

# Children of incarcerated parents

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Effects on Children of Incarcerated Fathers Most of the prisons in America are overcrowded. They are overcrowded with men, most of which are fathers and nearly half of these incarcerated fathers were living with their child or children before going to prison. The effects on these children can be detrimental. This can also cause strained relationships with the mothers or other family members doing their best to take care of these children while their father is away.

There can be social as well as emotional problems, but luckily there are many states that are trying to accommodate for the parent being gone with programs and camps for these children. Many social issues occur with a child of an incarcerated father as they grow older. It is common knowledge that if a parent or any caregiver disappears from a child's life, that child's attachment to that person will diminish. It is hard to establish a child's trust and takes time, so if a parent disappears that the child has depended on, it can affect the future of the child.

He/she may grow up thinking they cannot get too close to someone, fearing they'll lose that person. A lot of behavioral problems can also occur in a child. This may happen at home, in school, or in the streets. " Absence of the father is associated more with ' acting out' behavior (such as hostility, use of drugs or alcohol, running away, school truancy, discipline problems, aggressive acts and involvement in delinquent activities (Rosenburg 2009). " Being antisocial is looked at as a list of multiple behaviors that disrupt normalcy. As the child of an incarcerated parent grows to be an adolescent, there may be even more social problems.

Now the child is growing up and can get into more trouble for their social deviance. When it comes to getting in trouble, they may use excuses to cause them to get into more trouble. After all, what excuse is better than, "My dad did it?" It is very sad when kids are isolated socially from their peers because of their situation; even when it is not their fault. There was a study done in Oregon with 22 children with incarcerated fathers. Within this group, six children admitted they had no friends and four of these children said other parents would not allow their kids to play with them because their dad was in jail. These children grow up with feelings of shame, embarrassment, and mixtures of hope and fears of their relationships with their fathers, which leads them to be treated differently as they grow older. A father being gone in prison is also a huge financial strain on their families. Whether it be from the father having a job (legal or illegal), the family still depends on that income to help support the family. A lot of families need help through Public Aid to get through these difficult times. The family turns to food stamps, medical assistance, and child care assistance.

There are also many emotional issues that occur for a child dealing with a father in prison. Sometimes the child or children stay with another caregiver while their father(s) is/are in prison. It becomes way harder for the mother alone to maintain a household if she has relied on the father for help and support. This can cause emotional problems with the caregiver the child is staying with. There are many kids that are taken care of by their grandparents, other relatives, friends, or even foster care.

These kids can become unstable very quickly because if there is no relative to take care of them, they have to immediately be placed in foster care

because they become dependents of the juvenile court. They are automatically thrust into a more stable household, but because that is what they are not used to, their personalities become shaky. " The 1980 Federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Reform Act mandate that children who are placed in foster care must either be returned to their parents or placed with long-term guardians within 12-18 months (Hairston 2007). This gives the parents a chance to fix what they have done and realize what they are doing to their children, so they do not have to go through more emotional hardships. When abruptly removing a child from their father is ignoring the emotional needs of that child/children. They end up feeling vulnerable, alone, and frightened While being a father in prison, it is still necessary to establish a parental connection with their son or daughter. It has been said that it is most beneficial to have both parents in the child's life. They must create their own role even though they are behind bars.

A study showed that most incarcerated fathers have feelings of " helplessness and difficulties in being a ' good father (Rosenburg 2009). " There are many reasons why the fathers may feel this way. A lot of mothers refuse to bring the children to a prison or jail, but a lot of mothers may have a problem with finances, transportation, or time. There are strict rules and codes to follow when visiting a prisoner, so it would be difficult for a child to act normally with their father. Waiting times can be long, children will be frisked, and chances are it will be hot, dirty, and crowded.

The caregiver may say that is emotionally scarring and the visiting can have a bad influence on the child. When a father is sent away, he is not sent to a prison in accordance with the family's home. For those that are close, they

are lucky, but if a person is in the state's Department of Corrections, they can be sent anywhere in the state. When these fathers are taken away, the children receive little or no support on how to deal with their grief, loss, anger, shame, and fear. Depending on where the father is in prison, different programs can be available.

There are parent education courses- which most prisons teach special parent-child visits, child-oriented visiting activities, parent support groups, and custody and parental rights services. These programs are designed to develop and strengthen attachments, provide access to services, and address the issues that face the incarcerated parent when it comes to parenting. There is also a service for father behind bars that provides publications on self-help support groups. It serves many prisons with incarcerated fathers in the US and Canada.

There are more and more states doing something to lessen the impact of a parent going to prison on the child. States are now addressing the needs of a child at the time a parent is arrested. New laws are now requiring more extensive training to ensure the safety of a child at the time of arrest. Some states are also requiring judges to now consider the effects of a parent's incarceration on the child. " One Tennessee judge routinely requests that a video of the father interacting with the child accompany family impact statements (Christian 2009). Some policies are being imposed to require child-friendly visiting areas within prisons and jails, training correctional officers to have a better understanding of visiting children, and reducing the cost of maintaining contact. Welfare agencies in New York are now requiring arrangements to be made for the child to keep a meaningful relationship

with that child, unless there is clear evidence that a relationship would be detrimental to the child. These arrangements would include transportation and providing social and rehabilitative services to resolve or correct the problems which prohibit normal contact with the child. Most normal parenting classes do not meet the needs of incarcerated parents. If these programs want to succeed in decreasing criminal activities, they need to be more specific to maintaining a presence in a child's life. There are nurseries and different accommodations for mothers that are incarcerated, so why not fathers? In New York, there is a facility called The Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. They also have a children's center with their own building, which allows overnight and summer visits for older children.

There are inmate caregivers that work as associates in the center, which have gone through an accredited program that prepares graduates to teach in an accredited nursery anywhere in the country. There is a dayroom designed for the kids to play and the other inmates to form new friendships. It is an excellent opportunity for these children to make new friendships with other children going through the same thing. Why should these only be applied to women inmates with children? It is no surprise that fathers are just as important in a child's life as a mother is.

If there were more daycare centers for men's prisons, there would probably be less violence and problems within the population of the prison. If the Department of Corrections would give these men an incentive for their good behavior to see their families in a more "home-like" setting, there would be a lot less lockdowns. Many issues occur within a child when their father goes to prison. There will be social and emotional problems, including anger,

depression, shame, and guilt. They will be socially isolated and for any child, that is not a positive thing in their life.

Although these issues have been going on for a long time, states are now presenting new laws and implications for families with an incarcerated father. Little changes in the judicial system will help keep these kids out of trouble and continue to maintain a strong relationship with their father. Having two parents is the best basis for raising a child and even if one of the parents is absent, it is still best to maintain a paternal bond with the child. As a single mother of a child that has been raising a child going through this, I have constantly kept in contact with my daughter's father.

I understand the importance of having a family and one day, they will be able to have a normal relationship with each other. I understand the programs and meetings he attends in the prisons within the Illinois Department of Corrections to become a better person and a better father. If I don't believe in him, his daughter will never believe either. I have admired my dad ever since I can remember and I want my daughter to feel the same way about her father as I always have. References Christian, S. (2009, March).

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