

Not Their Crime but Still Their Sentence: Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Central East (HHS Region 3)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

MHTTC Network

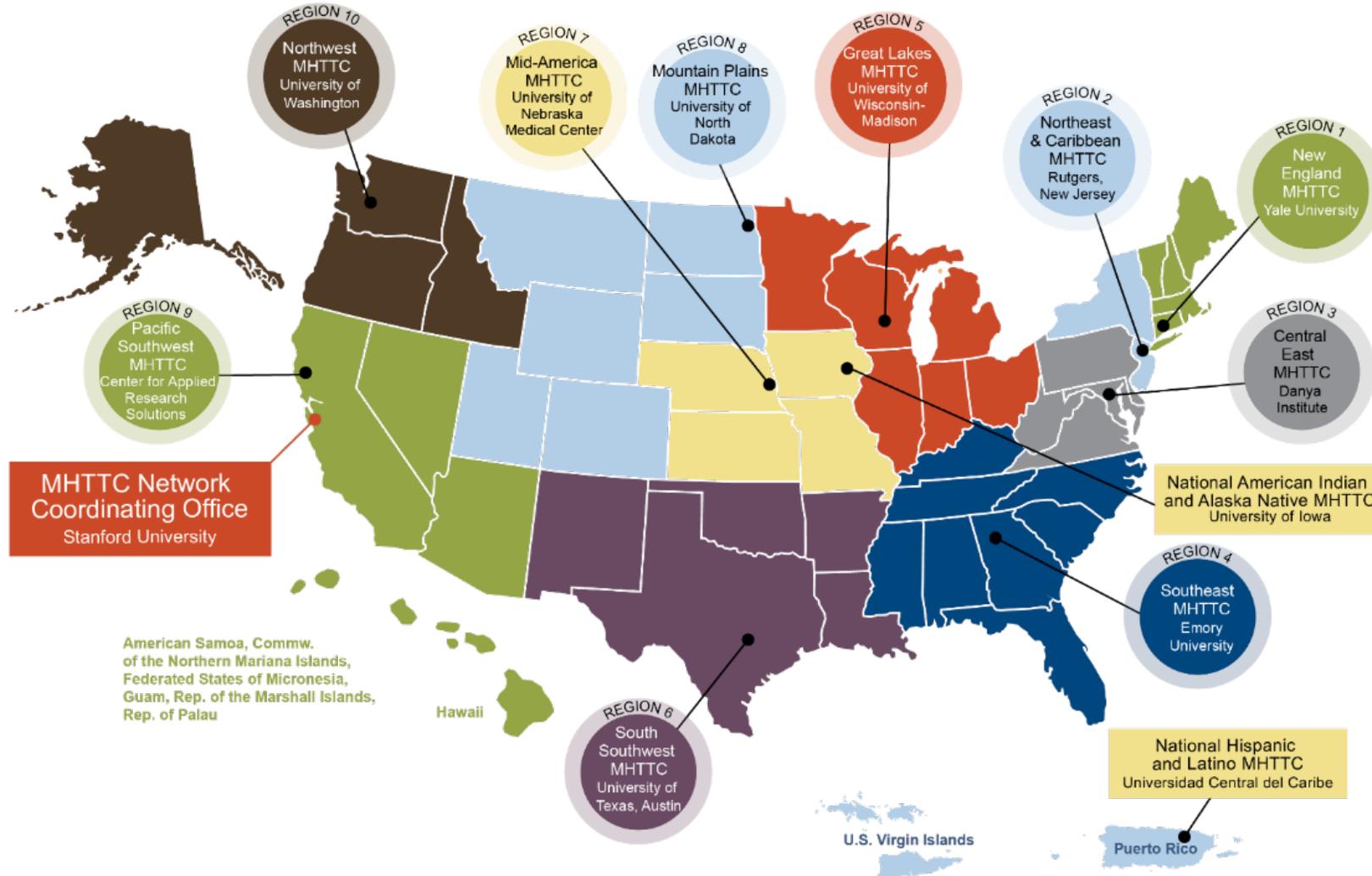


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MHTTC Purpose

The MHTTC Network vision is to unify science, education and service to transform lives through evidence-based and promising treatment and recovery practices in a recovery-oriented system of care.

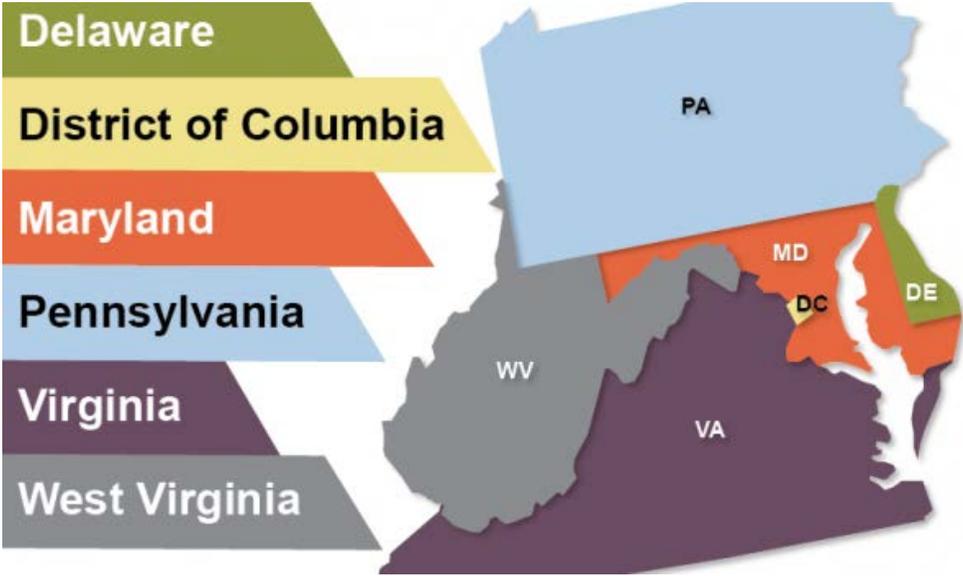


Central East MHTTC Goals

Funded by SAMHSA to:

- **Accelerate** the adoption and implementation of mental health related evidence-based practices
- **Heighten** the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the behavioral health workforce
- **Foster** alliances among culturally diverse practitioners, researchers, policy makers, family members, and consumers
- **Ensure** the availability and delivery of publicly available, free of charge, training and technical assistance

Central East Region 3



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At the time of this presentation, Tom Coderre served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at SAMHSA. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the speakers, and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.

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As part of receiving funding through SAMHSA to provide this training, the Central East MHTTC is required to submit data related to the quality of this event. At the end of today's presentation, please take a moment to complete a brief survey about today's training.

Working together
to
build a just,
humane, and
health society.

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is committed to ensuring every Marylander's fundamental right to quality behavioral health care by advancing public policy, monitoring service quality, providing training and education, leading systems change, and advancing new evidence-based treatments.



Education and Advocacy

Education:

- Children's Mental Health Matters
- General Adult
- Older Adult – Vibrant Minds
- Healthy New Moms

Coalitions:

- Behavioral Health Coalition
- The Maryland Coalition on Mental Health & Aging
- Children's Behavioral Health Coalition
- Maryland Behavioral Health Criminal Justice Partnership



Oversight, Training, and Other Initiatives

Training:

- Mental Health First Aid, Maryland
- Engage With™
- PEERS: Seniors in Partnership

Oversight:

- Consumer Quality Team

Other Initiatives:

- The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use



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- Become a citizen advocate
- Order resources & information
- Learn more about programs
- Schedule a training
- And much more!
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**NOT THEIR CRIME BUT
STILL THEIR SENTENCE:**

**SUPPORTING CHILDREN
OF INCARCERATED
PARENTS**



**Dana L. Cunningham,
Ph.D.**

**Licensed Psychologist &
Author**

Objectives:

- Describe the impact of incarceration on youth
- Describe factors that can impact adjustment to parental incarceration
- Identify strategies that can be used to support children of incarcerated parents

National Crisis



- U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country
- Almost **25% of the world's total prison population** are in the U.S.
- Between 1991 – 2007, incarceration of mothers increased **122%** and incarceration of fathers increased **76%**
- State and local **spending on prison/jails has increased at 3x** rate of funding for public education

What do you think?

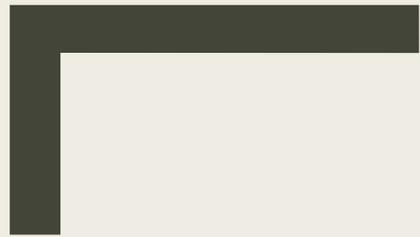
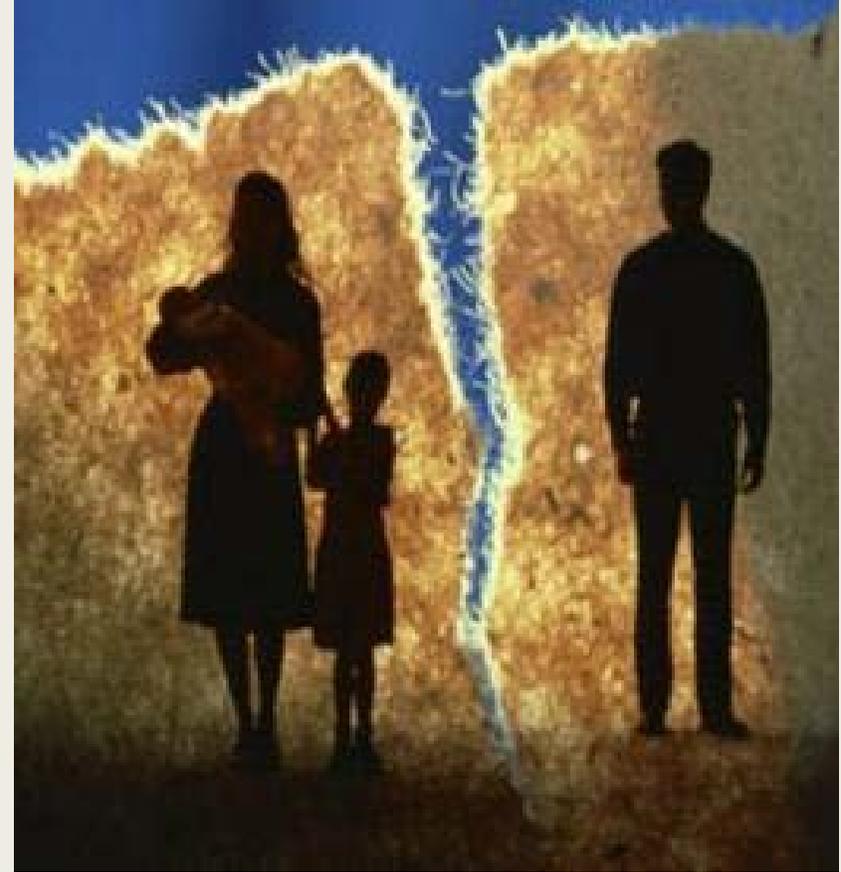
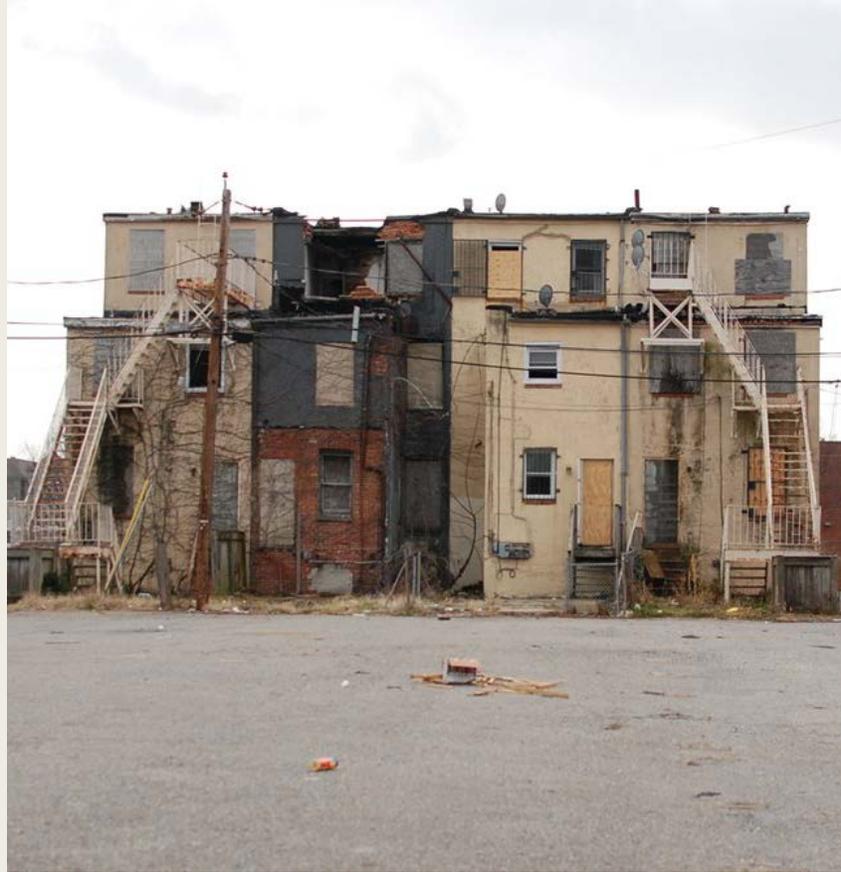
- How many children in the U.S. have ever lived with a parent/guardian who was incarcerated?
 - A. 1 million
 - B. 2 million
 - C. 4 million
 - D. 6 million
 - E. more than 8 million

1 in 28

One in 28 children in the U.S. has an incarcerated parent on any given day. That's 2.7 million children, nationwide.

What do you think?

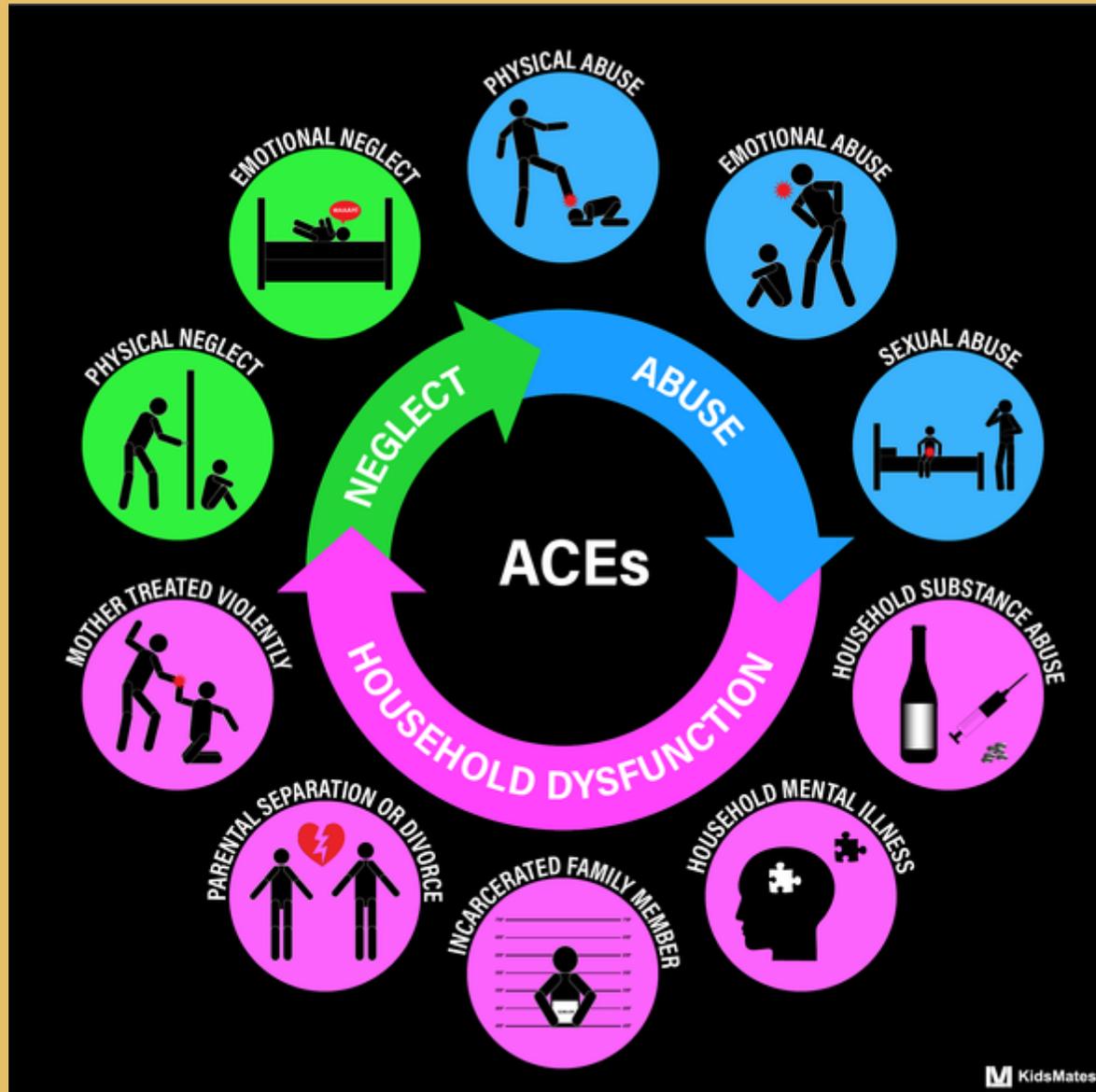
- What % of people of color (Blacks and Hispanics) are incarcerated in the U.S.?
 - A. 20 – 30%
 - B. 30 – 40%
 - C. 40 – 50%
 - D. 50 – 60%
 - E. 60 – 70%



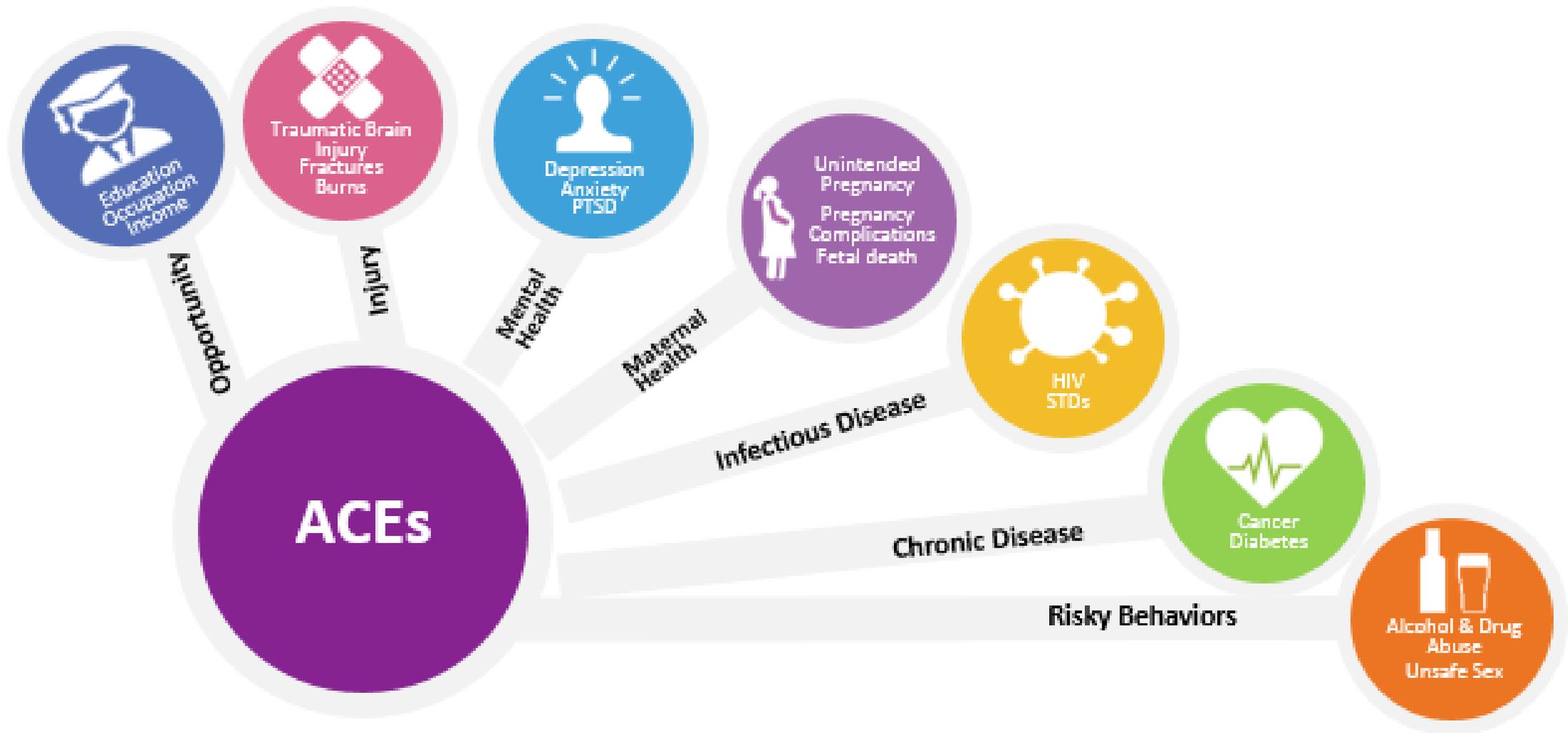
WHAT IS THE IMPACT?



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study



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





A Traumatic Experience

- **Trauma:** experience that threatens or causes harm to the child's emotional/physical well-being (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003)
- Psychological and physiological reactions commonly occur after a trauma
- Parental incarceration: an “**enduring trauma**” which is comprised of ongoing and repeated stressors (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagan, & Kennon, 1999)

Parental incarceration is traumatic due to:

- Ambiguous Loss
- Disrupted Attachment
- Disenfranchised Grief

(Ardetti, 2012)

COMMON EMOTIONS & REACTIONS

ECHOES OF INCARCERATION

Common Emotions & Reactions

Fear/
Anxiety

Sadness/
Depression

Isolation

Anger

Guilt

Confusion
about
incarceration

Family Role
confusion

Resentment

Stigma and
Shame

Stigma and Shame

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

Outcome Research

- *Aggressive behavior*
- *Decreased school readiness*
- *Health problems*
- *Grade retention*
- *Cognitive delays*
- *School disciplinary problems*
- *Insecure parental attachment*
- *High risk behaviors*
- *Depression*
- *Anxiety*
- *Teenage Pregnancy*
- *Poor self-esteem*

Under-resourced
Community

- Aggressive behavior
- Decreased school leadership
- Health problems
- Grade retention
- Cognitive delays
- School disciplinary problems

Trauma

Community
Violence

Shame &
Stigma

Witness Arrest

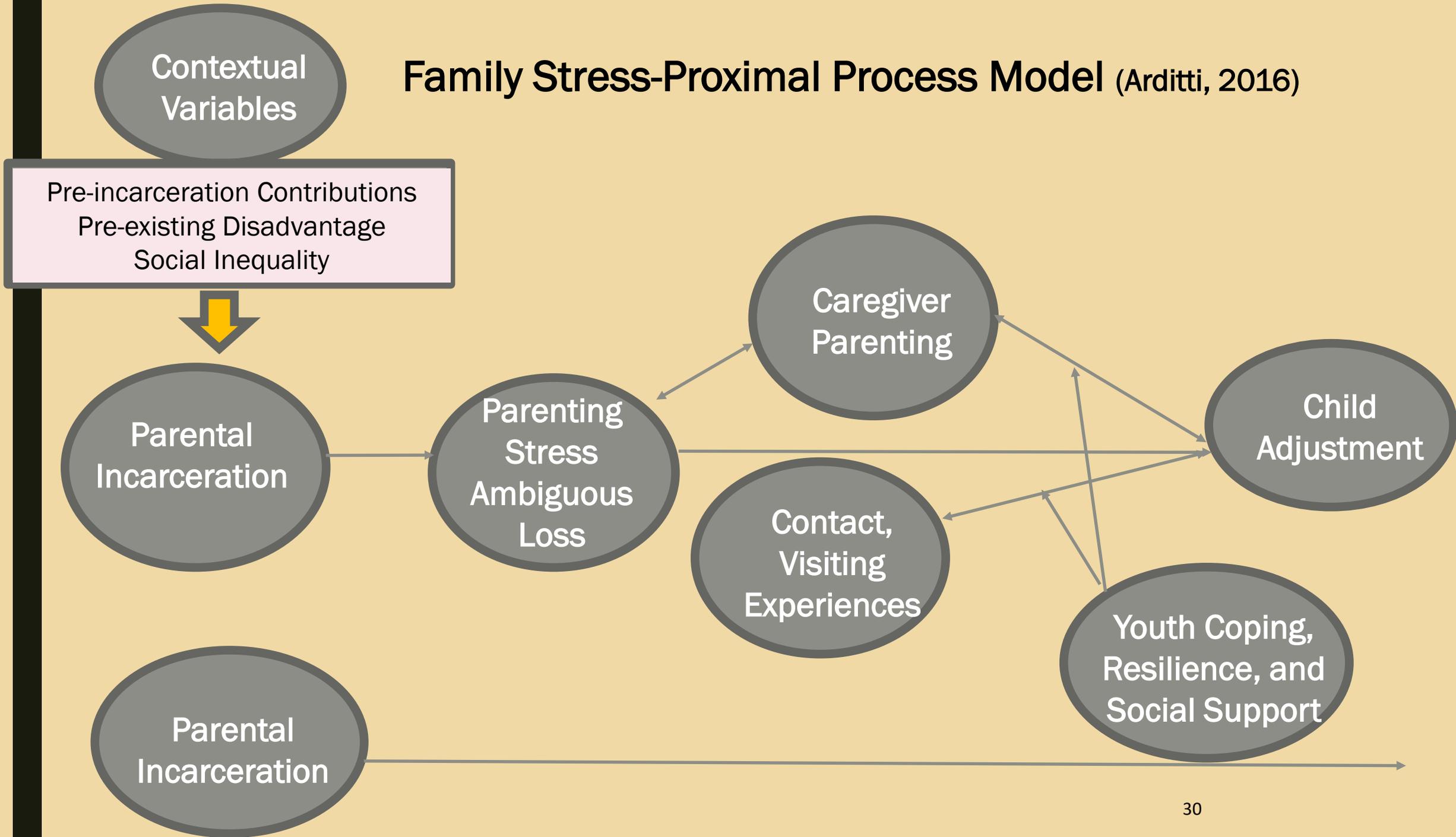
Parental
Substance
Abuse

- Insecure parental attachment
- High risk behavior
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Poor self-esteem

Domestic
Violence

Systemic
Inequities

Family Stress-Proximal Process Model (Arditti, 2016)



Protective Factors

- Culture, traditions, and family values
- Positive relationships with extended family
- Cooperative co-parenting
- Easy temperament in the child
- Intelligence
- Sense of humor
- High self-esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Empathy toward peers
- Emotional regulation
- School connectedness

SUPPORTING CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Humanizing Language

- **Instead of:** ~~ex-cons, criminals, inmates, convicts, offenders, felons~~
- **Say:** returning citizen, incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated person
- Incarcerated Parents are People

“Calling me ... inmate, convict, offender... indicates a lack of understanding of who I am, but more importantly what I can be.” – Eddie Ellis



Artist: Marcellous Lovelace. Photo taken by Don Sniegowski. Image retrieved from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sniegowski/49433391536/>



Promising Interventions

- Education programs for incarcerated parents
- Parent-child visitation programs
- Video visitation
- Prison nurseries
- Mentoring programs
- Re-entry programs
- Caregiver support
- Individualized support for COIP

(Gordon, Hunter, & Campbell, 2018)

From the Youth - What Providers Should Know:

www.youth.gov/COIP

We often grow up too soon taking on responsibilities

We love our parents, even though they have made mistakes

We are misjudged by many and negatively judged because of our parent(s)

We are sometimes told we will turn out like our parents and are constantly fighting against that judgement

We have different experiences than other youth whose parent is absent for another reason like divorce

We don't have control over the situation, which is difficult

From the Youth – Changes we would like to see:

www.youth.gov/COIP

Increased opportunities to visit

Better communication between corrections and schools

Better understanding about the impact of mandatory reporting rules

More frequent and less expensive ways to communicate

Improved information sharing

Better visiting experience

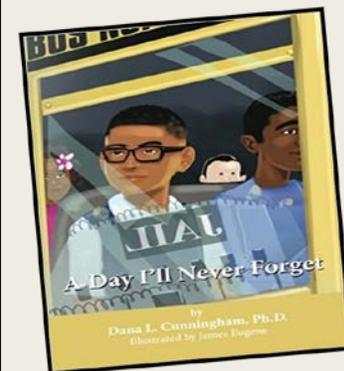
Supporting COIP

- Identify how you can support the caregivers (including the incarcerated parent)
- Recognize the multiple stress points within the criminal justice system
- Advocate for change
- Utilize bibliotherapy



A DAY I'LL NEVER FORGET

Javon's world is turned upside down when his father suddenly goes to jail. Javon is angry, sad, confused, and has no idea what he will do without his father. However, Javon eventually discovers that although he is separated from his father, he can maintain his relationship with him. This is a touching story that would benefit children, counselors, teachers, family members, and any adult who works with children who have been affected by the incarceration of a loved one. The narrative and discussion questions provide an opportunity for adults to help children process their feelings about incarceration.



A DAY I'LL NEVER FORGET

Student Perspectives

*What do you think children
of incarcerated parents
need the most?*

- *“Support”*
- *“Money”*
- *“Love”*
- *“Someone to talk to”*

Student Perspectives

What do you think life is like for someone living in jail? What would be most difficult? What do they need the most?

- *“It’s hard for them to be away from their family.”*
- *“They feel sad.”*
- *“They need a lawyer.”*
- *“They miss out on things.”*

Student Perspectives

What did you like most about the book?

- *“Javon found a way to handle his problems and made a worry jar.”*
- *“It helped me feel how hard it is to have a family member in jail.”*
- *“It helped me understand how to express my feelings and it helped me understand how to love a person in jail.”*
- *“I liked the part when they went to visit the boy’s father.”*
- *“It helped me get over the fact that my father went to jail.”*

School Staff Perspectives

- *“The book was extremely useful.”*
- *“All of the students enjoyed the book and wanted their own copy to share with family members.”*
- *“The book is a good reflection of what I’ve heard children say who have an incarcerated parent.”*
- *“The family member of a student with an incarcerated parent said the book was ‘incredible’ and something that all families should know about.”*
- *“My client wanted to take my copy of the book home so he could read it again.”*

LOVE LETTERS:
INCARCERATED MOTHERS
AND THEIR CHILDREN

Parent Letter Template



Date: _____

Draw (or attach) a picture
of yourself here

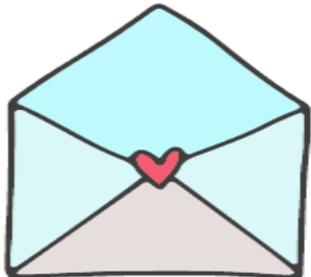
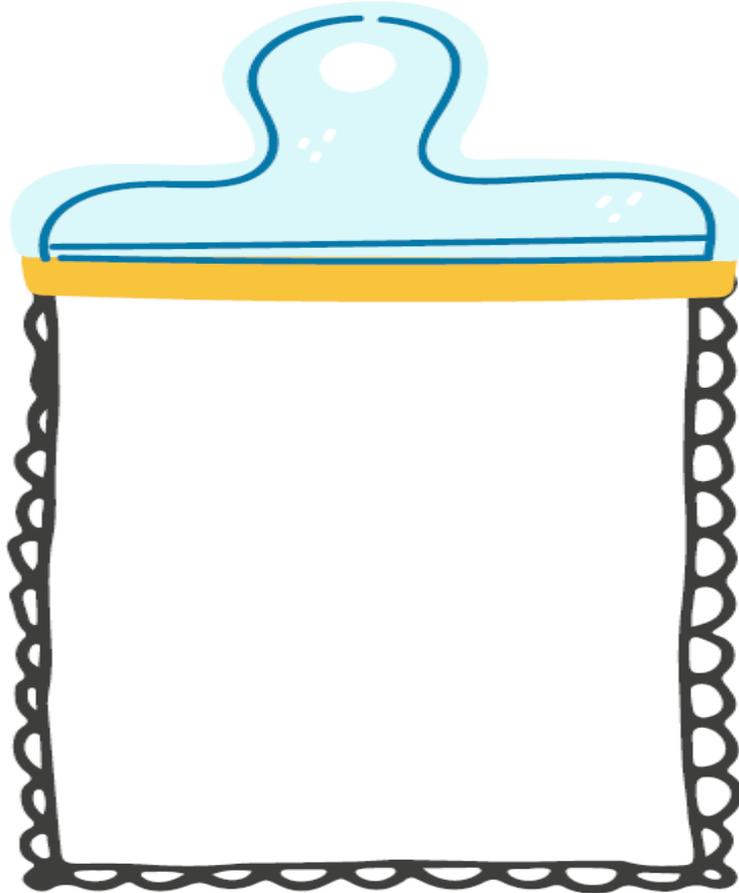
Dear _____

I have some questions for you:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Love,



My favorite color is:

My favorite food is:

For fun, I like to:

I like most about school:

I am really good at:

This week I:

Something I want you to know:

Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

I HAVE THE RIGHT:

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

From: San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership

Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

I HAVE THE RIGHT:

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

Resources

- Caregiver and Educator Tip Sheets to Support Children of Incarcerated Parents
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Federal Website
- Stronger Together. Volumes 1-3:
- Sesame Street- Little Children Big Challenges: Incarceration

National Organizations

- [National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated](#)
- [National Institute of Corrections: Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)
- [The Osborne Association](#)
- [Sentencing Project](#)
- [Vera Institute of Justice](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice](#)

Contact:

[Email Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D.](mailto:Dana.L.Cunningham@Ph.D.)

Booksbydrdana



When a Child's Parent is Incarcerated: A Grandparent's Story



Amy Young

- Amy's 30-year-old son, has struggled with substance use for 10 years
- During that time, Amy & her husband received custody & guardianship of their son's infant son who is now 5 years old
- Amy's son is currently incarcerated, leaving her having to explain to her grandson, where his father is and why

Questions



Contact Us



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a program managed by



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