

BEYOND THE BARS:

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

ISSUE 2: ARREST

MYTH OR TRUTH?

Children with arrested parents cannot develop PTSD symptoms.

MYTH!

According to a study conducted in 2010 “...children who witnessed the arrest of someone with whom they lived had approximately a 57% greater likelihood of having elevated PTSD symptoms relative to children who never witnessed an arrest.”¹

70% of children with newly incarcerated parents display emotional or psychological problems such as:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Shame
- Loss of appetite/ digestive issues
- Negative feelings toward authority figures
- Nightmares and flash backs
- Sleep disturbances
- Regression in toileting and language^{2,3}



When law enforcement agencies recognize that “**children love their parents** and that most of these **arrested individuals love their children**, even though they made bad decisions,” they are compelled to implement arrest policies that minimize the child’s trauma. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), makes the following suggestion:

- Collaboration of law enforcement agencies with child care services and other protective services “responsible for safeguarding a child when his or her parent is arrested.” This collaboration should focus on addressing the child’s trauma.⁴

To minimize any trauma a child may face, the Responding to Arrested Caregivers Together (REACT) model suggests:

- Educating key stakeholders about the “many challenges children of arrested caregivers may face”
- “[Modifying] arrest protocol to minimize child traumatic stress”
- Providing information for remaining caregivers and children⁵

ISSUE 2: ARREST

OFFICERS AND POLICYMAKERS

Departments developing an arrest protocol might consider the following questions:

- **Will** post-arrest services be communicated to the family?
- **Who** will inform the family of available post-arrest services?
 - o An officer
 - o A member of a community group
 - o A child welfare worker
- **What** type of support should be offered?
- **When** will post-arrest services be offered to the family?

Do	Don't
Do look for toys or any items that may signal a child in the home.	Don't question the parent in front of the child.
Do , when safe and appropriate to do so, allow the parent to talk to and comfort their child.	Don't handcuff the parent in front of the child, unless it is necessary. ⁴
Do allow the parent to identify a responsible caregiver for their child.	Don't question the child about the parent's activities.
Do run a background check on the responsible caregiver.	Don't ask the child to translate for the parent.

Key Questions: *What is at stake when arresting a parent? Why should all law enforcement agencies establish protocols focused on protecting the child, when arresting parents?*

"We must realize that the impact of our actions as we apply our authority may likely determine how children view officers all their lives." – Chief William Dean.

- Officers should aim to "understand how and when to intervene in all situations involving children."⁶
- Create a protocol that not only protects the child or children involved not only minimizes trauma, but it also builds trust in officers and other authority figures.

¹Phillips, S.D., & Zhao, J. (2010). "The relationship between witnessing arrests and elevated symptoms of posttraumatic stress: Findings from a national study of children involved in the child welfare system."

²Turney, K. (2014). "Stress Proliferation across Generations? Examining the Relationship between Parental Incarceration and Childhood Health."

³Roberts, Y.H., Snyder, F.J., Kaufman, J.S. et al. J. (2014). "Children Exposed to the Arrest of a Family Member: Associations with Mental Health."

⁴International Association of Chiefs of Police (2014). "Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents."

⁵Lang, J. and Bory C. (2012). "A Collaborative Model to Support Children Following a Caregiver's Arrest: Responding to Children of Arrested Caregivers Together (REACT)"

⁶Wyllie, D. (2015). "How cops can improve interactions with kids during parent's arrest." <http://www.policeone.com>.



The **Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Initiative** improves the quality of supports for children with incarcerated parents by informing public policy and practice. These briefs highlight some of our key issues.