

Bridging the gap: How jails and child protective services can partner to support children of incarcerated parents

Initial Key Steps to Building a Partnership

- **Create opportunities for regular, cross-agency collaborative meetings** between jail and child protection (CP) administrators and staff. Identify what is going well, areas for growth, shared resources, and improvements for incarcerated parents/caregivers.
- **Designate a point of contact** in both agencies to serve as a liaison and keep lines of communication open. Ensure staff know who the liaisons are.
 - Ideally, liaisons will be representative of populations served. At minimum, liaisons should be culturally aware of barriers that Indigenous, Black and other families of color experience, who are overrepresented in both systems.
- **Include questions at intake** about current CP involvement or parent incarceration. Explain why you are asking, that staff can help coordinate with the CP/jail staff to help continue work on current plans or participate in court appearances. Jails can reference model jail intake questions at [Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents - MN Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](https://state.mn.us/supporting-children-of-incarcerated-parents).
- **Coordinate an orientation to an in-person jail visit for new child protection staff** to understand available programs for incarcerated parents, jail procedures and key contacts.
- **Review current policies and procedures together annually.** Identify those that may be creating systemic barrier for incarcerated parents to maintain parent-child relationship and identify step to make them more equitable.
- **Consider a partnership with local community-based providers** who can offer culturally- and linguistically specific services to support incarcerated parents, caregivers, and children, such as facilitating supportive visiting, parenting classes, and caregiver support groups.

What Child Protection Can Do

- **Contact the jail liaison** if a parent or caregiver discloses a current parent incarceration, to share the case worker contact information, key actions to support the CP case, court dates, and identify programming opportunities and visiting information to share with the family.
- **Ensure that jail staff have relevant case information** to support the incarcerated parent such as court dates. Notify jail staff if court dates have changed.

- **Understand what the jail offers for incarcerated parents** including parent education programs, referrals, resources, or special visiting practices, etc.
- **Talk to the family about why it is important to talk to a child about a parent incarceration** and how to approach that conversation.
- **Review data about family outcomes for families with an incarcerated parent** to identify potential system barriers.

SUPPORT FAMILY VISITS OF INCARCERATED PARENT

- **Prepare families for what to expect during visits** with the incarcerated parent. Go over the jail visiting procedures with the caregiver. If possible, provide pictures or a book for children to explain what jail is to help ease anxieties or fears around visiting a loved one. For a list of books go to [Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents - MN Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/comm/child/parents/parents.html).
- **Provide a space for a video visit** for families and/or transportation for children. (Noting that this is not always possible, bus tokens or a bus card for families).
- **After a visit, check in with families** about how it went, what could be done better and answer any questions or concerns that the family has.

What Jails Can Do

- **Contact Child Protection (CP).** If a parent discloses involvement in CP, have the jail liaison, or administrator or social worker reach out to the CP liaison or the CP intake with the parent present to identify the assigned social worker, case status and key information.
- **Supervised Contact Visits.** Establish space and procedures for families with CP cases to have supervised contact visits, as these are often required by CP.
- **Provide program participation information to CP** about programs that the parent is engaging with, especially parenting education, since these may satisfy expectations in the CP case plan.

SUPPORT FAMILY VISITS OF INCARCERATED PARENT

- **Notify the family and CP liaison** in advance when cancellations for visiting, rules or procedures change in the jail e.g., lockdowns, what to and what not to bring (ID's, dress codes, physical contact, etc.).
- **Prioritize visits for parents based on need,** including parents with an open CP case for services and resources.
- **Create a child-friendly environment.** Jails can be stressful spaces for children. Consider modifying search procedures for CP family visits to make them less invasive for children, allowing developmentally appropriate materials for children during the visit (e.g., books, games, toys) and using staff in plain cloths to interact with children and families.

- **Find other model jail practices to support children with incarcerated parents at [Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents - MN Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](#) or the [National Institute of Corrections, Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jail: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections](#)**

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