

# Welcoming Those with Incarcerated Family Members

NBA Prison & Jail Ministries

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*Presenters:*

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# Another Effect of Mass Incarceration in the United States

“The growing number of children with an incarcerated parent represents one of the most significant collateral consequences of the record prison population in the United States.” (1)

--Neil Bernstein



Image by Shaun Mader. Clients of Children of Promise, 2012. BuzzFeed.



Book by Janet M. Bender, M.Ed. Amazon.

# Children with Parents in Prison

1 in 28 children in the U.S. have an incarcerated parent. More than 2.7 million children. <sup>(2)</sup>

10 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their young lives. <sup>(3)</sup>

**In the U.S.:**

- One in 9 African American children (11.4%)
  - One in 28 Hispanic children (3.5%)
  - One in 57 White children (1.8%)
- Have an incarcerated parent. <sup>(4)</sup>

Approximately half of children with an incarcerated parent are under 10 years old. <sup>(5)</sup>

# Parents in Prison

In 2010, 1.5 million people were in state or federal prison in the U.S., and 750,000 were in jails. <sup>(6)</sup>

Nationally, there are more than 120,000 incarcerated mothers and 1.1 million incarcerated fathers, who are parents of minor children. <sup>(7)</sup>

59% of fathers and 58% of mothers had no personal visits from any of their children. <sup>(8)</sup>

62% of parents in state prisons and 84% of parents in federal prisons are held more than 100 miles away from their residence. 43% of those in federal prisons are held more than 500 miles away from their last residence. <sup>(9)</sup>

# What's the Impact upon Children?

Parental incarceration is now recognized as an “adverse childhood experience” (ACE); it is distinguished from other adverse childhood experiences by the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma. <sup>(10)</sup>

Parental incarceration increases the risk of children living in poverty or experiencing household instability, independent of other risk factors such as parent substance abuse, mental health issues, and inadequate education.



# What's the Impact upon Children?

**One study conducted in 1998 estimated that, of the parents arrested:**

- 67% were handcuffed in front of their children
- 27% reported weapons drawn in front of their children
- 4.2% reported a physical struggle
- 3.2% reported the use of pepper spray. <sup>(12)</sup>

Children who witnessed an arrest of household member were 57% more likely to have elevated post-traumatic stress symptoms compared to children who did not witness an arrest. <sup>(13)</sup>

# What's the Impact upon Children?

- Chronic sleeplessness, difficulties in concentrating, and depression.
- One in five in one study had clinically significant internalizing problems (depression, anxiety, withdrawal) and one in three had clinically significant externalizing problems (aggression, attention problems, disruptive behavior) compared to roughly one in ten in the general population.
- Some children assume they are somehow at fault of have contributed to their parent's incarceration
- Children with a parent in jail or prison are often teased more in school. (14)

# What's the Impact upon Families?

- The stigma of an incarcerated family member does not only impact the child. The family is stigmatized and this impacts their ability to connect with others.
- Who can they trust? Combine the stigma with the trauma of incarceration, families are hesitant to trust personal and professional acquaintances.
- Family dynamics must shift in order to compensate for the incarcerated parent. Who will take on new responsibilities?
- Though they have not passed away, the incarcerated parent must be grieved. There is a loss that impacts everyone in the family. How will they cope?
- Clearly, all of this creates additional stress on every member of the family.



# The Stress of Incarceration

**MONEY**

**ANXIETY**

**STIGMA**

**CHAOS**

**ABANDONMENT**

**stress**

**FOOD**

**UNCERTAINTY**

**HOUSING**

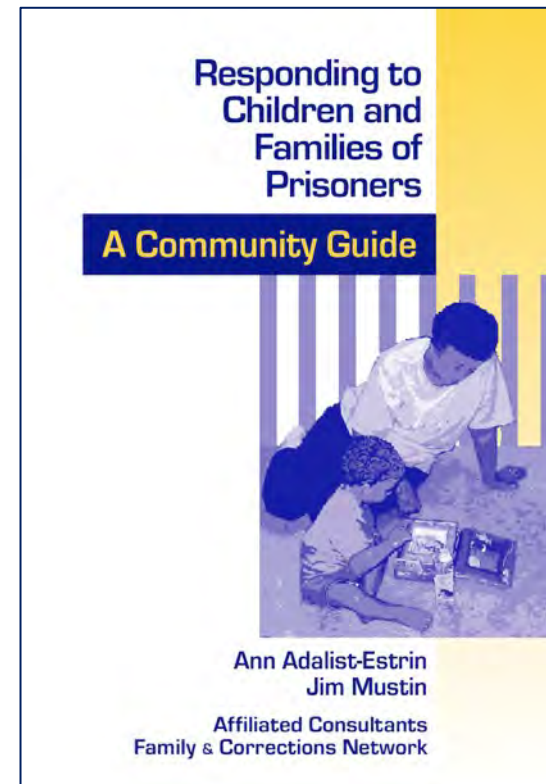
**FEAR**

**CONFUSION**

# Family Coping Styles

## Five Family Coping Styles (*Ann Adalist-Estrin*)

1. The Family On Hold
2. The Parallel Family
3. The Estranged Family
4. The Turbulent Family
5. The Functioning Family



# Resilience and Redemption: Don't Give Up on These Children and Their Families.

A misperception exists that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated than their peers, and are predisposed to criminal activity. There is no basis for this in existing research. <sup>(15)</sup>

Ann Adalist-Estrin, Director of the National Resource Center of Children and Families of the Incarcerated in Philadelphia, says, "Without adequate research, we cannot say they are more likely to go to prison or jail." <sup>(16)</sup>

# When Was It?

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

*Matthew 25:37-40 (The Message)*

# What Can the Church Do? How Can We Help These Children and Their Families?

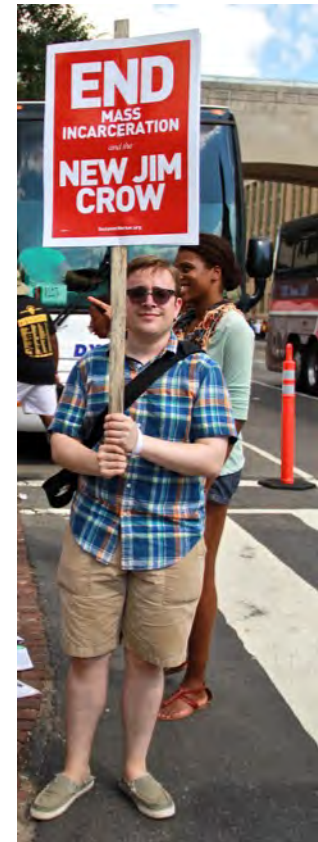
Dr. Harold Dean Trulear names these things communities can do:

- Create a climate of welcome and inclusion
- Reduce stigma and shame
- Foster communities of advocacy
- Facilitate acceptance of responsibility for actions and behavior
- Build networks of support
- Start engagement early in the process



# What Can the Church Do? How Can We Help These Children and Their Families?

- Patience and acceptance
- Build trust
- Empower parents and children
- Remember - problems don't disappear with release!
- Help crime survivors and their families
- Encourage visitation
- Become a mentor
- Advocate for a more just criminal justice system



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# Q&A - Thank You!

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