

BEYOND THE BARS:

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

ISSUE 1: MAINTAINING CONTACT

MYTH OR TRUTH?

Children with incarcerated parents are better off not having contact with their incarcerated parent.

MYTH!

Most research studies state that maintaining regular contact with an incarcerated parent:

- Increases child's self esteem
- Helps child cope with separation
- Promotes healthy brain development in children¹

WHY CONTACT MATTERS

- Fostering bonds with an incarcerated parent lessens risk of depression and anxiety and improves academic achievement.
- When an infant or toddler forms a bond with a primary caregiver, the risk of social, emotional, and health issues decrease.
- Direct contact visits — where touch is honored — promote healthy parent-child attachment, necessary to child development.



MEET NISHKA

Nishka is a 21-year-old senior at CCSU studying Criminology and Spanish. When Nishka graduates college she hopes to work in youth services. Nishka's dad was incarcerated for nine years.

INTERVIEW WITH NISHKA

Q: Which one of your parents has been incarcerated?

A: Dad.

Q: How often did you communicate with your parent?

A: Every two weeks we had phone calls and we visited about five times a year. We also wrote letters but I don't really remember the letters. I didn't really like the letters. When my dad wrote letters they would be about three pages and say the same thing: apologizing. It got overwhelming.

Q: Was visiting important to you? Why?

A: Because I could actually touch my dad and hug him. When talking in person you can express yourself more and it's totally different from talking on the phone or writing a letter. When we'd go visit I would try to look really pretty, my mom would do my hair the night before and I would get all dressed up. We would take pictures during visits and then I really looked forward to receiving it in the mail a few weeks later. Not sure if Dad had to pay for the photos or earn them in some way.

Did you know...?

- 71% of infants who lived with their mothers in a prison nursery developed secure attachment.²
- In a study, parental incarceration was *independently* associated with learning disabilities, developmental delays, and speech/language problems.
- 1 in 28 children in the US has a parent incarcerated
- In June, 2016, 18,034 children were reported as dependents by incarcerated people.

¹Reckman, L., & Rothstein, D. (2012). "A Voice for the Young Child with an Incarcerated Parent." Children's Rights Litigation.

²Elmalak, Seham. (2015) Babies Behind Bars: An Evaluation of Prison Nurseries in American Female Prisons and Their Potential Constitutional Challenges.



The **Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Initiative** is committed to improving the quality of supports for children with incarcerated parents by using the various data and knowledge it gains to inform public policy and practice. These issue briefs highlight some of our areas of interest.

Thank you for reading this issue brief. To learn more, please visit our website at www.CTCIP.org. If you would like to receive emails about CIP-related legislation in the future, please email us at ctcip@ccu.edu.