

# Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Webinar for Caregivers

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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

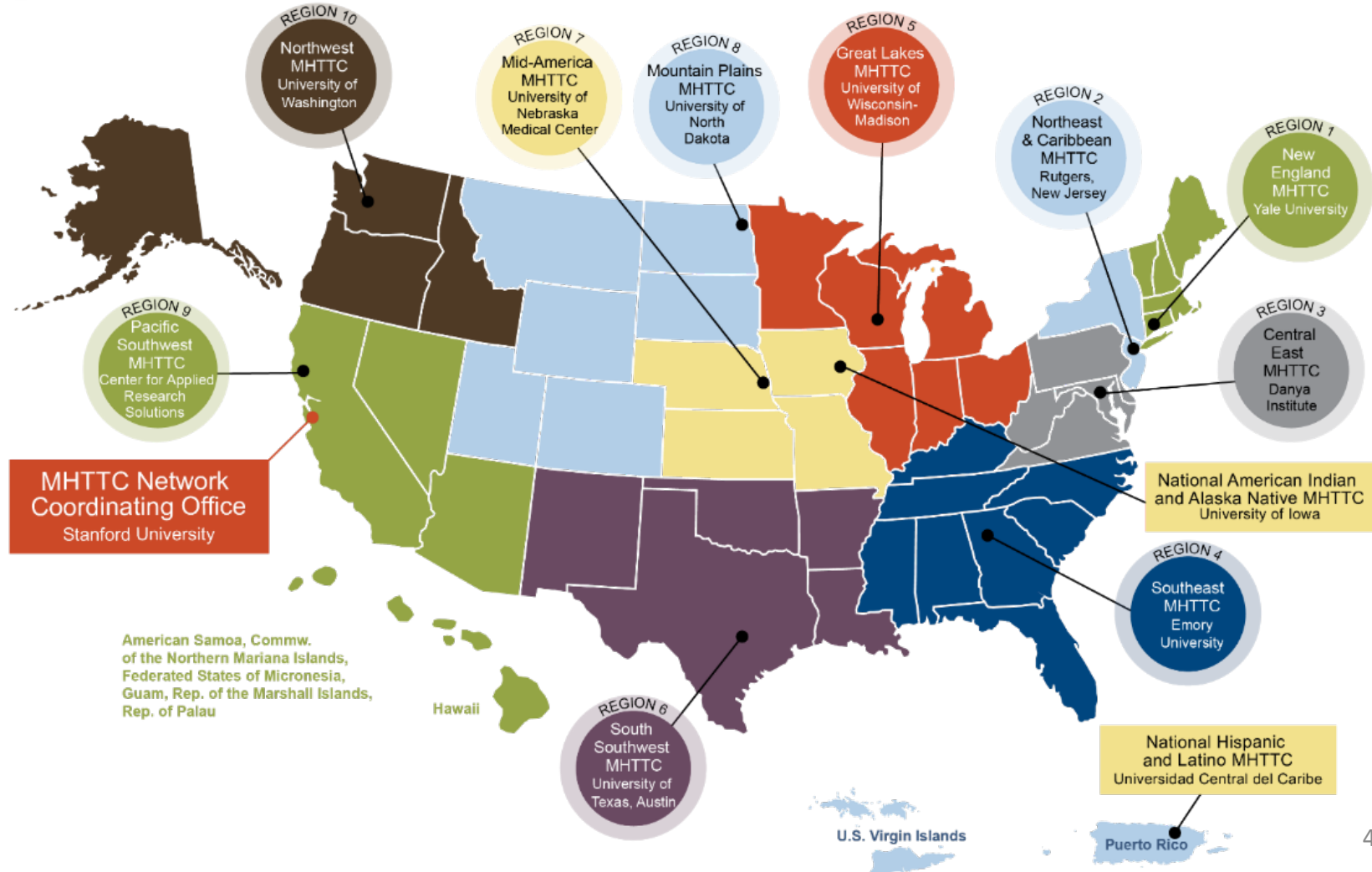


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# MHTTC Purpose

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.

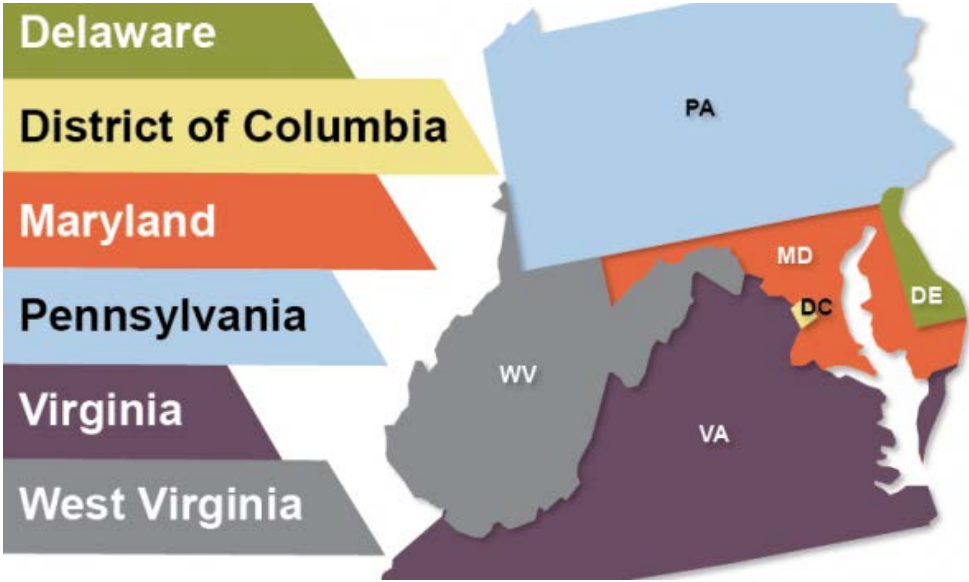


# Central East MHTTC Goals

## 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.

# Evaluation Information

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.

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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.

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# 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



# Connect to MHAMMD

[www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org)

- Subscribe for news updates
- Become a citizen advocate
- Order resources & information
- Learn more about programs
- Schedule a training
- And much more!
- Email: [info@mhamd.org](mailto:info@mhamd.org)

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# Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents:

A Webinar for  
Caregivers

**Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D.**  
**Licensed Psychologist & Author**



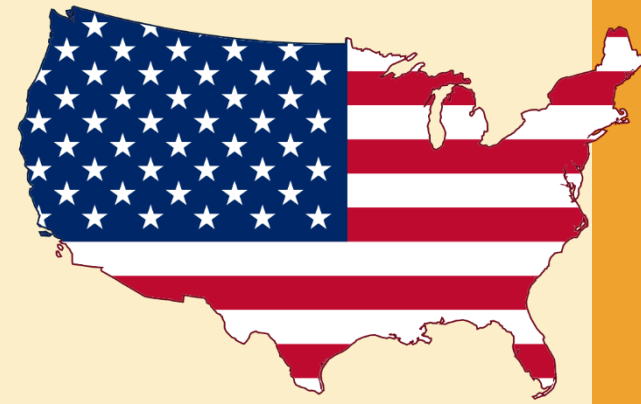
# OBJECTIVES

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

# WHAT DO CAREGIVERS NEED?

Place your thoughts in the chat box

# 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%**
- **50-75%** of the men and women who are incarcerated are parents
- State and local **spending on prison/jails has increased at 3x** rate of funding for public education

# WHAT IS THE IMPACT?





# A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE



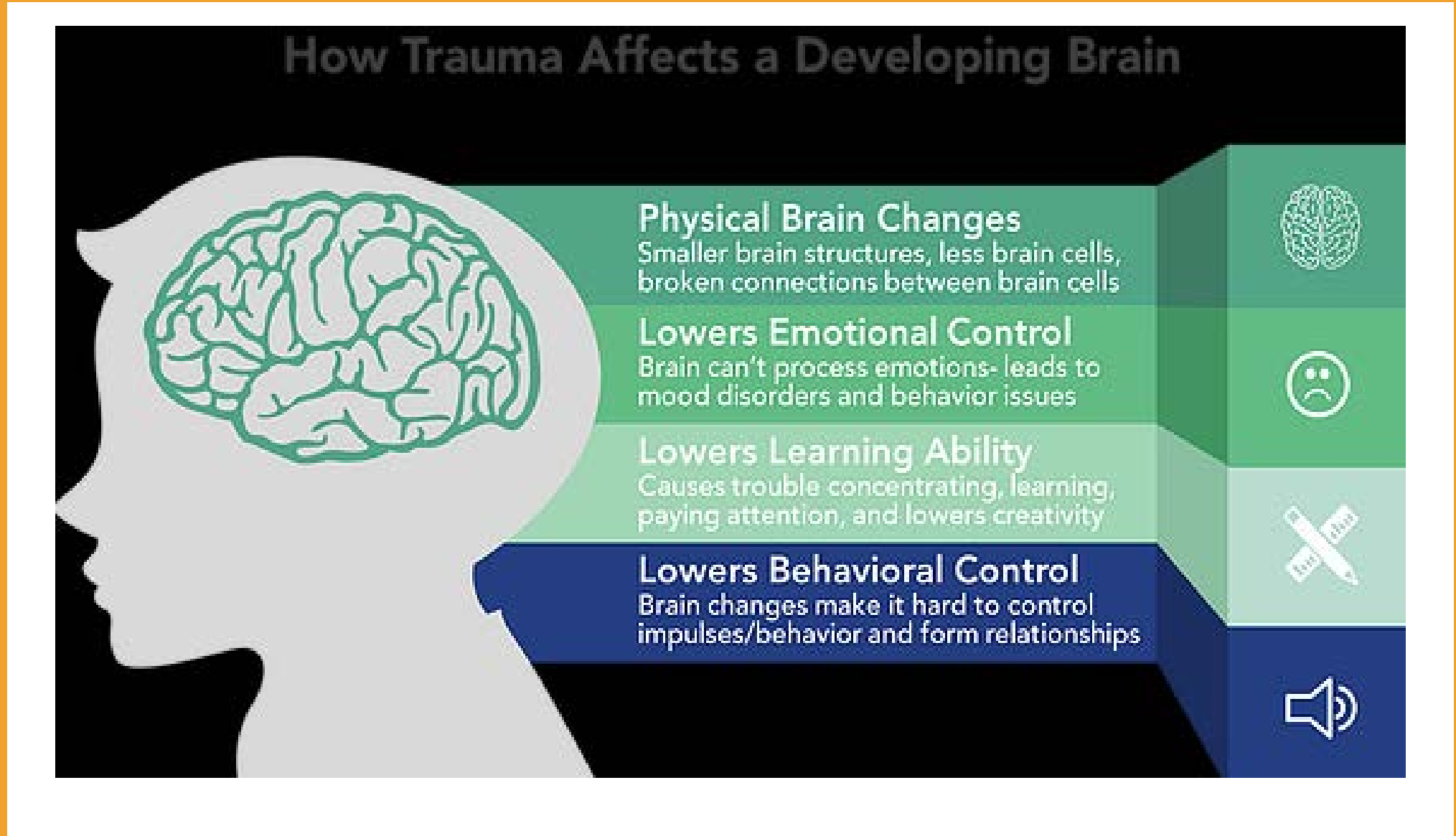
- **Trauma:** experience an intense event that threatens or causes harm to the child's emotional/physical well-being (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003)
- Psychological and physiological reactions commonly occur after a trauma
- Parental incarceration: an “**enduring trauma**” which is comprised 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)

# IMPACT of TRAUMA on the DEVELOPING BRAIN



# COMMON EMOTIONS & REACTIONS IN CHILDREN

- Fear/Anxiety
- Worry
- Sadness
- Isolation
- Anger
- Heightened Stress
- Guilt
- Stigma and Shame
- Family Role confusion
- Resentment
- Hopeful

# FEAR/WORRY

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

# SEPARATION ANXIETY/ATTACHMENT PROBLEMS

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

# SADNESS/DEPRESSION

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

# GUILT

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

# ANGER

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



# STIGMA AND SHAME

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

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM STRESS POINTS

- Arrest
- Pre-Trial and during Trial
- Sentencing
- Incarceration
- Parole
- Pre-release and Re-entry



# PARENT'S RELEASE



“Greatest time of my life.”

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

# PARENT'S RELEASE



Alisha Murdock, 21

From: [Newamericamedia.org](http://Newamericamedia.org)

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

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

“I can’t just be done with my Mom.”

# ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

**Avoiding  
Loss**



**Desire to  
Re-Engage**



**ECHOES OF INCARCERATION:  
CARING THROUGH STRUGGLE**



**WHAT EMOTIONS AND REACTIONS DID YOU HEAR?**

# COMMON EMOTIONS & REACTIONS IN CAREGIVERS & CHILDREN

- Fear/Anxiety
- Worry
- Sadness
- Isolation
- Anger
- Heightened Stress
- Guilt
- Stigma and Shame
- Family Role confusion
- Resentment
- Hopeful



# WHAT IMPACTS OUTCOMES?

- ***Degree of disruption***
  - Relationship with parent prior to incarceration
  - Duration of the incarceration
  - Exposure to arrest
  - Impact on family finances
  - Change in residence
  - Family stress
  - Family and peer response to incarceration

# WHAT IMPACTS OUTCOMES?

- ***Availability of Support***
  - Quality and type of contact with incarcerated parent
  - Relationship with caregiver
  - Quality of family functioning
  - Caregiver response to incarceration
  - Social support from peers and adults

# WHAT IMPACTS OUTCOMES?

- ***Child and Caregiver functioning***
  - Temperament
  - Coping style
  - Pre-existing conditions
  - Prior trauma & loss
  - Mental health
  - Caregiver parenting style

# WHAT IMPACTS POSITIVE OUTCOMES?

- 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

- Talk about their feelings
- Be honest and listen
- Avoid easy answers
- Lay the foundation for re-entry
- Discuss values and identity
- Identify support networks
- Separate your feelings from your child's
- Take care of yourself



# TALKING ABOUT THE INCARCERATION

- When children don't have the complete truth, they often create their own story
- Not telling the truth can create concerns about trust
- Consider age and developmental level
- Prepare child for questions from people outside of the family

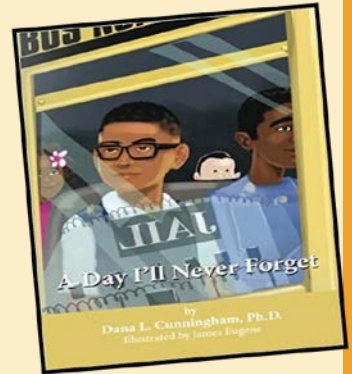


Source: [The Noun Project \(Parent Talking With Son\)](#)



## 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

# YOUTH 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.”



# YOUTH 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.”

# PARENT COMMUNICATION



Financial burden and barriers to phone calls and visits



Communication can help sustain the relationship



Communication can help ease worry



Contact helps reduce recidivism



Prepare the child for the letter writing experience



Parent and the child may need prompting to write

# PARENT LETTER TEMPLATE



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw (or attach) a picture of yourself here

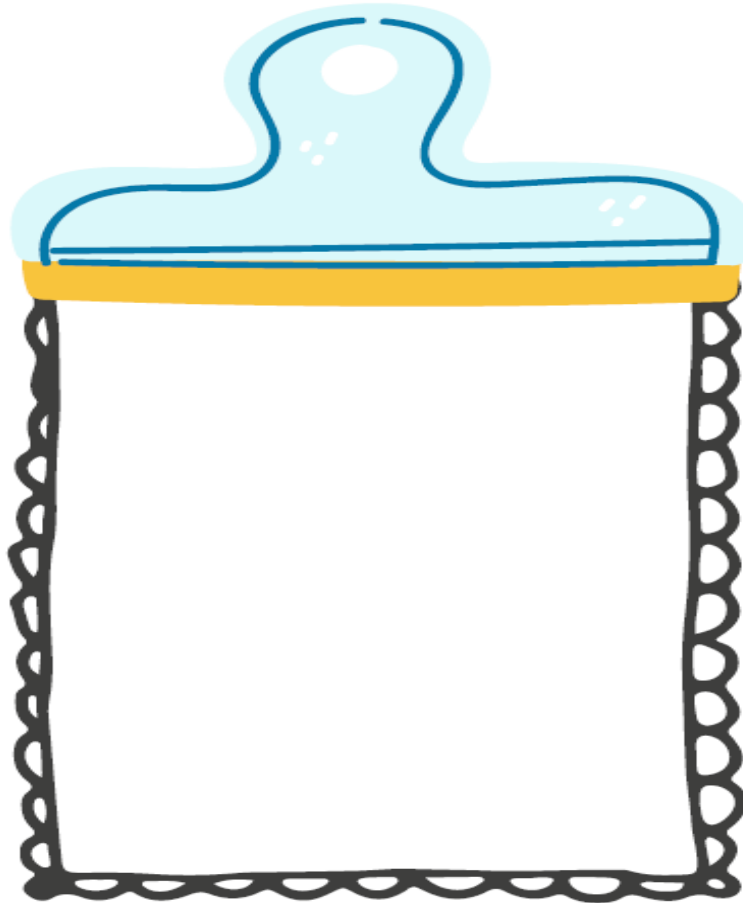
Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I have some questions for you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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: \_\_\_\_\_



Love,

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# RESOURCES

## **Family 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**
- **The Sentencing Project**
- **Vera Institute of Justice**
- **The Brennan Center for Justice**

# CONTACT:

[Email Dana L. Cunningham, Ph.D.](mailto:dana.l.cunningham@phd.edu)



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





# Evaluation

## Evaluation Link

Once you complete the evaluation, you will be directed to the resource page and certificate request form.

# Appreciation



# Contact Us



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