

BEYOND THE BARS:

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

ISSUE 1: MAINTAINING CONTACT

FACT OR FALLACY?

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

FALLACY!

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

- Increases child's self esteem
- Helps child to better cope with separation from their parent
- Promotes healthy brain development in children, leading to "the ability...to achieve self-control"¹

- Failure to continually foster bonds with an incarcerated parent heightens risk of depression and anxiety as well as hinders academic achievement.
- When an infant or toddler experiences separation from a primary caregiver, the risk of social, emotional, and health issues increase.
- Direct contact visits — where touch is honored — promotes 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.

INTERVIEW WITH NISHKA

Q: Which one of your parents has been incarcerated?

A: Dad.

Q: How long was his incarceration?

A: Nine years.

Q: Do you have brothers or sisters? If so, how was your relationship with them or other family members affected by their incarceration?

A: My older brother took on a father role and he became really overprotective, which would cause conflict. Especially in terms of dating.

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.

Did you know...?

According to a study conducted at the Bedford Hills Prison in New York, "71% of infants who lived with their mothers in a prison nursery developed secure attachment."

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.

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

TO LEARN MORE...

Adalist-Estrin, A. "Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective." Children of Prisoners Library via fcnetwork.org.

Christian, S. "Children of Incarcerated Parents." National Conference of State Legislatures via ncsf.org.

Diamond, S. "Prison Nursery Programs: Literature Review and Fact Sheet for CT" via cga.ct.gov.

Reckman, L. & Rothstein, D. "A Voice for the Young Child with an Incarcerated Parent." Children's Rights Litigation via americanbar.org