

**FATHERS IN PRISON
PARENT EDUCATION RESOURCE MANUAL**

**NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON CHILD
ABUSE AND NEGLECT INFORMATION**

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FATHERS IN PRISON

PARENT EDUCATION RESOURCE MANUAL

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Introduction

This manual is designed as a guide for volunteer parent education instructors who may have had no previous experience with groups in prison. The parenting course, "Fathers in Prison: Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships," and other materials included here are a resource for volunteers who work with men in prison to help them maintain positive relationships or improve the quality of their relationships with their children. The course was initially developed more than ten years ago as a series of parenting seminars at the Tennessee State Penitentiary, Nashville, Tennessee. Since then the course has been taught in diverse prison settings including maximum security prisons and work release centers. Although the course focuses on fathers in prison, the content has been adapted for use in women's prisons as well.

The unique experiences of fathers who are in prison as they struggle not only to maintain contact with their family and children but also to redefine parenting roles and responsibilities, given their environment and the limitations imposed by it, serves as the course focus. The course consists of five weekly units. Each weekly unit lists objectives, teaching resources, and suggested topics and teaching methods. Participant exercises, out-of-class assignments and handouts are also provided.

Since the literacy level of participants can be expected to vary, all written assignments are designed so that individuals who have marginal reading and writing skills can participate.

The content of each unit builds on the preceding week's content but can be presented as a complete unit of learning. Some of the benefits of the course are lost, however, if the group composition changes each week. Therefore, it is important that a specific group enroll for the entire six weeks. Realistically, the prison environment is such that it may be difficult for even a highly motivated man to arrange to be at each session. During course planning with prison officials and prisoner representatives, it is important for the volunteer to stress the need for continuity and to obtain commitments for ongoing involvement.

In addition to giving information about parenting, a most important role of the volunteer is to facilitate communication and group interaction and to provide a learning environment that incorporates the personal experiences of the men who participate in the course. It will be the responsibility of the volunteer to respond to the individual needs of participants and to adapt the course and assignments as necessary.

Volunteer Parent Education Instructors in Prison

Persons who volunteer to provide parent education in prison will find the setting very different from other settings where they may have volunteered. Volunteers in prison find that they must learn not only the formal policies of the Department of Correction but must also become familiar with the informal operating rules and procedures that exist in a specific prison. Knowledge of both the formal policies and informal practices of the institution is critical to establishing and maintaining a successful family service program. Even though you may have been approved as a volunteer and provided an orientation to the prison, there is still much to learn about the informal policies. These informal policies may pose the greatest barrier to your success.

Fulfilling your commitment to provide family support services to prisoners and their families will be frustrating and difficult in an institution that lends little encouragement or support to maintaining family contact. The institution's focus on security does not contribute to the maintenance of family contact or to innovative, family support services. Many prison administrators are tolerant, however, of volunteers who provide services that are not a threat to security, support overall treatment goals, and do not disrupt institutional routine.

Volunteers must understand that the prison administration must be included in the planning, implementation and ongoing operation of any family services and programs. Despite what initially may appear to be

resistance on the part of the prison's administration, an appropriate collaboration with key administrators is essential to the formation of any inmate program and/or service within a prison setting. One must also know how much involvement by the administration is needed to operate family support services without jeopardizing the degree of prisoner participation desired.

Myths and Stereotypes

Individuals and organizations routinely volunteering in prison often do so with little awareness of the myths about and stereotypes held about prisons, prisoners and the families of prisoners. Many of these stereotypes are inadvertently perpetuated by volunteers and/or by the formal prison orientations. Much emphasis is placed on the negative characterization of "the prisoner" as though all prisoners are alike. Little effort is made to delineate factors in the prison environment and how these factors influence the behavior of prisoners and the personnel working in the prison.

Fathers in Prison
Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships
Course Description and Rationale

In a society in which the role of father is all too frequently perceived as primarily that of "economic provider," it becomes too disheartening for some men to maintain a parental role once in prison. Many imprisoned fathers relinquish all parenting responsibilities simply because they are not able to understand the value of other aspects of parenting or lack the skill necessary to overcome the barriers to parenting imposed by incarceration. A father can be a positive and significant influence in his child's life, however, despite the restrictions and limitations imposed by prison.

The purpose of this course is to help fathers who are in prison understand the importance of maintaining meaningful interactions with their children and learn ways to effectively perform certain parental responsibilities. Given the large number of African American males in prison, the course focuses on African American family structures, life styles and culture.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, it is expected that participants will

- (1) understand the importance of maintaining meaningful contact with their children;

- (2) understand and value the full range of responsibilities of a father with emphasis on how to overcome some of the difficulties encountered by African American males in prison;
- (3) become more effective at meeting the developmental needs of their children; and
- (4) demonstrate knowledge of ways to be an ongoing positive influence in their children's lives despite separation from them.

Course Outline

Week one: Introduction/Course Overview

- a.) Review of course outline
- b.) Volunteer's course expectations
- c.) Participants' course expectations
- d.) Fathers introductions
- e.) How Fathers Parent

Week two: How to Foster Your Child's Growth and Development

- a.) Being able to recognize your child's greatest needs at various stages of development
- b.) Ways you can foster your child's development by understanding more about children's individual needs
- c.) Why your involvement is important as a positive influence in your child's life

Week three: Understanding Your Child's Reaction to Being Separated from You

- a.) How children react to separation and loss
- b.) Your child's reactions to being separated from you
- c.) Lessening the negative impact of parent-child separation

Week four: Communicating with your child more effectively while separated

- a.) The importance of effective communication with children
- b.) Barriers to effective communication with children
- c.) Learning to communicate with your child's caregiver about your child is important

Week five: Barriers for African American Father in Prison

- a.) Problems unique to African American fathers
- b.) Planning to reunite with families and children following release
- c.) Maintain meaningful relationships with children

**FATHERS IN PRISON
MAINTAINING PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Week One

Course Overview and Introductions

The major purpose of the first session is to introduce participants to the course content and format. The overview should involve a discussion of the course expectations with the volunteer instructor engaging the participants in exploring their expectations and related areas of interest. This first session is also designed to engage the participants in a discussion of their families — What their families were like before and how they have changed because of the participant's absence.

I. Objectives

Participants will

- (A) identify what they hope to gain from the course
- (B) describe how being in prison has altered their role as parent
- (C) describe their family and changes that have occurred in their families' lives because of their absence
- (D) Describe their family and past experiences with parenting

II. Materials and Exercises

Handouts:

Course outline

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Fathers in Prison:

Not Just Convicts." Nurturing Today X, 1, pp. 40-41.

Exercises:

1. "Participant Introductions"
2. "How Fathers Parent"

Instructor's Resource:

"Family Styles"

III. Teaching Methods and Topics

(A) Introduce self to group and review procedure for conducting class. Items to cover include:

1. Time for meeting each week
2. Time for breaks if needed
3. Confidentiality
4. Importance of participation
5. Importance of attending each session

(B) Distribute and discuss course outline and encourage discussion of related areas of interest and expectations.

(C) Conduct Exercise 1 "Participant Introductions" and then, if time permits, Exercise 2 "How Fathers Parent."

The purpose of these exercises is to have participants reveal their own assessment of what constituted family for them and how they acted in the parenting role before prison, and what changes occurred following prison that altered that role. Encourage participants to identify specific barriers to fulfillment of their role as parent in preparation for a later discussion of how these barriers might be removed.

(D) Allow time to summarize week one and to make assignments for week two. If participants are not able to start or finish the exercise, use it as beginning exercise for week two.

Exercise 1

Participant Introductions

Ask each participant to introduce himself by stating his name and the names and ages of his children and by giving one statement that best describes his family at the time he came into prison, (ex., Even though we lived separately we had every Sunday together.)

Encourage each participant to describe his family situation and the relationship with his child(ren). The responses may vary greatly as the family styles of the men will vary. Relationships with children and the children's primary caretakers and ways participants carried out their parenting role will vary within the group. They may also be very different from parenting relationships and roles in traditional, two-parent, middle class families.

At the conclusion of this exercise, tally the number of children and the age range of children. This gives the instructor and the group of participants an idea of the ages of children of the fathers in the course. The age range of children will be a factor in the group's interest in parenting issues. Just as other parents, prisoners who are fathers of pre-schoolers or young school age children have parenting issues that differ from fathers whose children are teenagers.

Exercise 2

How Fathers Parent

The focus of this exercise is family life styles. Some participants will have come from traditional families and may still be actively involved with their family in that their wife and children routinely visit. Other participants, however, are likely to have family relationships that are not at all traditional. Participants' relationships and involvement with the child's mother may vary. The purpose of this discussion is to have participants describe their relationship with their child prior to their imprisonment and to focus on the strengths of that relationship.

Ask each participant to think about specific contributions he made toward his child's development at various stages. Encourage everyone to make a statement. During the discussion, write the statements on a chalk board or newsprint. Entitle the list, "How Fathers Parent."

Week Two

How to Foster Your Child's Growth and Development

The purpose of this week's session is to have participants become familiar with their children's developmental needs at various stages of development and ways they can foster their child's growth and development while still in prison.

The major emphasis is on how they might make use of child development concepts and to identify specific ways to foster their child's growth and development. Participants should be encouraged to focus on the needs of their children. It is also important to encourage participants to focus on ways to be positive influences in their child's life. Even though they are in prison it is important that they know that they can be an important influence in their child's life.

I. Objectives

Participants will

- (A) be able to describe some of their child's greatest needs at their current stage of development.
- (B) be able to identify specific ways of fostering their child's growth and development despite being in prison.
- (C) understand what other influences there are in their child's life and begin to encourage the positive and discourage the negative influences, when possible.

II. Materials and Exercises

Handouts:

"Fostering your Child's Development Worksheet"

Exercises:

3. "Identifying Children's Needs"

4. "Influencing your child's growth and development"

Instructor's Resource:

"Some Common Principles of Growth & Development"

III. Teaching Methods and Topics

- (A) Review the major points emphasized the previous week. Allow time for participants to ask questions about last week's content to clear up any confusion or add comments, etc.
- (B) Begin with the introduction of some basic principles of human growth and development. These are very basic and are designed to give participants some general information. The volunteer may choose to hand out a developmental milestone chart that gives the age children should accomplish certain tasks. These type charts are helpful in clarifying age appropriate behavior but are often written so that they are very difficult to understand as the language is technical and can be understood only if the person has excellent reading skills. Allow time for discussion following review of each basic principle.

- (C) Conduct Exercise 3 "Identifying Children's Needs" and then Exercise 4 "Influencing Your Child's Development"
- (D) Distribute the Child Development Worksheet and read instructions. Participants should understand this is a tool for them to make notes of their activities or what they have done to foster their child's development.

Exercise 3

Identifying Children's Needs

Each of the participants should get into a small group with other fathers of similar age children using the age ranges 0-6; 6-12; 12-16 and 16 and above.

These small groups will answer the following questions:

- (1) What is your child's greatest interest at this age?
exp. - A. likes to play ball
B. enjoys going to the movies
C. runs and plays
- (2) What do you think are your child's greatest needs at this age?
exp. - A. infants need protection and
B. teens need to understand about human sexuality and
C. six year olds needs to know about school
- (3) What are likely to be the greatest influences in your child's life at this age?
exp. - A. teacher becomes influential in 6 year olds life
B. T.V. may be greatest influence - little league coach or high school football coach may be very influential in 10 year old's life
C. gang leader may also be influential in 13 year old males life

Small groups will be allowed ample time to discuss their answers. Ask each group to identify one person to record group notes.

After 30 minutes or less, reconvene the entire group to discuss the findings of each small group. If the class has a representative number of parents for the stages of development the discussion should cover the entire span of child development. If a period is not covered, have participants cover during the full group discussion.

As each small group reports, the volunteer should write ideas on chalk board using the following headings - Age range - interest - needs - influential persons. List interests and needs that are accurate as well as inaccurate and clarify during the discussion. Some participants may get confused about age-appropriate behavior, especially for younger children.

Exercise 4

Influencing your child's growth and development

Ask each participant to develop a clear written, statement in behavioral terms that identifies one thing he can do over the next three months to begin to positively influence his child's growth and development.

Share the list below as examples. Encourage participants to decide what they would like to do and write each on the chalk board as they are called out.

Examples -

1. I will write my son about his football team and each week I will write and encourage him to respond by letting me know how he and the team are doing.
2. I will spend at least 1/2 of each visitation playing games with my daughter and I will select games to help improve her reading skills.
3. I will ask my son to bring his homework during visitation each week and we will spend at least 1/2 of the period going over subject he has difficulty with.
4. I will write my baby's mother each week to inquire about his progress and I will ask her to send a short note about specifics of what s/he did each week.
5. I will write a letter each week to my daughter and I will mail it to my mother and ask her to call my daughter and read it.

Fostering Your Child's Development

WORKSHEET

This is an activity that only begins here today. It is hoped that you will continue to use these worksheets with your child. Take a few minutes one evening this week, and write in additional needs, skills, areas of encouragement, and specific things you can do to foster your child's growth.

Discuss how both of you and your child's caregiver can help your child develop and feel good about him/herself. (A separate set of worksheets can be used for each child.)

Discuss how you can be influential in rearing your child.

The few minutes you take can make a positive, healthy difference. Bring this worksheet to class each week as you may want to share with others in the class or should you feel discouraged bring work.

A. My child's PRIMARY NEEDS at this time;	SPECIFIC THINGS I CAN DO FOR MY CHILD WHICH WILL CULTIVATE, DEVELOP, AND FOSTER HIS/HER GROWTH:
Ex. My 10 yr. old son misses me and needs more attention from me.	Ex. I will spend time alone during each visit - to allow time to talk about his drawing.
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

B. My child's greatest interest at this age:

Ex. He likes to draw and he is good.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Things to help develop these interest:

Ex. In my conversation and letters I will ask him to draw pictures for me.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Person or persons most influential

Ex. No one other than mother who is very busy.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Who are others who might become positive influence, and specific things I can do to encourage involvement:

Ex. Talk to his mother and son about going to see art teacher at community center. I will get information about free lessons.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

D. My progress

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

My lack of progress

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Some Basic Principles of Growth and Development

I. Basic Principles (Put on flipchart)

1. Growth occurs in a pattern in that certain physical changes occur at about same age for all children
2. Each child, however, is an individual. Some mature or accomplish certain task earlier and some later than others:

*Ask for examples:

- A. Some infants begin walking at 8 months while other may not walk til 15 months of age.

3. Skills develop in a sequential order in that a child must be able to perform one task before moving onto another.

*Ask for examples:

- A. Must be able to roll over and sit up before standing

4. Stimulation can mean difference in rate of development.

*Ask for examples:

- A. Talking to children promotes language.

5. Parents need to be aware of development to promote growth and development.

6. Many factors promote or hinder growth and development

7. Materials and activities help promote growth and development and parents need to know which to use.

8. To know what a child can and cannot do at a certain age is a safety factor as well.

Week Three

Understanding Your Child's Reaction to Being Separated From You

The purpose of this session is to increase participants knowledge of how children react to being separated from parents. As participants begin to explore some of the effects of separation, they will be introduced to ways of minimizing the child's reaction to the loss of a father.

The participants will come from many different family styles and the degree of attachment between them and their children will vary. Some fathers will have left close knit families where they carried out traditional roles of father and husband. Other fathers may have long ago terminated their relationship with the mother of their children but maintained a tie with their child through visits and phone calls.

I. Objectives

Participants will

- (A) increase their understanding of children's reaction to being separated from parents.
- (B) explore how their children might feel about their absence.
- (C) increase their understanding of ways to minimize some of the negative effects of children's feelings of separation and loss.

II. Material and Exercises

Handouts:

"Reactions to Separation and Loss"

"Preventing or Handling Negative Reactions to
Separation"

Exercises:

5. "Reactions to Separation and Loss"

6. "How Does Your Child React to Being Separated from You?"

7. "Suggestions for Helping Children Feel Better About
Being Separated"

Instructor's Resources:

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Family Ties During Imprisonment:
Important to Whom and for What?" Journal of Sociology and
Social Welfare, March 1991.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Men in Prison: Family
Characteristics and Parenting Views." Journal of Offender
Counseling, Services & Rehabilitation, Vol. 14(1) 1989.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. Families and Children: A Study of
Men in Prison. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of
Social Work.

Lanier, Jr., C.S. "Dimensions of Father-Child Interaction in a
New York State Prison Population." Journal of Offender
Rehabilitation, Vol. 16(3-4) 1991.

III. Teaching Methods and Topics

- (A) Provide brief review of major points from preceding session and describe special emphases for this week. A statement such as the following is a helpful way to introduce this week's content.

That your children are no longer able to see you or interact with you may have a profound impact on them psychologically. How children are likely to feel and react is the subject of this session. The session will also focus on what you need to do to help reduce the longterm psychological effects.

- (B) Conduct Exercise 5 "Reactions to Separation and Loss", Exercise 6 "How Does Your Child React to Being Separated from You?", and Exercise 7 "Suggestions for Helping Children Feel Better About Being Separated"
- (C) Summarize purpose and objectives. Ask for final questions before closing. Encourage participants to return next week with any new questions.
- (D) Ask participants to review and/or develop a specific plan for being helpful with adverse effects of separation -- Each participant should have a general idea about what he wants to do. Some time should be given to the first of the next session so these can be discussed.

Exercise 5

Reactions to Separation and Loss

Pass out the handout entitled "Reactions to Separation and Loss." Provide an overview of the major points and then allow time for discussion. The following are questions to guide the discussion.

- (1) As a young child, how does it feel to be separated from your parents? How do you identify specific feelings?
- (2) Do babies react to being away from their parents and, if so, how do they react?
- (3) Have you seen a child react to being separated from his or her parents? How did he or she behave and what were the circumstances?
- (4) What are some situations that separate children and parents?
- (5) Do older children react differently to separation than younger children?
- (6) How do parents know when a child is reacting to the loss of a parent?
- (7) Does this behavior cease after a period of time?

Exercise 6*

How Does Your Child React to Being Separated from You?

Once participants have completed discussion of reactions to separation, pass the list of feeling words, ask each participant to identify how his child has reacted to being separated from him. Fathers who have been in prison for a long period of time may note that over time their child may have reacted differently. Some participants may deny knowing and some may not know as their interactions with their child has been so limited.

This exercise may generate in some participants feelings about losses they have experienced in the past. In fact they may find it difficult to focus on their children's feelings, choosing instead to describe feelings about their separation and loss. Other participants may find this exercise difficult because they have not been in contact with their feelings about the many losses they have experienced since coming to prison and they do not feel safe appearing vulnerable even in this environment.

*This exercise may not be necessary if in prior exercises participants are comfortable with describing on their own how their children reacted.

Exercise 7

Suggestions for Helping Children Feel Better About Being Separated

Ask the participants to

- (1) think about two things they would like to be able to do to help their child overcome some of the effects of separation;
- (2) identify barriers, if any, to successfully doing (1) and one or more ways to overcome those barriers.

Once each participant talks about what, if anything, he would like to do, have the group discuss the barriers and ways to overcome them. There may be numerous legal and social barriers. The volunteer should, nevertheless, engage participants in ways to overcome these barriers. Some possible barriers and solutions should be written on newsprint and saved for ongoing discussion as time may not permit detailed discussion of each barrier.

Reactions to Separation and Loss

There are many problems experienced by children that interfere with growth and development. Some of these disturbances are psychological while others are physical and are believed to be directly related to being separated from parents abruptly. Some of the psychological reactions are anger, aggression, fear, anxiety, crying, depression, withdrawal, rebellion, lying and stealing and failing in School. Some Physical reactions are complaints of being ill, may become ill, complains of headache; various physical symptoms:

wetting the bed;

if recently toilet trained, may need diapers again;

loss of appetite or over eating;

thumbsucking

excessive masturbation

The above is a list of some of the ways children react but there may be many other reactions. Some of these reactions begin immediately following the separation but others may not appear for months or even years later.

Babies' and young children's reactions are easier to see because they cry, scream and yell when they are separated from their parents. Older children are often quiet and do not express their feelings; this does not mean they are not feeling badly.

Children react to being separated from parents because they are emotionally attached (bonded) to them. Babies react most to being separated from the person who feeds, changes and holds them everyday. Older children also feel sad and lonely if the parent who cares for them for any reason goes away and does not return.

Even if they see you only once or twice each week they will be disappointed and sad if you do not show up. Most children know and love their fathers and even if they live in separate places they look forward to seeing their father at the usual time. The time spent with one's father is important in that as children get older they think about what it was like before and how I wish I could see my father.

If parents go away suddenly and do not return children go through a range of feelings similar to what one feels at the death of some one they love. The Stages are as follows:

Stage 1. Shock and denial - Reacts little and may refuse to believe what has happened. Gives the appearance of accepting what has happened.

Stage 2. Protest and anger - these feelings take over during time. The child feels anger, rebellion and anxiety.

Stage 3. Despair - The feeling of not being able to change the situation. The child may be depressed, withdrawn and accepts blame for what has happened. Convinces self he caused separation.

Stage 4. Acceptance - Begins to accept fact that parent not returning immediately and begins to behave normally again. Plays, eats and interacts again but may be different than before.

Different children react differently and the age and specifics of the situation will make a difference. If, for example, an older child suspects friends and teachers knew about his or her situation, s/he may react by refusing to go to school or by failing even though s/he had previously been successful at school. Fighting and attacking classmates who tease or call them names because of a father's imprisonment are common for boys as a way of expressing anger.

Preventing or Handling Children's Reactions to Separation From You

To prevent children's negative reactions to separation from parents, certain things can be done by an imprisoned father. Even though you may have been in prison for some period of time, it is never too late to help relieve the negative feelings. The following are helpful suggestions for you and your child's mother or other caregiver.

- (1) Let the child know where you are. Even a telephone call from prison is better than having the child guess why you are not there or hear it from someone else.
- (2) Do not lie. Saying you will be home "Soon" when you know you are facing a five-year sentence is not reassuring. In fact, it may cause more hurt over time.
- (3) Reassure the child that you are well. Describe and tell a young child about your daily activities.
- (4) Apologize - Tell the child you are sorry for creating a situation that makes it impossible for the two of you to be together.
- (5) Let the child know of changes that occur in the length of time you will be in prison or when you have moved.

- (6) Listen! - You do not have to burden a young child with the details of your charges, but listen and answer questions as they arise again. Be Honest!
- (7) Do not criticize your child's present caretaker, but listen if the child expresses problems or voices being mistreated when living with non-relatives or in institutional care.
- (8) If the child's mother or other caretaker insists upon lying about where you are, try to work this out with the caretaker by sharing material about the harmful effects of such stories. Do this before you tell the child that you are in prison.
- (9) If you are denied access to your child, write to your mother, sister, or other relative and ask that person's assistance in reassuring your child of why you are absent.
- (10) Tell the child you love him or her and want to see him/her. This may be awkward and seem unnecessary given all the other problems in your life, but it can be very reassuring for your child.

Week Four

Communicating With Your Child While Separated

The purpose of this session is to have participants understand the importance of effective communication with their children. The focus is on establishing and maintaining communication with one's children while overcoming barriers to communication imposed by prison. The role of children's custodial parents and other caregivers in the communication process is also reviewed.

I. Objectives

Participants will

- (A) describe ways to communicate effectively with their children during periods of separation.
- (B) understand the importance of communicating with a child's caregiver who may be the key to maintaining a relationship with the child.

II. Materials and Activities

Handouts:

"How Do I Communicate with My Child?"

Facilitating Communication with your Child: The Role of
Children's Caretakers

Exercises:

- 8. "Improving Communication with Children"
- 9. "Communicating with Children's Caretakers"

Instructor's Resources:

Hairston, Creasie Finney and Clifford Louis Taylor. Visiting with Family and Friends. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work, 1991.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Mothers in Jail: Parent-Child Separation and Jail Visitation." AFFILIA, Vol. 6 No. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 9-27.

Butterworth, Oliver. A Visit to the Big House. Families in Crisis, Inc. and Junior League of Hartford, 1987.

III. Teaching Methods and Topics

- (A) Review the major points emphasized the previous week. There should be time allowed for participants to ask questions about last week's content to clear up any confusion or add comments, etc.
- (B) Summarize the basic information on communication using the handout on communication to focus the discussion. In addition to contact via telephone calls and visits there are other forms of communication participants should consider. Audio and video tapes are convenient methods for communicating in prisons which permit men to receive and send them. Newspaper articles and cards with written messages are also excellent methods of keeping contact with children and sharing news and views.

Ask the group for their answers and thoughts to stimulate discussion. Even though the volunteer is a primary resource, the participants are a valuable resource as their life experiences as parents qualify them to answer their own questions or to generate discussion that ultimately leads to answers. This is one of the benefits of this course.

- (C) Conduct Exercise 8, "Improving Communication with Children" and Exercise 9 "Communicating with Children's Caretakers."

Exercise 8

Improving Communication with Children

The purpose of this exercise is to have participants identify and describe ways they can improve communication with their children. Begin by having each participant give one statement that begins "Since coming to prison I have trouble communicating with my child because _____." List each statement on chalk board or news print. Some of the responses will identify lack of access; others will identify the prison environment as a factor while some fathers will simply identify the problem as one of not knowing what to say. It is fairly common for fathers in prison to express not knowing what to say or not knowing how to talk to their children. The discussion should be directed toward helping participants understand these different problems with communication as barriers to effective communication. Have them classify the barriers and begin to develop statements about how to overcome these.

How Do I Communicate With My Child?

1. In the course of a month how much communication do you have with your child?

Frequently (every week) _____ Infrequent (once a month) _____
None _____

2. How does this take place?

During visits _____ Letters _____ Phone calls _____
Tapes _____ Other _____

3. Would you like to have more communication with your child?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Do you know what to say to your children when talking on the phone or when you write?

Yes _____ No _____ I often have difficulty _____

5. I don't have children and I would know how to talk to children.

Yes? _____ No? _____

6. Do you think written communication is an important way of keeping up with your child's progress?

Yes _____ No _____

7. Who are some other people you communicate with about your child?

Child's mother Minister of Church Other
Teacher Coach

8. In what areas related to communication do you want improvement?

Describe.

Exercise 9

Communicating with Children's Caretakers

The purpose of this exercise is to promote discussion about communication problems with caretakers. The primary caretaker's attitude about the father in prison may become a major barrier to communication. The volunteer will hand out a list of typical responses by caretakers. These are generally negative responses to requests by fathers in prison for the caretaker to bring a child for a visit or to receive phone calls from the father.

Participants should discuss how they would successfully respond to each. Ideally, role playing the situation would be the most effective method; however, men may find role playing too difficult. Asking for volunteers to role play some of the situations may produce some participants willing to do so. If participants have the opportunity to role play any of the situations it give them the chance to observe some flaws in communication and how to effectively deal with these.

Facilitating Communications With Your Children:

The Role of Children's Caretakers

1. You make a phone call to your daughter's mother about a visit on Sunday. She has been visiting regularly but now tells you, "I have someone else I am seeing, I still care about you and I want Judith (daughter) to still know you as her father but it is over for us."
2. This is only your second phone call since being in prison and your wife tells you she is "so pissed off" with you and it is "all your fault your son is so upset and failing in school."
3. Your wife has been coming to visit for three months but never brings the children nor does she talk about them except when you ask specific questions.
4. Your son's mother has just gotten involved with some other man who is very jealous. She doesn't mind but he is always upset when she accepts calls from you! She has been trying to deal with the situation but something must be done. She asks you to make other plans.
5. Your sister has been bringing your children to visit but at the time of the last visit she tells you of the problems she has had getting the children's mother to agree to let them come. It gets increasingly difficult with each visit. She has a verbal fight with her each week and is beginning to believe it is not worth the effort.

Week Five

Barriers for the African American Father in Prison

The purpose of this session is to have participants focus on the problems unique to African American fathers in prison and following their release.

I. Objectives

Participants will

- A. identify problems they consider to be unique to African American fathers in prison.
- B. identify and describe potential problems in reuniting with families and children following release from prison.
- C. identify ways African American fathers can maintain meaningful relationships with their children throughout incarceration.

II. Materials and Exercises

- A. Handout:

"African American Fathers in Prison"

Exercise:

10. "Experiences of African American Fathers in Prison"

III. Teaching Methods and Topics

- (A) Review the major points emphasized the previous week.

- (B) Conduct Exercise 10 "Experiences of African American Fathers in Prison."
- (C) Summarize major points covered in course and encourage participants to continue to use knowledge and understandings obtained from the course.
- (D) Distribute course evaluations and announce plans for awarding certificates.

Exercise 10

"Experiences of African American Fathers in Prison"

The purpose of this exercise is to have participants begin to focus on the uniqueness of their situation as African American fathers in prison and how they might plan to solve some of the difficulties they encounter now and anticipate following their release from prison. Distribute handout and ask participants to respond in writing to the following: (1) List and be prepared to discuss three areas of difficulty they encounter as African American fathers in prison that other fathers do not experience, (2) what are the areas of greatest difficulty related to parenting you might experience upon your release, (3) how do you plan to address these problems now and in the future as you are released, and (4) each participant will be asked to seriously consider and list the problems your family and children encounter because you are in prison.

Participants will need ample time to read and respond to each question. The volunteer will need to read the questions and give each participant a copy of the questions in writing.

Another variation of this exercise is to have question #4 prepared as a homework assignment so they might get family members to assist them with the answers to the final part (#4) of this exercise. If a greater portion of the class have contact with families and receive frequent visitation it is possible for participants to engage family members in this exercise by

having them obtain responses of family members to include children at the time of a weekly visit, by phone, or by mail.

Planning will be required to carry out the exercise in this manner. It is well worth the effort, however, if family members and children of most of the participants are accessible. The kind of difficulty encountered during the imprisonment is often perceived very differently by the fathers, partners and children. This exercise becomes an opportunity to voice the differences and clarify some of the feelings each have about how they are personally affected by this experience.

Overall, by focusing on the uniqueness of this experience for African American males it allows an opportunity for them to explore common barriers and develop common strategy for overcoming the range of difficulties likely to impact their ability to parent now, in the past, as well as the future.

Men are prepared for release from prison by engaging in a number of pre-release activities none of which are designed to prepare for reintegration into a family or resuming additional responsibilities for children. Generally it is assumed this will be an easy process when in fact it may be very problematic.

Once each participant has had time to develop his list, the volunteer instructor should be prepared to lead the discussion. Have participant focus on (1) commonality of experiences that emerge and (2) how they might develop common strategy as parents to overcome some of the difficulty. Ask for practical and concrete suggestions for ways of joining together as parents to continue their efforts to improve following this course and even following their release.

African American Fathers in Prison

- (1) List and be prepared to discuss three areas of difficulty you have as African American fathers in prison that other fathers may not experience.

- (2) What are the areas of difficulty related to parenting you might experience upon your release?

- (3) How do you plan to address these problems now and in the future as you are released?

- (4) List the problems your family and children have encountered because you are in prison.

Note: You may ask your family and children to help you with this exercise by having each family member make a list in response to this question. Include even the youngest child's responses. Each member of the family should do his or her list separately.

Teaching Resources

The following books and articles are recommended readings for volunteer instructors to broaden their knowledge of parenting in African American families and prisoner-family relationships.

Butterworth, Oliver. A Visit to the Big House. Families in Crisis, Inc. and Junior League of Hartford, 1987.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Fathers in Prison: Not Just Convicts." Nurturing Today X, 1, pp. 40-41.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. Fathers in Prison: Visiting Policy Guidelines. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work, 1990.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Family Ties During Imprisonment: Important to Whom and For What?" Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, March 1991.

Hairston, Creasie Finney and Clifford Louis Taylor. Visiting with Family and Friends: A Handbook for Prisoners. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work, 1991.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. Families and Children: A Study of Men in Prison. Indianapolis: Indiana University School of Social Work.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. "Mothers in Jail: Parent-Child Separation and Jail Visitation." AFFILIA, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 9-27.

Kunjufu, Jawanza. Developing Positive Self-Images and Discipline in Black Children, Chicago: African American Images, 1984.

Kunjufu, Jawanza. The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys. Chicago:
African American Images, 1985.

Kunjufu, Jawanza. Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys,
Vol. III, Chicago: African American Images, 1986.

Additional copies of this resource manual may be obtained by writing:

Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D.
Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
P.O. Box 4348
Chicago, Illinois 60680
(312) 996-3219

WHO RUNS CHILDREN'S VISITING PROGRAMS?

Programs are typically staffed by community volunteers, professional staff and/or prisoners.

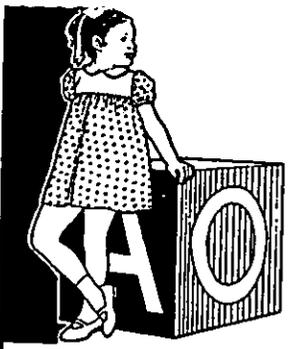
The policy setting board of most well-run programs consists of community professionals, institutional staff, and prisoners representative of the racial makeup of the prison population.

Designed by Cynthia Marie Hairston
Creasie Finney Hairston

This brochure was developed under U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grant No. 90CW092202, Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D., principal investigator.

Information about setting up children's visiting programs in prison may be obtained by contacting Dr. Hairston at the following address:

Indiana University
School of Social Work
Education/Social Work Building
901 West New York Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5156
(317) 274-6792



Children's Visiting Programs in Prison



WHY IS PARENT-CHILD VISITING IN PRISON IMPORTANT?

Frequent visiting between separated parents and their children is important for the well-being of parents and children. Visiting helps maintain parent-child bonds, assures children that their parents are all right, and helps parents carry out parenting roles and responsibilities.

Visiting facilities which permit informal, relaxed social interactions and provide child-centered activities promote positive visits and the maintenance of family ties.

Family visiting during imprisonment is also related to reunification of families after release and to prisoners' post release success.

HOW DO CHILDREN'S VISITING PROGRAMS WORK?

Children's visiting programs are special child-centered areas and activities in prison visiting rooms. Although programs differ from one prison to another, most provide games, toys, and educational materials for children of different ages. Other activities include projects such as holiday parties, movies, puppet shows and story hours.

Some prisons set aside areas in the regular prison visiting room. Others provide a separate children's room and both indoor and outdoor visiting facilities. These special visiting arrangements are called kids corners, children's centers, playrooms, and romper rooms.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHILDREN'S VISITING PROGRAMS?

Children's visiting programs

- ☞ provide an opportunity for parents and children to play, have fun, and learn together
- ☞ permit adults to engage in conversation while children play alone
- ☞ reduce boredom and restlessness among children visitors
- ☞ make visiting a pleasant experience for families and children
- ☞ increase order in the prison visiting room



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

SAMPLE

Education/Social Work Building 4135
902 West New York Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5156
(317) 274-6705

Dear

Recently you participated in "Fathers in Prison: Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships," a course sponsored by Parents in Prison, Inc. The attached form is to learn what you thought about the course. Your responses are confidential. No one will be able to identify you or what you have said about the program.

Your assistance in providing this information is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Creasia Finney Hairston, Ph.D.

Attachment

FIP-SIHR:mcr

FATHERS IN PRISON
MAINTAINING PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

COURSE EVALUATION FORM

Please complete this form and return it in the attached envelope to Dr. Creasie Finney Hairston.

1. How did you learn about the course?

- I heard about it in a Parents in Prison meeting.
- I saw a flyer at the prison.
- A Parents in Prison member told me about it.
- The instructor told me about it.
- I saw the men in the meeting and asked them what they were doing.
- Other: please specify _____.

2. Why did you decide to attend the course? (Check all that apply)

- I wanted to support Parents in Prison activities.
- I wanted to learn how to be a better parent.
- The instructor asked me to attend.
- I wanted a certificate for my record.
- I wanted to meet the women involved in the program.
- I wanted to attend the party at the end.
- It gave me an opportunity to get out of my cell.
- Other: please specify _____.

3. How many sessions did you attend?

- 6
- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

4. If you had been tested on what the course covered, what grade do you think you would have received?

- A
- B
- C
- D
- F

5. What was the course about?

6. What did you learn?

- Didn't learn anything new.
- I learned the following: (Describe below)

7. What information from the course have you used in relating to your children?

- Haven't used anything.
- I've used the following: (Describe below)

8. What information from the course have you used in relating to your children's caretakers?

- I haven't used anything.
- I've used the following: (Describe below)

What should family service organizations do to help prisoners have good relationships with their children and families?

Thank you very much for answering these questions. This information will help us and others develop better programs in prison.

SAMPLE

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
School of Social Work
Fathers in Prison Project

Certifies that

Has completed the

FAMILY EDUCATION COURSE



Date

Project Director and Associate Dean
School of Social Work

Fathers in Prison: Not Just Convicts

Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D.

Prisoners who are fathers are not just convicts. They are parents, too. They have the same dreams and aspirations for their children as other fathers and experience many of the same parenting joys and difficulties. Notwithstanding similarities, imprisonment presents unique barriers to parenting and a subsequent need for special supports to maintain father-child relationships.

The exact number of fathers in prison is not known. Based on a U.S. prison population of over 500,000 and surveys which indicate that 50 percent or more of men in prison are fathers, the number of fathers in prison is estimated to surpass 250,000. A realistic estimate of the number of different children involved ranges from one-quarter of a million on any given day to several million over as short a time span as five years.¹

The Importance of Family Ties

Strong family ties during imprisonment are related to post-release success, to the maintenance of the family unit, and to the well-being of individual family members — including children. Studies consistently show that men who maintain strong family and friendship ties during imprisonment and assume responsible husband and father roles upon release have lower recidivism rates than those who function without family ties, expectations and obligations.²

As in the case with children of divorce, children of imprisoned fathers love their father and want to see him. They have many questions about his whereabouts, are concerned about his well being, and long for his return. Frequent contact with the father relieves children's feelings of rejection and abandonment and, consistent with the findings of divorce and foster care research, is associated with children's social and emotional well being.³

Problems in Maintaining Relationships

Parents who are in prison face many problems in maintaining meaningful and

constructive relationships with their children, as reflected in this father's statement:

"I really wanted to play a major role in the development of my sons, but it's not working out that way. I must have been a bad boy in another lifetimes. I can't quit (trying to see my sons), so I may as well do the best I can with the hand I have to play. Perhaps, I'll have more children one day . . ."

“Strong family ties during imprisonment are related to post-release successes . . .”

Poor relationships between imprisoned fathers and the mothers of their children, failure to tell children that their father is in prison, and the stigma associated with having a parent in prison, are among the facts that limit father-child contact. No less important are the financial costs associated with traveling to prisons in remote locations and families' limited financial resources. In addition, the social roles and responsibilities associated with parenthood are seldom acknowledged in the prison setting. Men are not encouraged to fulfill their parental obligations and receive little support in carrying out their commitments.

Official memorandum to the contrary, visiting by children and other family members is actively discouraged in many prisons. Visiting conditions are usually very restrictive and inhospitable. Facilities are uncomfortable for adults and even more so for children. Activities and areas

for children are practically nonexistent and normal parenting behaviors such as holding a child on one's lap are often prohibited. Oppressive practices ranging from strip searches to failure to provide shelter from the rain and cold for visitors awaiting entry to the prison are common. The success of these administratively sanctioned tactics in discouraging visitors is evidenced by the number of persons who leave visits saying, "Never again!"

Programs to Maintain and Strengthen Families

The maintenance of strong, positive relationships between prisoners and their families should be implemented to strengthen father-child relationships. Critical in this regard are public policies and institutional practices that recognize visits between fathers and their children as a right and that promote, rather than discourage, family visits. Safe, secure and orderly visiting environments, wherein visitors are treated with respect and dignity are a must as are accommodations that permit relaxed, informal interaction between parents and children. Children's centers modeled after those in women's prisons, special events such as picnics and festivals for parents and children, and overnight family visits are among the way to normalize the prison environment.

A second priority should be the development of policies and programs which help fathers and mothers better understand and carry out their shared parental roles and responsibilities. Child development courses, fathers' self-help groups, and parenting skills seminars are means for addressing both general family concerns and prison parenting issues. The Parents in Prison program at the Tennessee State Prison provides a successful family support and parent educational model for use in maximum security settings.⁴ In addition to social services, the need for work and training which enables fathers to carry out traditional provider

(Continued on next page)



Photo: Richard Green/Friends Outside

roles is obvious. Paid employment for prisoners with a built-in mechanism, such as soldier's allotments, for regular financial contributions toward the care of their children would demonstrate a serious societal commitment to the maintenance of family units.

For the good of families and society, positive parent-child relationships must be encouraged and promoted through meaningful social policies, humane institutional practices, and concrete programs. Inmate fathers are parents, too.

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1. *Unlocking the Second Gate*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1977), 8; *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, October, 1983) 37; Creasie Finney Hairston, *Family Characteristics and Service Needs in a Maximum Security Prison*. (mimeographed, 1987).
2. Holt, N. and Miller, D. *Explorations of Inmate-Family Relationships* (Sacramento, CA: California Dept. of Corrections, 1972); Burstein, J., *Conjugal Visits in Prison*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1977.
3. Morris, P., Farida, B., and Vennard, J. *On License: A Study of Parole*. London: John Wiley & Sons, 1975; Hetherington, E. *Divorce: A Child's Perspective*. *American Psychologist* 34, 10, October, 1979, 851-858.
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Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D. is Professor and Associate Dean, Indiana University School of Social Work, and Vice-President, Parents in Prison, Inc., Nashville, TN. Dr. Hairston is a researcher and program development consultant in the area of families and corrections.

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