

Creating Safe Spaces for Children of Incarcerated Parents

- ▶ More than 10 million children in the U.S. have experienced their parent's incarceration or their parent being under correctional supervision. About 1 in 28 children have an incarcerated parent, making it likely that you will come in contact with children of incarcerated parents. But, you may never know it because these children often remain invisible due to the stigma associated with incarceration. These guiding tips will help you create a safe space where children and families feel comfortable disclosing and expressing their emotions without feeling judged, blamed, or labeled.

BE A ROLE MODEL OF ACCEPTANCE

- ▶ Assess your values and beliefs about the incarcerated and their families
- ▶ Examine how your values and beliefs are affecting your approaches and responses

BE AN ACTIVE NONJUDGMENTAL LISTENER

- ▶ Let children lead the conversation and help them talk about their feelings by asking open-ended questions
- ▶ Acknowledge how hard it is to be separated from a parent
- ▶ Don't ask a question just because you are curious

USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- ▶ Use nonjudgmental language, such as a parent who is incarcerated or formerly incarcerated person
- ▶ Avoid using *inmate*, *offender*, *convict*, *prisoner*, and *criminal* to describe a young person's parent

RESPECT PRIVACY

- ▶ Let children know that what they share is confidential and share the limits of that confidentiality
- ▶ If it is necessary to share information, let the child know and get permission when possible

SIGNAL THAT THIS IS A SAFE SPACE

- ▶ Post the *Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights* in your office or classroom
- ▶ This will help families identify you as a safe and supportive person

SEE THEM SUPPORT THEM

- ▶ Include parental incarceration on intakes and questionnaires given to children and families
- ▶ By identifying these children you can better meet their needs
- ▶ Responses may depend on how safe families feel about disclosing

SUPPORT FAMILY CONNECTIONS

- ▶ Support the parent-child relationship, which in most cases is in the child's best interest
- ▶ Support visits, phone contact, and letter writing

CONNECT TO AFTER-SCHOOL SUPPORTS

- ▶ Identify peer groups, counseling, and supportive programs where children can discuss their feelings, ask questions, and share experiences without fear of judgment
- ▶ Refer to programs dedicated to supporting children of incarcerated parents and families of the incarcerated

USE A TRAUMA- INFORMED LENS

- ▶ Understand that children experience a parent's incarceration as an ambiguous and disenfranchised loss
- ▶ Learn about how the criminal justice system works and how incarceration affects children and families

ORGANIZE LEARNING EVENTS

- ▶ Invite youth and others directly affected by incarceration to speak at your organization or school
- ▶ Connect with organizations that work with families impacted by incarceration and learn about their programs

The NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP)

is a special project of the Osborne Center for Justice Policy and Practice.

- ▶ Raising awareness, promoting policy and practice change, and building partnerships to ensure that children's rights are upheld, important relationships maintained, and their potential nurtured during their parent's involvement in the criminal justice system. For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/NYInitiative>.
- ▶ The Children of Incarcerated Parents: *A Bill of Rights* was developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005: www.sfcipp.org.
- ▶ For more information about person-first, inclusive language, go to <http://bit.ly/WEAREPEOPLE>.