



Children of Incarcerated Caregivers

## RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS ENCOUNTERING PARENTAL INCARCERATION

Prepared by the non-profit organization Children of Incarcerated Caregivers  
[cicmm.org](http://cicmm.org)





## A Growing Problem

As America's incarcerated population grows, so does the number of children who have a parent behind bars. Between 1991 and 2007, the number of incarcerated parents with a minor child increased by 79% (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Parental incarceration tends to impact the most vulnerable families in the United States. When a child loses a parent to incarceration, it impacts his or her mental, physical, and overall well-being.

Unsurprisingly, incarceration has been shown to negatively impact most offenders and their families (Arditti & Savla, 2015). But the stakes are higher when minor children are involved. Parental incarceration has been identified as an adverse childhood experience (ACE), characterized by enduring trauma and continual stressors (Arditti & Savla, 2015). ACEs put children at risk for future social, emotional, cognitive, and physical struggles (Felitti et al., 1998). More specifically, children who have experienced parental incarceration are at risk for academic failure, behavioral issues, and school dropout (Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2010).

Educators can play a pivotal role in mitigating the harmful effects of parental incarceration. A variety of resources exist that enable educators to support both children and their non-incarcerated caregivers. Having a parent behind bars is a massive burden. Through regular, positive interactions, teachers can help these students achieve both academically and socially. This guide contains tips and resources for educators who wish to support children with incarcerated caregivers.

---

### TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

- Forge a relationship with your student's non-incarcerated caregiver(s) and help connect them to resources
- Notice and talk about your student's feelings
- Anticipate days that may be difficult for your student
- Support your student when they visit incarcerated parents
- Be flexible yet maintain high expectations
- Monitor academic and behavioral progress
- Reinforce that your student can choose whether to tell others about their incarcerated parent
- Maintain self-care to avoid compassion fatigue
- Be prepared to answer common questions children have about incarceration (e.g., "Why did my mom/dad go to jail?", "When will he/she be coming home?", "Is it my fault my mom/dad is in jail?")
- Give your student choices to help them feel safe and in control
- Recognize that acting out and certain behavioral problems are driven by trauma-related anxiety, and increase support when you see these behaviors
- Warn children before changing their typical academic routine
- Refer children to a mental health professional when appropriate



## ONLINE RESOURCES

---

### TIP SHEET FOR TEACHERS (PRE-K THROUGH 12)

[https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP\\_TipSheet-Teachers\\_508.pdf](https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP_TipSheet-Teachers_508.pdf)

### HOW TO EXPLAIN JAILS AND PRISONS TO CHILDREN

[http://www.starsmp.org/PDFs/explaining\\_prison\\_final.pdf](http://www.starsmp.org/PDFs/explaining_prison_final.pdf)

### EDUCATOR'S TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS BEHIND BARS

<https://icjc.idaho.gov/pubs/Parents%20Behind%20Bars%20-%20Children%20of%20Incarcerated%20Family%20Members.pdf>

### CHILD TRAUMA TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>

### NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF THE INCARCERATED

<https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu>

### THE SENTENCING PROJECT

<http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/index.cfm>

## RECOMMENDED READING

---

### LOVING THROUGH BARS: CHILDREN WITH PARENTS IN PRISON BY CYNTHIA MARTONE

<https://www.amazon.com/Loving-Through-Bars-Children-Parents/dp/1891661485>

### PARENTAL INCARCERATION AND THE FAMILY BY JOYCE A. ARDITTI

[https://www.amazon.com/Parental-Incarceration-Family-Psychological-Imprisonment/dp/1479868159/ref=sr\\_l\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1532400809&sr=8-1&keywords=Joyce+arditti](https://www.amazon.com/Parental-Incarceration-Family-Psychological-Imprisonment/dp/1479868159/ref=sr_l_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1532400809&sr=8-1&keywords=Joyce+arditti)

## REFERENCES

---

- Arditti, J. & Savla, J. (2015). *Parental incarceration and child trauma symptoms in single caregiver homes*. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24, 551-561.
- Felitti, V.J. (1998). *Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study*. *American Journal of Prevention Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.
- Glaze, L. E., & Maruschak, L. M. (2010). *Parents in prison and their minor children*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee. (2008). *Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators*. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress
- Tse, M. L. (2011). *Parents behind bars: Children of incarcerated family members*. Idaho Criminal Justice Commission. Retrieved from <https://icjc.idaho.gov/pubs/Parents%20Behind%20Bars%20-%20Children%20of%20Incarcerated%20Family%20Members.pdf>
- Wakefield, S. & Wildeman, C. (2018). *How parental incarceration harms children and what to do about it*. (NCFR Policy Brief). Retrieved from [https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/How%20Parental%20Incarceration%20Harms%20Children%20NCFR%20Policy\\_Full%20Brief\\_Jan.%202018\\_0.pdf](https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/How%20Parental%20Incarceration%20Harms%20Children%20NCFR%20Policy_Full%20Brief_Jan.%202018_0.pdf)