

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!

Research indicates that maintaining regular contact with an incarcerated parent:

- Reduces potentially damaging effects of separation,
- Promotes permanency, and
- Promotes healthy brain development in children.¹

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.²
- Direct contact visits — where touch is honored — promote healthy parent-child attachment, necessary to child development.¹



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.

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.

INTERVIEW WITH NISHKA

Q: How often did you communicate with your dad?

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

Q: Why was visiting important to you?

A: *Because I could actually touch my dad and hug him. When talking in person you can express yourself more and it's totally*

Did you know...?

- 71% of infants who lived with their mothers in a prison nursery developed secure attachment.²
- Parental incarceration is *independently* associated with learning disabilities, developmental delays, and speech/language problems.³
- 1 in 28 children in the US has a parent incarcerated.⁴
- 18,034 dependents in CT had at least 1 incarcerated caregiver in June 2016.⁵

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."

³Turney, K. (2014). "Stress Proliferation across Generations? Examining the Relationship between Parental Incarceration and Childhood Health."

⁴The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010). "Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility."

⁵Connecticut Department of Corrections. (2016)



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.