

Coming home

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Jeremy becomes quickly agitated when Sandra raises her voice, as he does not understand what is expected of him. He lacks the language to explain or tell his mother exactly what he wants. Despite the problems in communication, Jeremy loves his mother and wants to be near her constantly. He rarely explores distant toys or activities and he is lacking in self-confidence. Sandra does not know how to encourage safe exploration and play.

Recently, when Sandra was arrested and taken to jail, Jeremy cried for hours. He stayed with Sandra's mother Deborah, who eventually was able to calm him. However, she too lacks the skills to deal with Jeremy's level of activity and with his tantrums or fits of frustration. Deborah is even more distant than Sandra when it comes to Jeremy. She rarely cuddles or converses with him other than to correct him when he tries to touch or explore something he shouldn't. Jeremy's tantrums have increased since his mother's incarceration and he is trying Deborah's patience. There is some concern that Deborah may try to hurt Jeremy, though there has never been any evidence of this. Sandra is complacent in jail and seems not to be as concerned about Jeremy as she should be. Sandra spends her days in jail chatting, doing minimal chores and playing cards. The Travis County Sherriff's department does not offer any educational for parents like Sandra, who often fail to realize the impact their jail time has on their children. There is a missed opportunity to help these parents learn effective coping skills and become better role models for their children.

Family Matters, A program by Family Connections, helps children whose parents are in jail, by providing supervised visits and parenting classes. This

unique program is designed to serve 500 children of roughly 400 parents who are incarcerated. Skilled and experienced parent educators will be used to help incarcerated parents learn how to connect with their children emotionally and how to properly handle situations such as tantrums. Parents will also learn how to select and provide age-appropriate toys and books for their children. They will learn active listening skills so they can be more in tune with the needs of their children. \$10,000 will be provided by the Travis County Sheriff's department for the program. It is hoped that other donations will come later. Family Connections will provide ongoing services to parents upon re-entering society. The organization also plans to refer the most severe cases in which there was previous CPS involvement to the agency's CRADLES program, for those families with children ages 0-3 years. Family Matters staff facilitating the program will also receive additional training in the criminal justice system, substance abuse, mental health issues and rehabilitation, to more adequately meet the needs of the parents and children they serve.

Imagine a situation with a much more positive outcome, where Jeremy's needs are more adequately met, he is happier and cries less, tantrums are minimal, and he is happy to explore and discover new things, with the guidance of his mother. He is shown love and affection and given plenty of praise. Sandra attends parenting classes and NA meetings on a regular basis, so she can get the support she needs to stay away from Cocaine and out of Jail. Sandra's mother Deborah has contact with Jeremy, but Sandra understands that her mother's parenting skills are lacking, so she sets limits and has requested that Deborah take parenting classes herself, if she is to

take Jeremy for any length of time or away from Sandra's house. Deborah begins to understand, after her first parenting class, that her skills in parenting were lacking as she was never shown another way. She is working on becoming a better grandmother and mending the awkward and sometimes hostile relationship with her daughter Sandra.

Jeremy continues to grow and is becoming more confident and interested in his world and in other children. He is now in school and doing quite well. He loves his teachers and can't wait to share his day with his mother. Sandra has been clean for 3 years. She now realizes that she must stay this way for Jeremy's sake. She still attends NA meetings and is now able to provide support for other group members. Through the parenting classes and interventions provided by Family Matters, Sandra became more confident in herself and her abilities. She even earned her GED, realizing she must do a better job of supporting herself and Jeremy financially. She is now taking college classes and working part-time as a legal assistant.