

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

Introduction

The arrest of a parent or guardian, and subsequent incarceration of that parent, causes many disturbances in a child's life. Children and youth who have experienced the pain of losing a **parent** to imprisonment often grow up having to combat physical and emotional battles.

In this first module, you will learn about the impacts of incarceration and how mentoring can be a positive influence on the lives of children with an incarcerated parent. This module sets the stage for deeper exploration of the negative impacts of parental incarceration and how mentoring techniques can help with the trauma and stress often experienced by these youth.

The goal of this module is to give you enough information about the impacts of parental incarceration on children so that you understand the implications well enough to be able to speak fluently with mentors matched with these youth during pre-match training and on-going match support as well as in supporting the youth and their families as part of your program.

Learning Objectives

In this module, you will learn:

- Facts about parental incarceration and its impact on families so you can identify and be prepared to recommend applicable services and resources for mentees and their families;
- The emotional impact of parental incarceration on children and youth so that you can advise mentors on ways to identify and work with behaviors caused by trauma; and
- How you can coach mentors to mediate negative impacts of parental incarceration on children and youth through development of positive assets.

At several points through this module, you will be asked to pause and consider how the content you've just reviewed would be helpful in your match support activities.

Content Overview

Consider this excerpt from The National Conference of Legislatures

(<http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cyf/childrenofincarceratedparents.pdf>) about the impact of incarceration on families.

"The nation's growing prison and jail population has raised serious questions about the collateral effects of incarceration on children, families, and communities. Whatever one's views about the appropriate role of incarceration in the criminal justice system, it is clear that imprisonment disrupts positive, nurturing relationships between many parents—particularly mothers—and their children. In addition, many families with children suffer economic strain and instability when a parent is imprisoned. Research suggests that intervening in the lives of incarcerated parents and their children to preserve and strengthen positive family connections can yield positive societal benefits in the form of reduced recidivism, less intergenerational criminal justice system involvement, and promotion of healthy child development. In the words of one prominent researcher, "[s]tudies . . . indicate that families are important to prisoners and to the achievement of major social goals, including the prevention of recidivism and delinquency."

To learn more about the incarceration and judicial process, read Handout 1A: "Facts about Incarceration"

In the United States, fifty-three percent of the 1.5 million people held in prisons were the parents of one or more children.¹ A recent study indicates that this number has increased with over 5 million children having experienced

¹ Children on the Outside: Voicing the Pain and Human Costs of Parental Incarceration. (2011). Justice Strategies.

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

parental incarceration.² It is difficult to determine what a “typical” child of an incarcerated parent would look like since the circumstances of arrest, charges, length of confinement, living situations, financial resources, support from extended family and community, are unique. However, research into how children and families are impacted by incarceration has provided some information about these families and children:

- Over half of children of incarcerated parents are under the age of 10. More than a third of these children will reach the age of 18 while their parent remains incarcerated.³
- A “substantial number of incarcerated parents were deeply involved in their children’s lives before imprisonment.” Approximately one-half of state prisoners (64% of mothers and 47% of fathers) lived with at least one of their children prior to imprisonment.⁴
- A majority of children of incarcerated parents are living with the other parent or a relative caregiver. Parental incarceration is strongly correlated to unemployment of a caregiver, economic strain, a lower standard of living, and increased family instability.⁵
- Increasingly, incarcerated parents are being held in facilities far from home. The majority of children of incarcerated parents (over 60%) live between 101-500 miles away from their parent⁶.—this indicates that these children are unable to maintain a close parent/child relationship through regular visitation.
- Separation from a parent due to incarceration is as painful as other forms of parental loss. Children of incarcerated parents often lose contact with their parent and may have few or no visits. Over half (59%) of parents in a state correctional facility and 45% of parents in a federal correctional facility reported never having had a personal visit from their child(ren).⁷
- Increasing incarceration of women means that more mothers are incarcerated than ever before—the number of children with a mother in prison has more than doubled in the last 20 years. In addition, there is evidence that children whose mothers are incarcerated are much more likely to be living with grandparents or other family members rather than with their father. Incarcerated mothers are five times as likely as men to report having children placed in the foster care system.⁸
- One in 43 children has a parent in prison. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 1 in 15 black children (6.7%) and 1 in 42 Latino children (4.2%) has a parent in prison compared to 1 in 111 white children who have a parent in prison.⁹
- Children of incarcerated parents are at an increased risk for homelessness, physical or sexual abuse, substance dependence or abuse, and poverty.¹⁰
- Medical and mental health disorders are more likely to be reported by incarcerated parents, with those parents serving time in state prison much more likely to report these issues than those in the federal prison system.¹¹
- Parental incarceration is recognized as an “adverse childhood experience” and is characterized by a

² Parents Behind Bars: What Happen to their Children? D Murphey, PMCooper, Urban Institute, October 2015.

³ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 222984. Revised 2010

⁴ Christian, Steve (200). Children of Incarcerated Parents. National Conference of State Legislatures.

https://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/fatherhood/NCSL_ChildrenOfIncarceratedParents_0309.pdf

⁵ Phillips, Susan et al., (2006). Disentangling the Risks: Parent Criminal Justice Involvement and Children’s Exposure to Family Risks. Criminology and Public policy 5, No. 4.

⁶ Schirmer, S., Nellis, A., and Mauer, M. (2009). Incarcerated parents and their children: Trends 1991-2007. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project. http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/publications/inc_incarceratedparents.pdf

⁷ Schirmer, S., Nellis, A., and Mauer, M. (2009). Incarcerated parents and their children: Trends 1991-2007. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project. http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/publications/inc_incarceratedparents.pdf

⁸ Schirmer, S., Nellis, A., and Mauer, M. (2009). Incarcerated parents and their children: Trends 1991-2007. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project. http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/publications/inc_incarceratedparents.pdf

⁹ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 222984. Revised 2010. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>

¹⁰ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 222984. Revised 2010. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>

¹¹ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 222984. Revised 2010. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

combination of trauma, shame, and stigma.¹² More than half of children with incarcerated parents have had school problems such as poor grades, antisocial and delinquent behavior, and an increased likelihood of developing mental health problems.

- Encouraging communication between parents in prison and their children and improving the setting for visits can increase positive outcomes for the children.

Based on the information you've just read, consider the following case study and how you may address it within your own program. *Note that this case study is also used during the mentor pre-match training (Mentor Training Handout 1B).*

Donald's Story

Donald Jamison (mentee) is a 14-year old, bi-racial male living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with his mother, grandmother, and two younger sisters (Tania who is 10 and Celia who is 4). The family moved in with the maternal grandmother a proximately 3 years ago when Celia's father went to prison. The family had been living with Miguel, who is Celia's father, for several years and Donald was very close to him and upset when Miguel went to prison.

Since Miguel left the family things have not gone well. Mara, Donald's mother, works part time as a housekeeper and does not make enough money for the family to have their own home so they moved into his grandma's home. With the move to grandma's home, Donald changed school, lost touch with his friends, and could no longer be in the neighborhood Boy's and Girl's Club program. The neighborhood the family currently lives in is rundown and is overrun with drug dealers, crime, and violence. The family tries not to be on the street in the evenings.

Donald would like to visit Miguel in prison, but his mother has told him they do not have the money for the bus trip to the prison. When Miguel was first placed in prison, he was in a facility close to Philadelphia but over the 3 years of has been moved to four facilities and he is currently about 120 miles from the city. This is a difficult time for Donald, and he appears to be struggling at school and at home. His grades have fallen, and he is constantly fighting with his two younger sisters.

After reading Donald's Story, consider the following questions:

1. What stressors were created for Donald and his family as a result of Miguel's incarceration?
2. What resources might Match Support suggest that would be helpful for Donald?

It is evident that parental incarceration has a significant impact on children economically, emotionally, developmentally, and behaviorally. In the next section, we will explore a few of the most relevant impacts that have direct implications for your program and mentors.

Economic Impact of Incarceration

About half of incarcerated parents provided primary financial support for their children prior to their incarceration.¹³ If the incarcerated parent contributed financially, the child who finds him or herself living in a single head of household family may be deprived of basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. The majority of kinship caregivers, such as grandparents or other relatives, do not have access to financial support that may be offered to non-relative caregivers.

¹² Hairston, C.F. (2007). Focus on the children with incarcerated parents: An overview of the research literature. Annie E. Casey

¹³ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 222984. Revised 2010. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

This can lead to increased family strain and stress on both caregivers and children. Economic concerns also impact whether the child(ren) has regular contact with an incarcerated parent. Costs associated with maintaining relationships between children and the incarcerated parent include travel costs (transportation and lodging, food, gas, etc.), time spent away from work/school which can jeopardize employment, and associated costs to the visitation, such as minor children are required to be accompanied by an adult who has been “approved” as a visitor to the prison— approved adult visitors are required to have acceptable forms of identification which are valid and current, and children often need to have certified copies of birth certificates, proof of legal guardianship, notarized written consent/authorization, and other documentation that is often not readily accessible to them.

You can read more about video-conferencing in **Handout 1B: “Visits by Video- Conferencing: Incarcerated Parents and Their Children”**.

Barriers to Visitation

Visitation with loved ones in jails and prisons can be complicated and costly. Children and youth should be given the option to visit with a parent while they are incarcerated, but the issues impacting visitation can vary depending on multiple factors: where and with whom the child (ren) is living, location of the incarcerated parent, rules of the jail or prison facility, and the emotional and behavioral impact that visitation can have on children and youth. Because of the social stigma that can arise from parental incarceration, relatives or other caregivers may feel that children should not be exposed to a parent in a jail or prison setting and therefore refuse visitation. Distance may also present a problem since the majority of incarcerated parents are housed over 100 miles (and often up to 500 miles) from where the child (ren) is living, caregivers may not have the financial ability or reliable transportation in order to facilitate visits between the child(ren) and parent. In addition, children and youth may “act out” following a visit with an incarcerated parent and be sad or depressed, angry, or express an unwillingness to visit the parent again. Due to some of the difficulties many families have with visiting inmates, a new “visitation” trend has emerged to open up possibilities for increasing visitation for families through video visitation systems.

While video conferencing offers an opportunity for connection that would otherwise not be available, the increased use of this strategy has resulted in some negative impacts as well. One concern is that the cost is usually passed on to the families and is a high cost for families already experiencing financial burdens to absorb. Another concern is that many facilities are discontinuing in-person visitation in favor of this cost-saving strategy.

Relationship with New Caregiver

A majority of children of incarcerated parents are cared for by relatives with grandparents providing the majority of caregiver placements. Relative caregivers face obstacles such as financial and domestic issues, meeting legal demands regarding custody, medical care, and coping with the emotional effects of incarceration which include social, community, and inter-family stigma. Many of these families are dealing with concurrent issues of medical and mental health and over 20% of these households live in poverty.¹⁴ If the incarcerated parent was positively involved in the family prior to incarceration, the child may be deprived of important socialization, parental supervision, role models, and emotional support needed for healthy development. The child may feel conflicted about their role in the family and how they fit in with respect to the roles of other family members. Caring for relative children can lead or contribute to conflicts within the family, increased stress and obligations, and feelings of guilt, anger, and resentment. Relative caregivers also experience feelings of:

¹⁴ Travis, J., McBride, E.C., & Solomon, A.L. (2005) Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry. Urban Institute; Justice Policy Center.

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

Loss

- Relative caregivers are experiencing not only the loss of their family member to incarceration, but also a loss of their own space and privacy, routines, and plans for the future.

Embarrassment and Shame

- Relative caregivers are often embarrassed about needing to ask for services or assistance from public or private agencies. Relatives may be asked to disclose family information about criminal activity, living circumstances, and family dynamics that they would rather not share.

Guilt

- Many relative caregivers feel guilty for their perceived “role” in the parent’s incarceration and may experience guilt because they are more focused on the child(ren)’s needs rather than on the incarcerated parent’s needs.

Caregivers may face barriers related to the age of the caregiver such as living on a fixed income (retirement), childcare costs, housing issues including not having enough room for the child(ren), mobility (including physical health) of the caregiver, and transportation issues. Children may feel cut off from “normal” family lives and may feel that they are unlike their peers—leading to feelings of isolation and increased stigma from the incarceration. Conversely, children may live in communities in where many of the people they know are, have been, or are related to someone that has been incarcerated which can lead to a sense of incarceration as a fated outcome that they too will come to experience.

Emotional and Behavioral Impacts of Incarceration

The effects of parental incarceration on children vary by age and gender. Older children may suffer from feelings of helplessness and fatalism, with males being more likely to cover up feelings of depression through violent and aggressive behavior. In addition to depression and behavioral problems, school failures, low self-esteem, and general emotional dysfunction are also documented in children of incarcerated parents. Children of incarcerated parents feel the loss of a parent in a variety of ways—loss of the parental relationship, siblings, and their role in the family. Children may feel like they have lost part of their identity, feel neglected and misunderstood—which may cause them to seek acceptance from others. They may act in ways that make them more susceptible to negative peer influence and they may engage in high risk behaviors such as drug use and unhealthy sexual activity. Children who are angry about the parent’s incarceration may act out aggressively toward peers, siblings, or caregivers.

On the other hand, children who experience parental incarceration as loss may present as listless, withdrawn, or without emotion. All of these reactions are “normal” ways for children to respond to the loss of a parent to incarceration, however, these children need to be watched closely for signs of depression and other disorders needing immediate intervention and treatment.

Of particular concern is the traumatic effect that parental incarceration has on children and youth resulting from the sudden and sometimes violent separation of parent from child. Parental crime, arrests, and incarceration interfere with the ability of children to successfully master developmental tasks and to overcome the effects of enduring trauma, parent-child separation, and an inadequate quality of care. **Module 2 will explore the impact of stress and trauma on child development in more depth.**

Child and Adolescent Depression

About 5 percent of children and adolescents in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time. Children under stress who experience loss and/or trauma—such as loss of a parent to incarceration—are at a higher risk for depression. Recognizing and diagnosing depression in children is difficult because depression manifests itself differently in children and adolescents, and the behaviors may look very different from behaviors of depressed adults. Children and adolescents may present with increased irritability, anger, or hostility, have difficulty

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

with relationships, be unable to concentrate, have low self-esteem or guilt, get in trouble at home or at school, and may use drugs or alcohol as a way of trying to feel better.

For more information about depression in children and adolescents, read:

Facts for Families: The Depressed Child. 2013. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. http://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/04_the_depressed_child.pdf

What does this mean in practice?

Why is it important for match support to have a deeper understanding of the circumstances that could be facing families impacted by parental incarceration and their children?

What kind of services and supports could be helpful for these families?

In what ways can having a mentor help a child cope with the experience of having an incarcerated parent?

Responding to Trauma

In order to help children and youth overcome loss and trauma, caregivers and other adults must make every effort to ensure that they feel secure, protected, and loved. Children need to have trusted caregivers and other engaged adults in their lives that are emotionally available and physically present.

“The number and intensity of high-quality relationships in young people’s lives is linked to a broad range of positive outcomes, including increased student engagement, improved academic motivation, better grades, higher aspirations for the future, civic engagement, more frequent participation in college-preparatory classes and activities, and a variety of other individual outcomes. We also know that high-quality relationships are characterized as caring, supportive, meaningful, reciprocal, and resulting in young people’s sense of agency, belonging and competence.”¹⁵

It is not possible to change environmental factors that youth encounter such as loss of parental support, increased poverty, and prior exposure to domestic violence, mental illness, or parental substance abuse. However, it is possible to use strategies to promote “protective factors” and increase coping skills in youth who are dealing with the pain and loss associated with having an incarcerated parent.

One of these protective factors is the presence of supportive adult relationships, such as mentors, in the child’s life. Studies of mentor relationships and youth development have found that youth who had a mentoring relationship during adolescence had better outcomes in the areas of education, employment, mental health, behavior/risk, and health. However, the benefits of mentoring are expected “only to the extent that the mentor and youth forge a strong connection that is characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy.”¹⁶ In order to forge this type of close connection, it is important that mentors spend time with a mentee consistently and over a significant period of time (at least one year) and focus their efforts on the mentee’s interests and goals rather than on their own expectations for the relationship.

Developmental Relationships

One way that mentors can encourage a strong, youth-centered relationship with mentees is by forming and encouraging developmental relationships with mentees. A developmental relationship is a term used to describe a close connection between a youth and adult (or peer) that “powerfully and positively shapes the young person’s

¹⁵ Search Institute: Discovering what kids need to succeed. Developmental Relationships. <http://www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-relationships>

¹⁶ Rhodes, J.E. & DuBois, D.L. (2008). Mentoring Relationships and Program for Youth. Current Directions in Psychological Science. APS.

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

identity and helps the young person develop a thriving mindset...not just to survive, but thrive".¹⁷ Forming developmental relationships foster positive youth development and provide a variety of opportunities for youth to grow and expand their opportunities in life, family, school, and their future endeavors.

The Search Institute defines the framework of a developmental relationship in the following way. In order to create a developmental relationship with a mentee, a mentor should:

Express Care

- By being present and paying attention to youth when they are with them; being warm and expressing positive feelings toward youth; investing time and energy to do things for and with the youth; showing interest in what is important to the youth and what they care about; and by being dependable-someone the youth can trust and count on.

Challenge Growth

- By inspiring youth to see future possibilities; having expectations that the youth live up to their full potential; recognizing thoughts and abilities while pushing the youth to strengthen them; and by holding the youth accountable for appropriate boundaries and rules.

Provide Support

- By encouraging efforts and achievements; guiding youth through practical assistance and feedback; and by modeling appropriate behaviors, reactions, and responses to situations and emotions.

Share Power

- By providing youth the opportunity to identify their feelings and let them know that many feelings such as fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety are normal; respecting youth's opinions and considering them when making decisions; understanding and responding to a youth's needs, interests, and abilities; and collaborating with youth to accomplish goals and solve problems.

Expand Possibilities

- By providing the opportunities youth need to explore their environment, learn, and grow while feeling safe, supported, and nurtured; exposing youth to new ideas, experiences, and places; and helping youth work through barriers and introducing growth opportunities.

What does this mean in practice?

When adults provide consistent, caring environments that focus on youth's strengths, they are able to begin developing a more positive view of themselves and their environment. When you consider each of the qualities of developmental relationships listed above, in what ways have you seen these qualities demonstrated in mentoring? What are the implications for match support?

Wrap Up:

The arrest of a parent or guardian, and subsequent incarceration of that parent, causes many disturbances in children's lives including economic hardship, unstable housing, and feelings of shame and anger. Children and youth who have experienced the pain of losing a parent to imprisonment often grow up having to combat physical and emotional battles which can stall or delay their development. Match support should be aware of the circumstances facing each of the families including whether or not the child is aware of the incarceration. They will need to be

¹⁷ Search Institute: Discovering what kids need to succeed. Developmental Relationships. <http://www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-relationships>

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

knowledgeable about resources and services in the community that could help families to cope with the stressors they may face. It is important that a mentor understand some of the circumstances that the child they mentor might encounter and how their behavior could indicate the impact. Mentors need to understand their role as the nurturer of a positive relationship with the child. Mentors should also be aware of the role of match support staff in connecting and providing additional support to the family through referrals and monthly contacts.

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

Handout 1A: Facts About Incarceration

Some Facts About the Impact of Parental Incarceration on Youth

The arrest of a parent or guardian, and subsequent incarceration of that parent, causes many disturbances in children's lives. Below are some facts to help you better understand what could be involved in this experience. Remember that each person will have a unique situation and not all of these circumstances will necessarily apply to the child you mentor.

- A recent study indicates that over 5 million children having experienced parental incarceration, a sharp increase from earlier numbers suggesting 1.7 million.
- Over half of children with an incarcerated parent are under the age of 10. Almost one quarter of these children are aged four or younger. More than a third of these children will reach the age of 18 while their parent remains incarcerated.
- Increasingly, incarcerated parents are being held in facilities far from home. The majority of children of incarcerated parents (over 60%) live between 101-500 miles away from their parent—this indicates that these children are unable to maintain a close parent/child relationship through regular visitation.
- Children of incarcerated parents often lose contact with their parent and may have few or no visits. Over half (59%) of parents in a state correctional facility and 45% of parents in a federal correctional facility reported never having had a personal visit from their child(ren).
- Increasing incarceration of women means that more mothers are incarcerated than ever before—the number of children with a mother in prison has more than doubled in the last 20 years. In addition, there is evidence that children whose mothers are incarcerated are much more likely to be living with grandparents or other family members rather than with their father. Incarcerated mothers are five times as likely as men to report having children placed in the foster care system.
- Issues of homelessness, a history of physical or sexual abuse, substance dependence or abuse, poverty, and current medical and mental health disorders are more likely to be reported by incarcerated parents, with those parents serving time in state prison much more likely to report these issues than those in the federal prison system.
- Children of incarcerated parents face social stigma in schools, communities, and from peers. This stigma may manifest itself in bullying, isolation, intimating that the child will also be incarcerated, and expectations of failure. Young children often show signs of “insecure attachments” to parents and caregivers, which can lead to serious mental health consequences. More than half of children with incarcerated parents have had school problems such as poor grades, antisocial and delinquent behavior, and an increased likelihood of developing mental health problems.
- Children of incarcerated parents are often also impacted by stigma (embarrassment and shame), poverty, and a sense of loss, guilt, depression, and trauma.
- A majority of children of incarcerated parents are cared for by relatives. Relative caregivers face obstacles in caring for children of incarcerated parents that are complicated by medical and mental health issues and higher poverty rates. Caring for relative children can lead to or contribute to conflicts within the family, increased stress an obligations, and feelings of guilt, anger and resentment.
- Children on the Outside: Voicing the Pain and Human Costs of Parental Incarceration. (2011). Justice Strategies.

Some Citations and Links to Additional Reading

- Hagen, J and Dinovitzer, R. (1999) Collateral Consequences of Imprisonment for Children, Communities and Prisoners. University of Chicago.
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Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

Washington, DC: The Sentencing

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- Allard, P. and Greene, J. 2011. Justice Strategies. Children on the Outside: Voicing the Pain and Human Costs of Parental Incarceration. COIP-1-13-11.pdf <http://www.justicestrategies.org/sites/default/files/publications/JS->
- Murphey, D and Cooper, PM (October 2015) Parents Behind Bars: What Happens to Their Children? <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-42ParentsBehindBars.pdf>
- Bryce Peterson, Jocelyn Fontaine, Lindsey Cramer, Arielle Reisman, Hilary Cuthrell, Margaret Goff, Evelyn McCoy, and Travis Reginal (2019). Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails: Reducing Barriers for Families while Maximizing Safety and Security, Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100531/model_practices_for_parents_in_prisons_and_jails_0.pdf

Impact of Incarceration on Children and Families

Handout 1B: Visits by Video – Conferencing: Incarcerated Parents and Their Children (Staff Handout)

In over 500 facilities around the country, jail and prison administrators have implemented video conference visitation systems. These video “calls” to inmates have replaced face-to-face visits in at least 95 of these sites and are primarily designed to save taxpayers money while promoting benefits for families who get to “visit” inmates without the associated travel costs, wait times, and other inconveniences.

There are some concerns regarding whether these visits are as beneficial to families and residents as in-person visits. Video does not “feel” as personal and may be confusing for young children. In addition, video visits have an associated cost per minute (.50 - \$1.50 per minute) plus a deposit/other fees to establish the account. Families may be required to book the “visit” 4 hours in advance and inmates are often not given privacy for the video call which can inhibit the connection between children and youth and the incarcerated parent.

The biggest concern regarding video conferencing is that facilities that implement video visits are substantially decreasing or doing away with in-person visits with residents. How does this type of “solution” to the costs associated with prison visitation, increasingly used by private prisons, impact children and families of incarcerated parents?

For more information about visitation and video conferencing, read or listen to the following:

<http://grassrootsleadership.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Video%20Visitation%20%28web%29.pdf>

<http://qz.com/386789/are-video-visits-in-jails-a-smart-innovation-or-yet-another-way-to-exploit-families/>

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/9/video-replaces-in-person-visits-at-prisons.html>

<http://nwpr.org/ost/visit-loved-one-jail-itll-cost-you>