The Student of Incarcerated and Returning Parents[1]

According to the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, an estimated five million children in America have had at least one parent in prison or jail in their lifetime. Nationally, one child in 28 has an incarcerated parent. According to a 2023 article in NC Newsline (2023), North Carolina men and women in prison reported having a total number close to 19,000 minor children at home. According to the program director for Our Children's Place of Coastal Horizons Center, these figures do not include children whose parents are in county jails or who are in federal prison.

Impact of Parental Incarceration on the Student

The health and well-being of children are closely associated with school performance and are affected by all aspects of the child's life. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Questionnaire asks about a household member going to prison, with a positive response contributing to an increased ACEs score. All professionals, both in schools and in the community, are encouraged to recognize the shame and stigma that can exist for children with incarcerated and returning parents.

Assisting the Student

Language

School staff members are encouraged to think about the language being used related to the incarcerated or returning parent and the message demonstrated by that language. Here are some situations where use of language matters:

- Referring to an individual as the child's mother, father, or parent rather than as an inmate, prisoner, offender, or perpetrator.
- Using the terms formerly incarcerated or parents who have come home rather than ex-offender, ex-inmate.
- Describing time spent with an incarcerated parent as visiting the parent or a visit rather than visitation.

Including the Incarcerated Parent

School nurses and staff members are also encouraged to consider ways to support the child-parent relationship and to include the incarcerated parent in his/her child's school life as much as possible when it is safe and appropriate. This can include sending the school calendar, report cards, and other updates to the parent, including the parent in IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and case planning meetings via phone, and providing additional support to a child before and after a visit.

[1] This section was jointly prepared with staff from Our Children's Place of Coastal Horizons Center, Inc.

Resources for Schools

American Correctional Association
https://www.aca.org/resources

Support Us Healthcare Provide Toolkit
https://www.susu-osborne.org/voices-from-susu

Our Children's Place of Coastal Horizons Center
https://www.ourchildrensplace.com/