the adjustment was simply a matter of children growing older, maturing, and having new interests. The combination of these circumstances made it difficult for incarcerated parents to blend back into the family and as one mother explained, she felt like a guest in her own home. The void that resulted from a parent's incarceration was difficult to fill, even when considerable efforts were made to maintain a bond during the incarceration. In many instances, spouses were not willing to reestablish a relationship due to the chaos and hardship they experienced prior to incarceration.

Another adjustment that needed to be addressed was that children felt abandoned a second time when their formerly incarcerated parents had new families following their incarceration and did not make attempts to blend families. While at times this decision was based on practical decisions (e.g., not disrupt children, have child stay with best financial provider), children clearly saw this as preferential treatment and resented the decisions their parents had made.

The release of a parent meant changes for caregivers too. In most instances, caregivers were able to transition from primary to secondary caregiver. However, there were instances when caregivers found this exceedingly difficult. Often, this was due to the strong bond the caregivers established with the children in their care as well as their skepticism that the returning parents were fully capable of caring for the children.

My husband expected to step back into the life he left. No way could that happen. I'd tell him when we visited but he couldn't understand till he was home.



I think my kids find it hard that I've moved on. They know I couldn't stay with their father and they say they understand but it's hard for them. I tell them that's your father and you have every right to do things with your dad. That's fine, but they still feel uncomfortable.

I had my granddaughter since day 1. When her mother gets out, she's not getting my granddaughter. That girl is all mine.

The stronger I became, it became a territorial thing. Caretakers tend to be territorial. But now I'm included in everything. There is a trust thing where they wanted to know if you are going to be consistent in your child's life.

My aunt cared for my son and she puts more stipulations on me than ACS ever would.

When she's out, it will be difficult for me because we are so close. I've had them since they are so young.

Addressing anger, fears, expectations

As noted earlier, parent incarceration takes a substantial toll on children, leaving them with feelings of anger, insecurity and often instances where they idealize their parents. As a result, a major part of family reunification required dealing with complex emotions and helping children readjust their expectations of what it would be like when they were reunited with their parents.

Parents acknowledged that their incarceration was the source of considerable anger for their children. Despite this anger, children were reluctant to confront their parents out of fear that their parents would not be able to deal with their children's emotions and this would trigger negative results. In these instances, the children chose the role of protector even when it caused them considerable anguish; however, they believed burying their feelings was necessary to help their parents remain in the community.

Children were often reluctant to bond with their parents once parents were released due to old habits and experiences where children had come to realize their parents were not reliable figures with whom they could depend. Instead, they had learned to look to other adults for that type of support and found it difficult to reunite with their parents.

Last Thanksgiving when my daughter was home it was good for a few days and then my granddaughter asked when her mother was going to leave because she gets worried her mother will have authority over her. She's afraid she'll get into the same situation like before. She loves her mother but she is frightened she'll have all that chaos again. She knows I am the one who provides stability and she doesn't want to take any chances with her mother getting too much authority in her life.

With me, she is still leery even though I've completely changed my life.

Parents expressed considerable concern regarding the incongruity between how children expected their released parents to behave and how the parents would deal with their role once back in the community. They consistently requested parenting supports that would help them determine the best way to deal with this situation.

My daughter had great plans for when her father was released. She thought they'd be spending all kinds of time together. I didn't want to discourage her but I knew what he was like. I tried to help her with her expectations but then it comes a point you just have to let whatever happens happen because she wouldn't believe me no matter what I said. In all his letters he'd tell her how much he wanted to spend time with her. Then when he got out, he couldn't be bothered.



My son's father is never going to be the man he needs to be and if he decides he doesn't like parole and goes back, then what? So, do I protect my son or should I be honest? You don't want to hurt the kid.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHILDREN, CAREGIVERS AND PARENTS

The recommendations presented here are the result of our conversations with those impacted by parents' incarceration and reflect the insight of those closest to this experience.



Counseling supports

Caregivers, youth and parents repeatedly underscored the importance of individual and family counseling during and following incarceration. These forms of support helped children, youth and caregivers adjust to the changes in their lives at the time of their parents' incarceration as well as the types of adjustments that were necessary once parents were released. Several parents explained that counseling helped them deal with the guilt and shame they experienced and helped them forgive themselves, enabling them to move forward. Some participants also noted the improvements they experienced through their participation in anger

management and parenting courses during their incarceration. Family counseling, during and following incarceration, was especially instrumental in dealing with many of the challenges associated with co-parenting that developed while children were in the care of their other biological parent or a caregiver.

The value of early diagnosis of children's mental illnesses was acknowledged by parents who described instances where the delayed diagnosis resulted in further complications and challenges for their children, the caregivers and parents. Once proper assessments were made, youth were able to receive the care and services they required, and made considerable progress.

While caregivers were soundly in agreement regarding the benefit of counseling, they also were very consistent in describing how difficult it was to access mental health services for the children in their care.

Youth were very mindful of the fact that their parents' incarceration distinguished them from many of their peers and expressed a preference for counseling sessions that allowed them to deal with this issue on a one-to-one basis.

There should be something where children can have therapy as soon as their parent is incarcerated. We go to prison and they have to deal with it. Not to mention the stuff that happens before prison where they feel hurt from that too. They need to work through the pain. I would get them a mentor or counseling because a part of them is missing.

The best thing you can do with a young child is to give him a composition book to draw and write because kids do things unconsciously. He told me what every picture was. Wow, he had a lot on his mind!

The school counselor helped my daughter. My daughter changed her major and now she is going to law school.

Substance abuse was a factor associated with the incarceration of many parents. As such, parents, caregivers and youth consistently recommended the need for preventive services that helped address this issue prior to an arrest. They also noted the benefit of substance abuse programs available to incarcerated individuals during their incarceration.

The importance of transition supports

I would pray I'd have positive people around me. I wanted to do it but I needed support. I needed someone to believe in me and support me because if you don't have that you would drown.

They process you in but they don't process you out.

They come out institutionalized and can't do anything when they come out. They need to come into therapy. It shouldn't be dependent on what your crime is where you have to take ASAT or KSAT if you were a drug dealer or an addict. Everyone is an addict to some extent whether it's drugs or money. You're addicted to something if it's nothing but the behavior or the smell of a prison—you're addicted to something. They are addicts to something. They need therapy. They need to understand why they are making the mistakes they keep making.

They need to stop doing what they are doing and somebody needs to help them. Because if you are just sitting there looking down on them all the time, they are going to keep doing the same thing they've been doing. They should open up schools in all the facilities. Don't just have schools in the maximum facilities where someone may never see the light of day again. But the ones who have two, three, four years they can get out and use that education.

They need programs to help people transition back to the community. Otherwise, you go back to what you know best.

Many of the issues that led to parents' incarceration were not fully resolved at the time of their release and it was understood that the challenges one faced could be more difficult within the community once the institutional barriers and protections were removed. The types of supports requested were similar to those available in prison (e.g., parenting, substance abuse recovery, anger management, education, job training). Participants frequently explained the supply for supports did not meet the high demand. In particular, housing that could accommodate parents and their children was in short supply, yet important for family reunification since it allowed parents to increase their self-sufficiency while helping them rebuild their role as provider, slowly and incrementally removing stigma.

Parents enumerated a number of ways they tried to compensate for the difficulty their actions caused their children. While well-intended, often the parenting practices they used were not helpful to their children and, at times, created more challenges for reestablishing a healthy, functioning family. As an example, parents would overcompensate and indulge children rather than set parameters. Families acknowledged the value of ongoing opportunities to build parenting

skills, either through parenting classes or peer support programs. Again, counseling for families and individuals was cited as being critical for successful family reunification; yet it was repeatedly stated that access was limited, given the high demand.

Opportunities to maintain family ties

Caregivers consistently acknowledged the difficulties related to maintaining ties with incarcerated parents, including commonly referenced examples, such as the cost of telephone calls and the expense and logistical challenges of face-to-face visits. They also raised concern regarding less frequently cited difficulties related to transfers. An example of this was when families, with already limited resources, paid to send packages to incarcerated parents. In instances where the parent was transferred to another location, the packages were returned to the family, requiring them to incur additional expenses if they chose to resend the package. It was suggested that packages be forwarded to the next location since all packages were opened prior to their delivery to individuals.



Caregivers and parents also explained that consistent visiting practices and procedures across prison facilities would increase the likelihood that family members were prepared for visits. Caregivers and children expressed their appreciation for settings that encouraged positive interactions between parents and their children, suggesting more equivalent areas for men's prisons. Several times participants acknowledged the usefulness of free transportation made available through DOCS and various organizations.

Sensitivity awareness for professions working with families of incarcerated parents

Caregivers, youth and professionals cited instances where staff working with children and families were unaware of how their behavior and comments emotionally impacted children. This form of awareness training was suggested for arresting officers, judges, social workers, teachers and correctional officers. Some also recognized that family counselors were not always familiar with particular nuances related to this issue and could benefit from additional training.

Mentoring, peer supports and opportunities to be with others who share this experience

Programs that served as knowledge networks lessened the sting of stigma and allowed children, youth, caregivers and parents to build critical skills were cited as substantially beneficial. It is well recognized that parents' incarceration can be traumatizing for children and the important role programs played in helping children and youth build positive coping skills became increasingly evident during the course of focus groups with youth. Programs such as mentoring, afterschool and peer support groups provided youth with opportunities to master positive coping skills and reduced their reliance on negative coping strategies. As an example, these programs allowed youth to engage in activities that diverted their focus from their problems to positive experiences. Additionally, mentors who had the common experience of having an incarcerated parent served as role models that one could successfully move beyond this challenge. Access to mentors also had the benefit of countering negative coping skills youth might use since the mentors allowed youth to express feelings or share certain rites of passage that they may not wish to share with other adults who cared for them due to fears that the discussion could upset or needlessly worry the caregivers. A young teen explained how she tried to protect her grandmother by not discussing how much she misses her mother; however, she shared these feelings with a mentor and other family members.

Children and youth were highly appreciative of opportunities that allowed them to interact with others who had similar experiences, enabling them to feel more at ease and less self-conscious about their circumstances. These opportunities looked different depending on the age of focus group participants

where older youth expressed an interest in support groups that allowed them to come together and listen to how others deal with having an incarcerated parent and young children noted enjoyment in meeting other children of incarcerated parents in after school programs and camps since these types of programs did not require them to maintain a façade they often created with other children.



It's good for me to come here [afterschool program for children with incarcerated parents] because it's good to have a place where you can come and have fun and have friends that don't judge me.

They [mentors] help children because my granddaughter will talk to the mentors before she talks to me. The mentors will listen and the children feel safe. She can be herself with her mentor and not feel different or think about having a parent in prison.

Sometimes I think having someone to speak with one-to-one would be helpful but then again that person isn't a teenager and doesn't know what you are going through so having a place to go and talk about your situation with other people just like you would help me. It's not so much that you have to tell somebody because they can do something for you. It's that you have to get it out so you don't explode.



It's impossible for this experience to not impact you. It's great to go to places and get services but I also really need to share this experience with others who are going through it. I want to hear how they got through it and learn from them.

I went to camp with kids who have the same situation. It was a whole week and I didn't have to think about it or feel different. Everyone in this program has gone through the same thing so they aren't going to get teased.

Caregivers and formerly incarcerated parents also noted the benefit of listening and learning from others. Some already involved in support groups were able

to communicate with one another during regularly scheduled meetings and through a website. Others described how these interactions fostered better parenting skills, particularly when they faced challenging situations upon their release from prison.

Outreach for incarcerated parents and caregivers

Formerly incarcerated parents were extremely grateful for the contact they had with organizations that conducted outreach in prisons. This outreach informed parents of programs that allowed them to maintain contact with their children and provided the supports they recognized as essential for their transition back to their families and communities. Given that many families do not readily disclose their circumstances, community outreach was a means to find families and link them with support services. As an example, caregivers who had been living in shelters with the children in their care described how the outreach enabled them to access permanent housing. It also was apparent that outreach was necessary in jails as well as prisons since many mothers explained they were unaware of issues related with parental termination of rights while they were in jails and only became aware of this when they were in prison and had contact with advocacy organizations.

Keeping siblings together

Young adults noted that the valuable support they received from other siblings comforted them and often made the changes they encountered bearable since their siblings were the only individuals they trusted enough to express their feelings. This was particularly valuable when youth felt that sharing feelings with their caregiver would be an additional burden for them. Sibling support also helped deal with family dynamics when family members were

angry with the incarcerated parent and expected the youth to compromise their loyalty for their incarcerated parents. Children who were separated from their siblings as a result of foster care placements described (and often displayed) considerable sadness at this loss and explained this type of situation compounded the loss they felt from their parents' incarceration.

I would only talk to my sister about it [parent incarceration] because she was the only one who really knew what it was like and how it felt. I couldn't talk to anyone else. I didn't want to talk to anyone else.

Community-based preventions and supports

During focus groups, several participants were resigned to the fact that many people, especially young men, would experience incarceration. Caregivers and youth accepted this as an inevitable outcome of living in poor communities and when asked what preventive services might help families, a focus group participant explained that was the job of families. As she explained it, "we all live in the ghetto and it's hard so you have to learn to protect your family." Her reluctance was echoed by another individual who recognized that preventive community supports were necessary at a very early stage.

I'm not sure what can be done to help families. My husband's problems started long before he went to prison. He started dealing when he was 12 years old. There's no reason a 12 year old should have responsibility for paying his mother's \$800 a month rent but that's what he had to do. If you are going to help us, it needs to start way back then.

These comments underscore the importance of a public health approach that promotes positive youth engagement. As an example, mentoring and after-school programs, similar to those provided to children of incarcerated parents, can benefit a broader group of youth and serve as a form of prevention.

Domestic violence and substance abuse issues were contributing factors for the incarceration of many parents and focus group participants consistently identified the need for programs that addressed these issues in the community prior to incarceration.

People who have drug addictions don't need prison, they need help. They get out of prison and still have that appetite.

Instead of incarceration we need to consider home programs. Don't tell me foster care is good for children. It is disruptive, they run away, and there are too many times when they are mistreated.

How many women in this country are beaten by men and feel dead inside themselves? This is self defense. We need to rethink how this is handled. You go to the police and they say they can do nothing.

You have to have some record from the police or hospital showing you were being beaten before you can get into a domestic violence shelter. Some women don't go to the police or visit a doctor and are frightened. Then when they decide to go to the shelter you have to have papers.

Although limited, those who participated in alternative to incarceration programs were very much aware of how these programs allowed them to maintain ties and reduced the burden of incarceration on families.

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APPENDICES

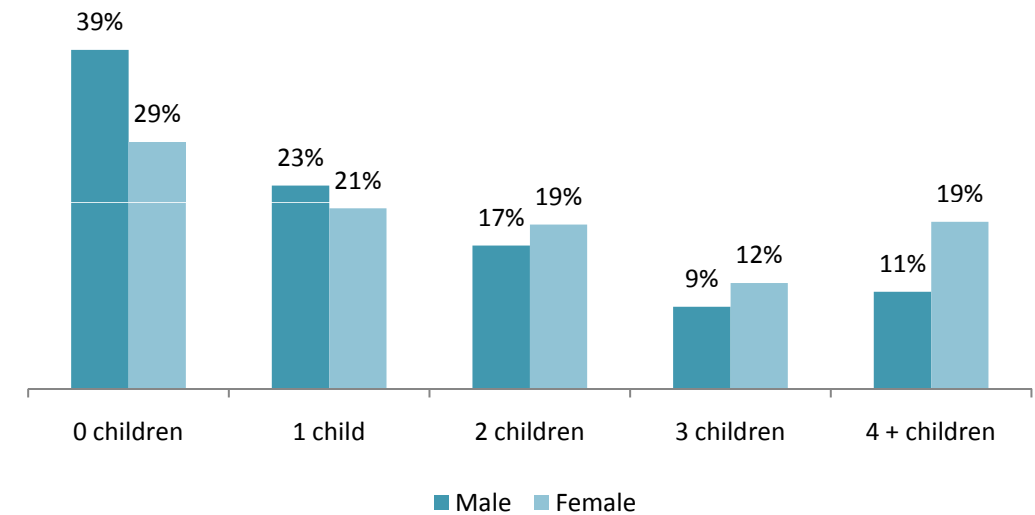
Appendix A:

The New York State Department of Correctional Services

The New York State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) is responsible for approximately 58,000 individuals held at 67 state correctional facilities. The facilities vary in level of security with 17 maximum security facilities, 37 medium security facilities and 13 minimum security facilities. Of the 67 facilities, 5 facilities are for women and 61 are for men. One facility has men and women. The facilities are located in 32 of the 62 counties throughout the state.

Figure 3 depicts the percent of individuals who self-report the number of children they have at the time of their admission to the correctional system. Fifty-nine percent report they have children, with some variation by gender. Six in ten men and seven in 10 women report having at least one child.

Figure 3. Percent of individuals under DOCS custody who self-report having children by gender



Data Source: Department of Correctional Services, January 1, 2010

Appendix B

Description of Participating Organizations

Abraham House takes its name from the forefather of Christians, Jews and Muslims. Abraham, a central figure in the book of Genesis, is a person of faith, hope, and change. Abraham House grew out of the efforts of Catholic prison chaplains and Baptist Department of Corrections officers at Rikers Island to find an alternative to New York City's prisons. The majority of families are new immigrants from the Mott Haven area of the South Bronx and surrounding neighborhoods. More than 95 percent of the children in the After School Program are Latino and are new immigrants or first generation American. Participants in the Alternative to Incarceration Program are first time, non-violent criminal offenders.

Children of Promise, NYC (CPNYC) is a Brooklyn based organization committed to embracing and empowering children of incarcerated parents to break the cycle of intergenerational involvement in the criminal system. CPNYC's mission is to provide children of prisoners with the guidance, support and the opportunities necessary to effectively develop leadership skills, form positive social relationships and enhance academic performance. Implementing the principles and best practices of youth development, this innovative after-school program infuses a mental health model. Mental health based interventions allow CPNYC to acknowledge the traumas children of prisoners experience and to address the problems and challenges at the root, allowing young people to create new behaviors, new habits and new reactions. It also allows staff to understand the sources of negative and inappropriate conduct and model appropriate behaviors and reactions.

The Correctional Association of New York is an independent, non-profit organization founded by concerned citizens in 1844 and granted unique authority by the New York State Legislature to inspect prisons and to report its findings and recommendations to the legislature, the public and the press. Through monitoring, research, public education and policy recommendations, the Correctional Association strives to make the administration of justice in New York State more fair, efficient and humane. The Correctional Association envisions a criminal justice system that holds a person accountable for a crime yet does not condemn an entire life based on a person's worst act, a system that goes beyond a process of law and accountability to encompass social and racial equality on all levels.

Prison Families of New York (PFNY) is a statewide network of families and friends of New York state prisoners, formerly incarcerated people and their families, people of conscience who wish to improve the quality of life for prison families, educators, agencies and communities of faith, and state and county agencies. PFNY helps develop resources for prison families and re-entry, runs support groups, testifies at hearings, provides talks, trainings, dinners, retreats and other special events that focus on prison families. PFNY develops the prison family collective voice and also speak for those who cannot. The founder of PFNY has long been intrigued by what can happen when prison families are provided with the support, information, and other resources needed to become full participants at the state decision-making table.

The Door Since 1972, The Door has practiced a holistic and human approach to helping each individual member dismantle the complex barriers that often stand in the way of success. The Door was created as a model to demonstrate the effectiveness of providing comprehensive, integrated services and of developing networks of linkages among existing service systems. The original team was made up of young professionals in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, law, education, social work and the arts. They set out to develop a program that would offer young people relevant services, programs and meaningful life alternatives. Young people who come to The Door often face many barriers before they arrive. The Door is proud to offer an encouraging environment, and through integrated services, form a supportive network — a springboard to help launch young people forward and a safety net to catch them if they fall.

Hour Children is a multi-faceted family service organization that provides housing, permanent and transitional, and a wide array of supportive services that transform the lives of women and their families involved in the criminal justice system. Staff work closely with each mother, tracking her progress or addressing problems with obtaining a job, managing a household, and caring for her children. On a long-range basis, staff keep track of program participants to ensure that they are still employed and housed, and have not returned to prison. The goals of Hour Children are to ensure that the children in their care are healthy, socially well-adjusted and achieving academically, and that their mothers make a successful transition to independent living.

The Osborne Association offers opportunities for individuals who have been in conflict with the law to transform their lives through innovative, effective, and replicable programs that serve the community by reducing crime and its human and economic costs. The Osborne Association offers opportunities for reform and rehabilitation through public education, advocacy, and alternatives to incarceration that respect the dignity of people and honor their capacity to change as they achieve self-sufficiency, adopt healthy lifestyles, enter the workforce, form and rebuild families, and rejoin their communities.

Schenectady County Cornell Cooperative Extension Women, Infants and Children

(WIC) Program provides children with the healthiest possible start in life. Pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants, and children up to the age of five who are at nutritional risk and have limited income may be eligible.

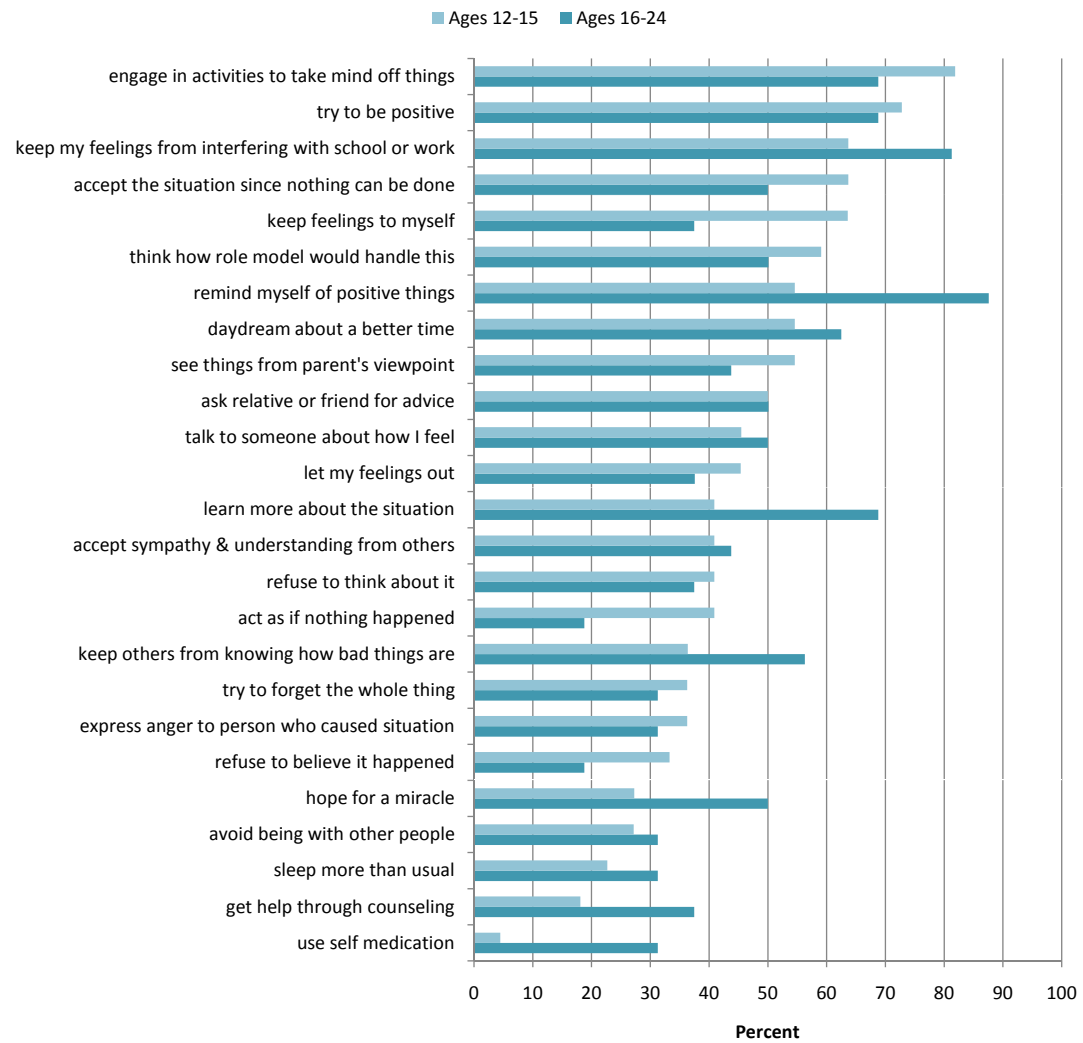
Women's Prison Association (WPA) is a service and advocacy organization committed to helping women with criminal justice histories realize new possibilities for themselves and their families. Program services make it possible for women to obtain work, housing, and health care; to rebuild their families; and to participate fully in civic life. Through the Institute on Women and Criminal Justice, WPA pursues a rigorous policy, advocacy, and research agenda to bring new perspectives to public debates on women and criminal justice.

Appendix C

Coping Skills of Children and Youth by Age

Figure 4 reflects the types of coping skills utilized by children and youth when dealing with a stressful situation, as having a parent incarcerated.

Figure 4. Type of coping skills used to deal with stress of parent incarceration by age*



*Percent reflects responses of 'use quite a bit' and 'use a great deal.'





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