

# Improving Outcomes for Children of the Incarcerated

Pacific Region Family to Family Coordinator's Meeting"

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# TRAINING GOALS

- Understanding and Awareness about the impact of parental arrest and incarceration on children
- Examine policies, procedures and practices that support or possibly traumatize children
- Encourage community leadership & advocacy on behalf of these children

And how are the children?



**1. How many children have an incarcerated parent?**

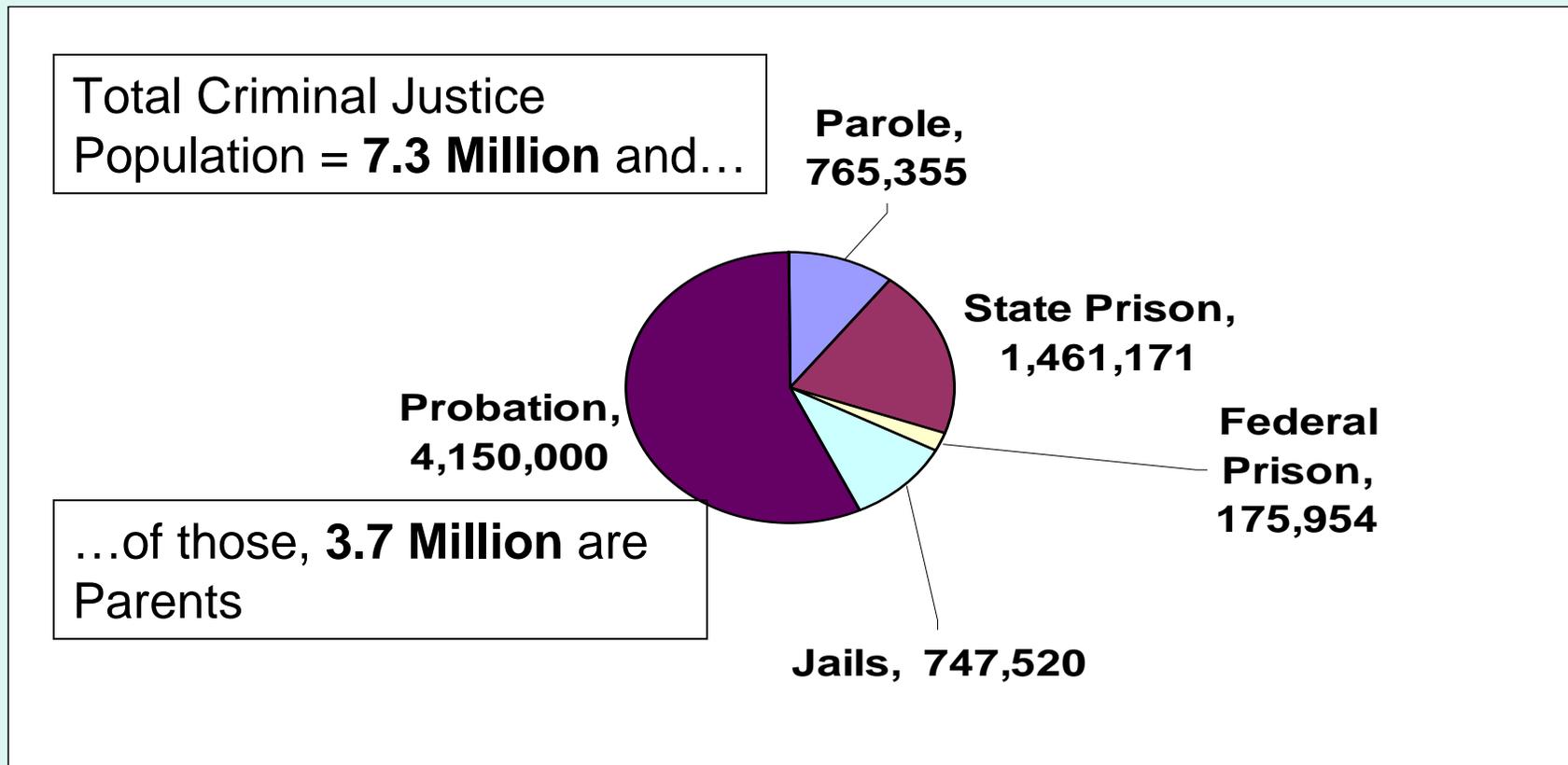
**B. Approximately 2.3 million**

# National Data

- More than 2 million children have an incarcerated parent, an increase of 50% since 1990.
- Approximately 10 million children have a parent who has been imprisoned or under supervision at some point in their lives.
- For each parent incarcerated, 2 children are left behind.

# Parents in the Criminal Justice System

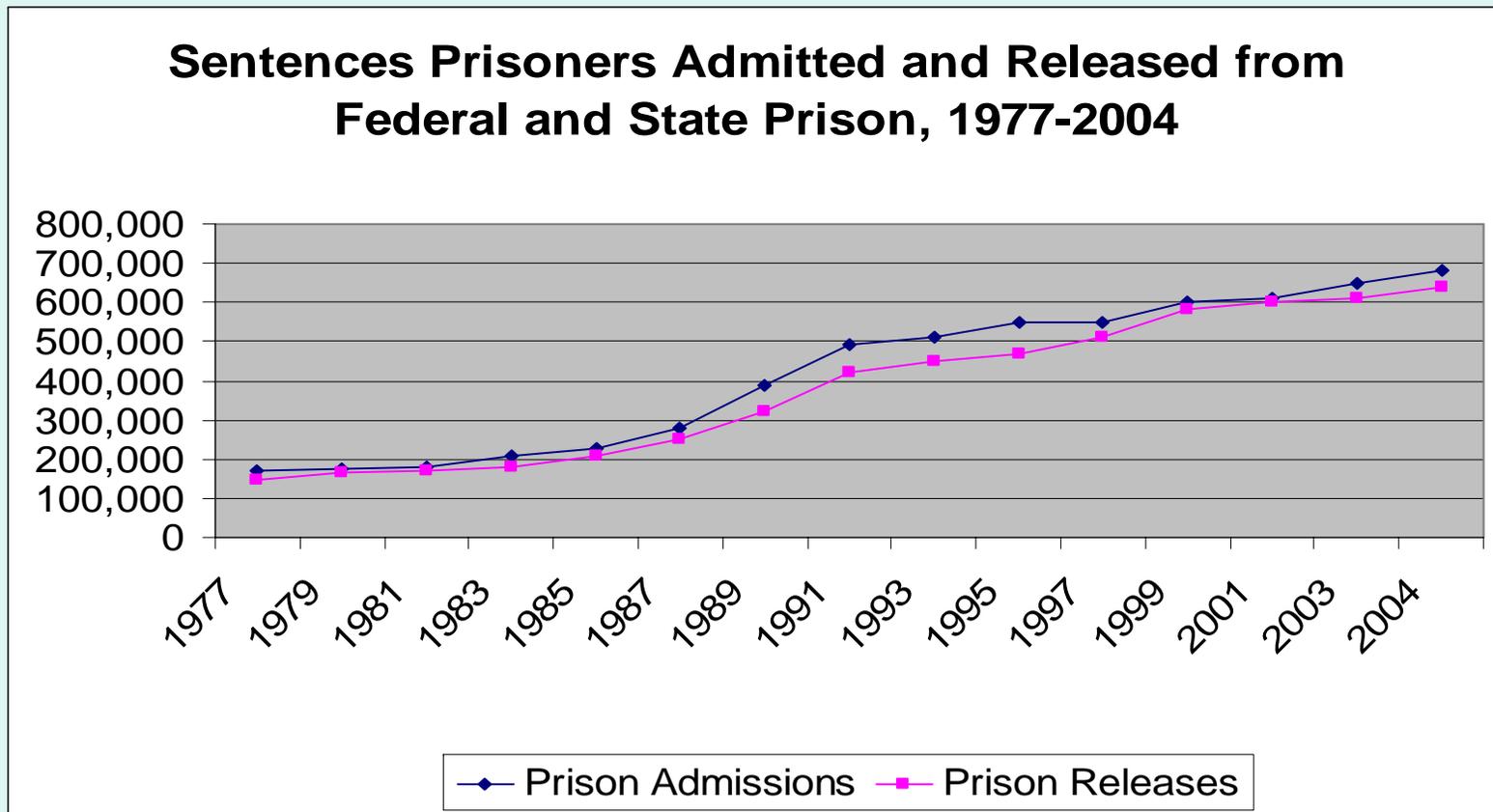
Source: Mumola (2002), "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." Presentation at the National Center for Children and Families. 10/31/02



# More People Entering and Exiting Prison

1.5 million incarcerated adults at any given time

Source: The Urban Institute, 2001. Based on BJS National Prisoner Statistics



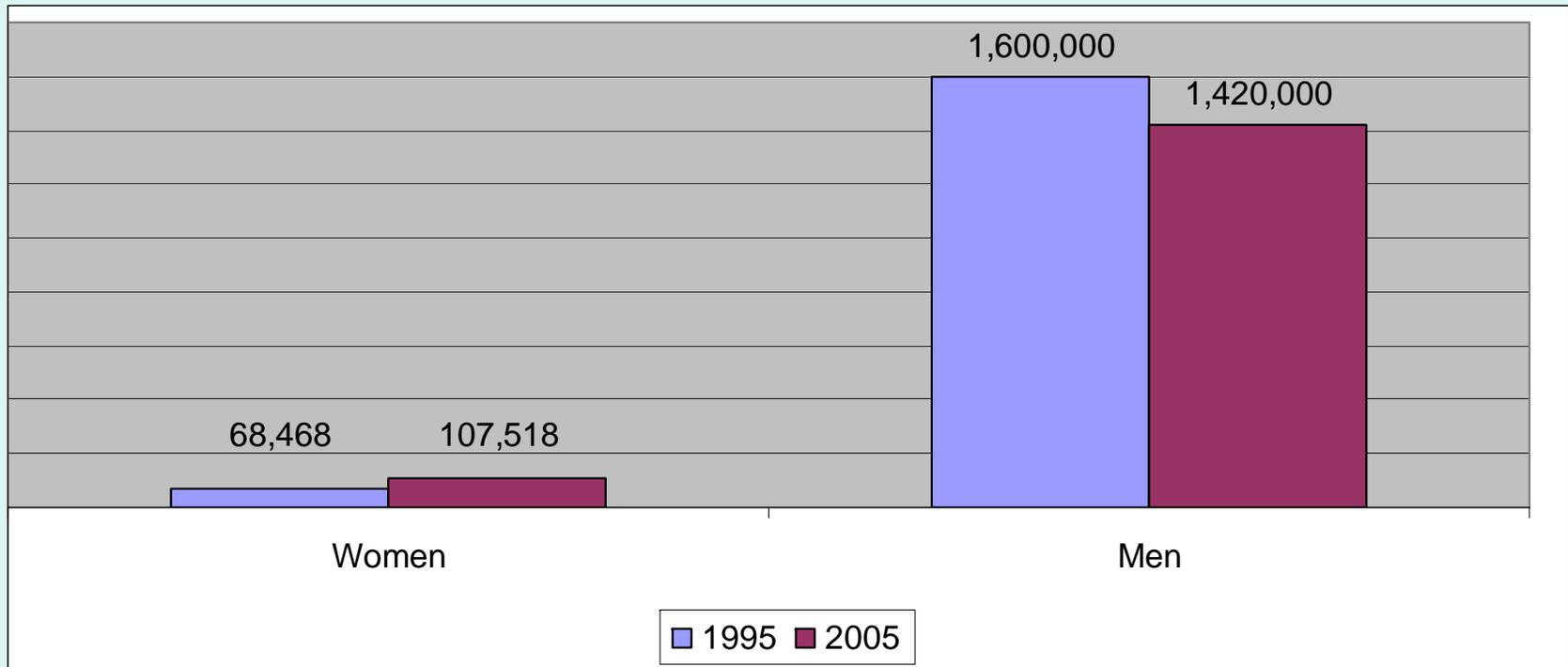
**2. Impact for a child whose mother is incarcerated is greater than when the father is incarcerated because?**

**A. Child will have to move.**

# Incarcerated Females Increasing Faster than Males

57% increase in women

34% increase in men



**3. Which one of the following is a true statement?**

**D. Most children live with parents prior to incarceration and will live with them after release.**

# Circumstances of Children with Incarcerated Parents

- 2/3rds of incarcerated mothers lived with child before incarceration.
- 44% of incarcerated fathers lived with child before incarceration.
- 10% of children with an incarcerated mother are in foster care; 6% of children with an incarcerated father are in foster care.
- Most children who lived with their parents prior to parental incarceration and will live with them again following release .

**4. Frequent visitation, when appropriate and there is no risk to the child is:**

B. Counteracts symptoms of fear connected with a parents incarceration

# Circumstances of Children with Incarcerated Parents

## Visitation:

- Frequent visitation is essential to successful parent-child reunification following release.
- Most children have no visits with their parents in prison.
- Children in foster care are the least likely to have visits.

# Barriers to Visitation

- Distance
- Lack of transportation
- Visits prohibited by custodial caretaker or conflict with caretaker's schedule
- DOC policies
- Child Welfare practices and resources

**5. Which of the following do children need to handle the effects of parental incarceration?**

**D. All of the above**

(Connections, Information & Stable Caregiver  
with adequate services)

# Impact of Parental Criminality and Incarceration

- Many children begin to have school related problems – higher drop out rates.
- Many children experience severe anxiety or depression – 2 fold increase in mental health issues
- Higher rates of drug addiction and depression
- Poor parenting skills and parental offending are two of the strongest predictors of children's criminal conduct

# Why should we care about this issue?

- Child Welfare/Criminal Justice systems are the most intrusive.
- Criminal Justice decisions have consequences for Social Services.
- Pro-Social Contact improves Criminal Justice and Child Outcomes.
- Family Connections are important for successful return.

# Implications for Child Welfare

Significant relationship between child maltreatment and future criminality.

- Higher rates of neglect
- Higher rates of termination of parental rights
- Higher levels of physical abuse post release

# Child Welfare Perspective

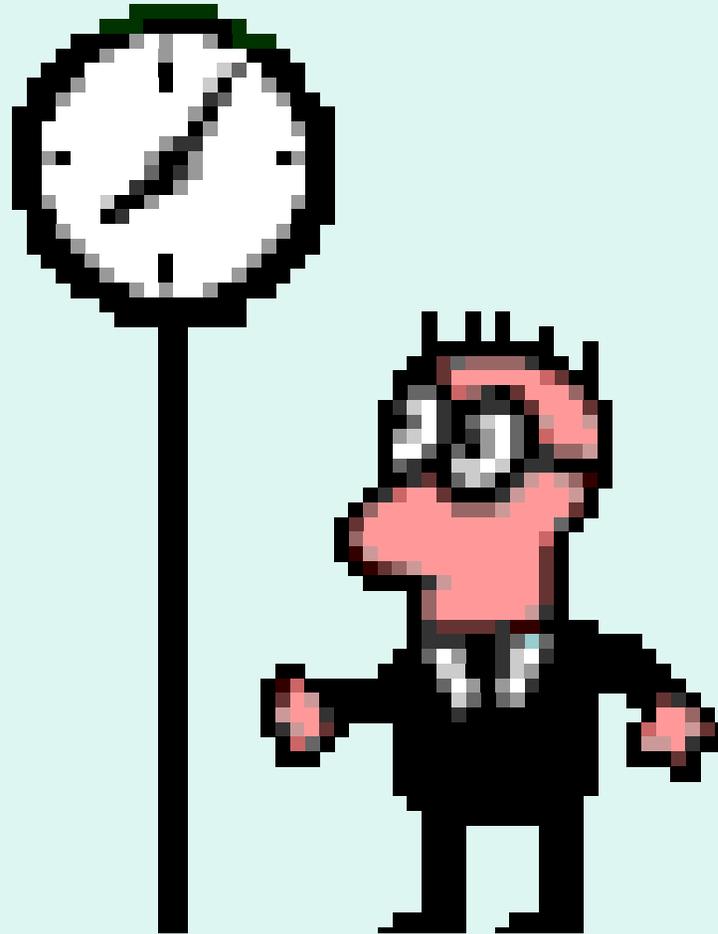
- Prevent entry or re-entry into the child welfare system
- Prevent abuse and neglect
- Prevent child welfare children from entering the criminal justice system

# Questions

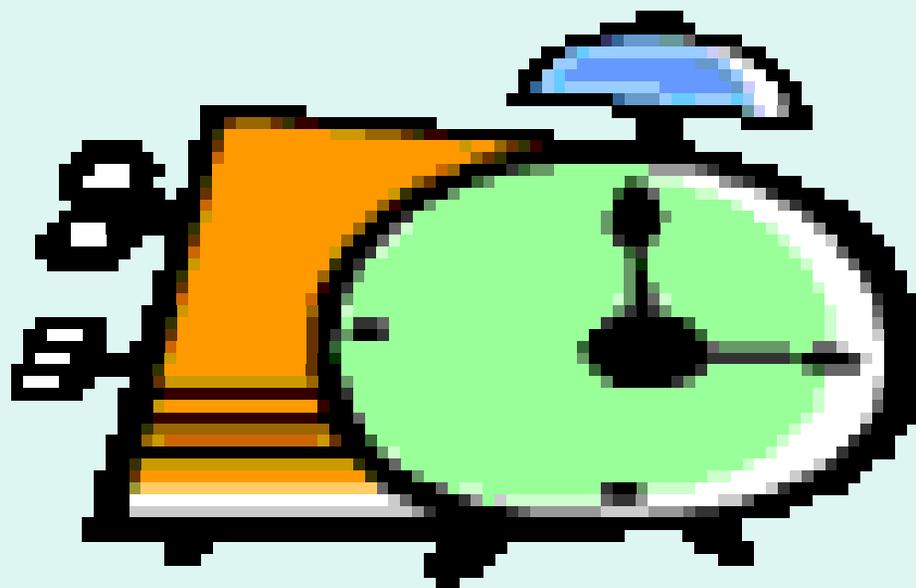
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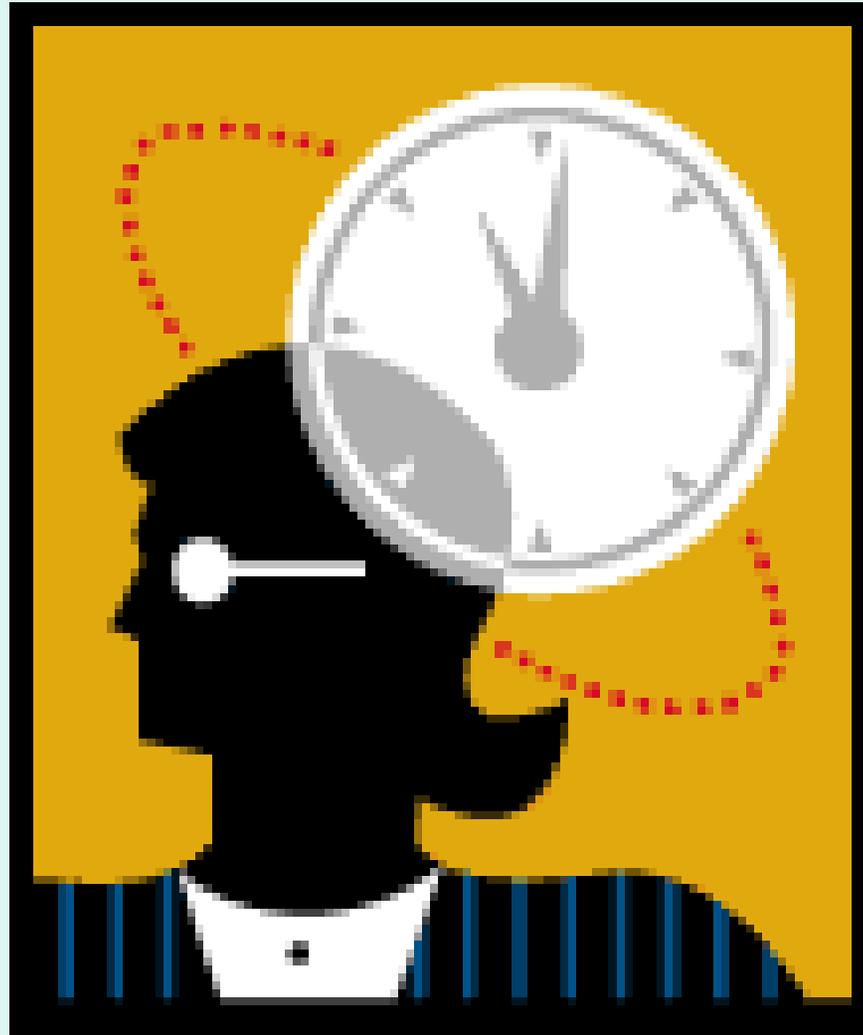
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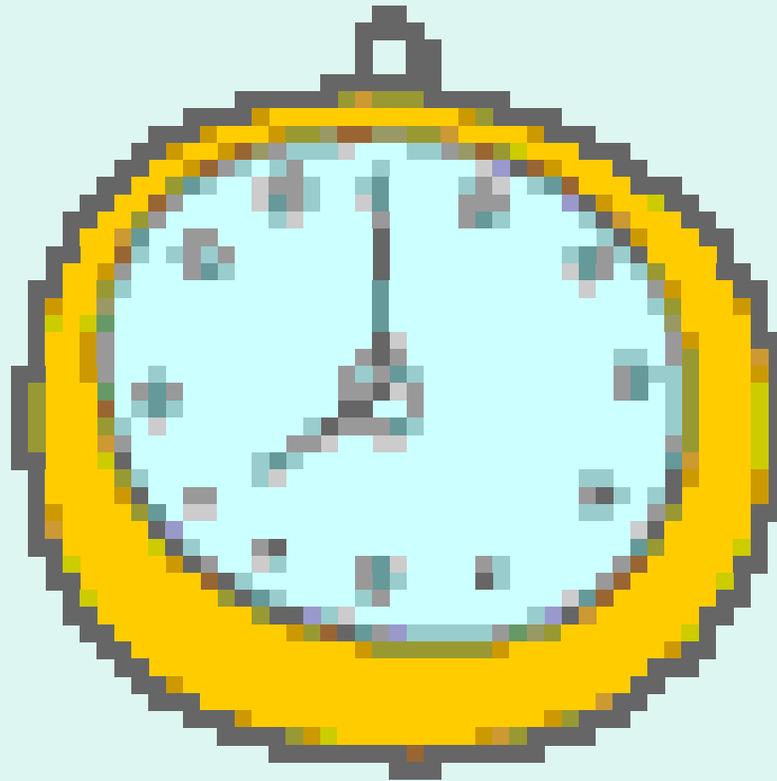
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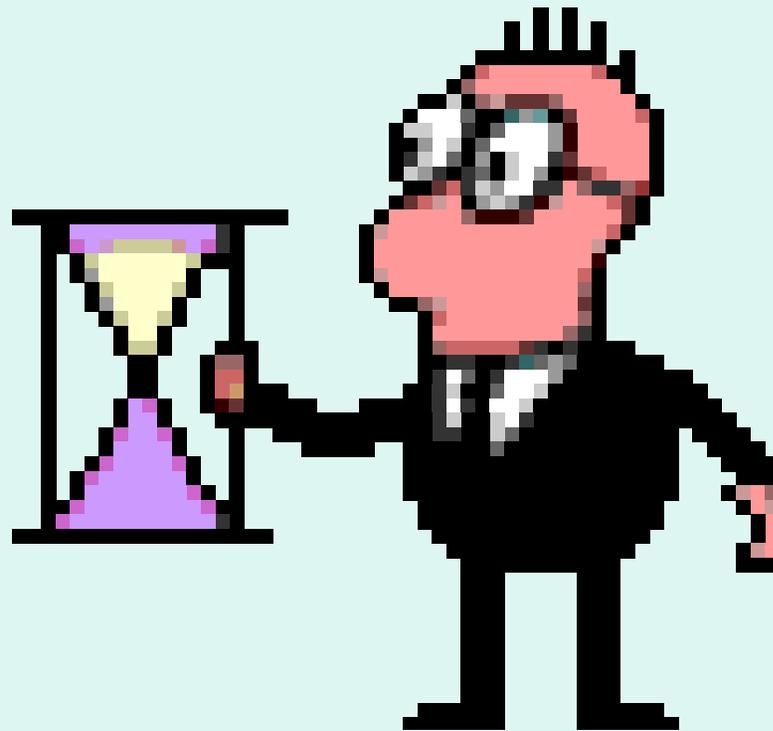
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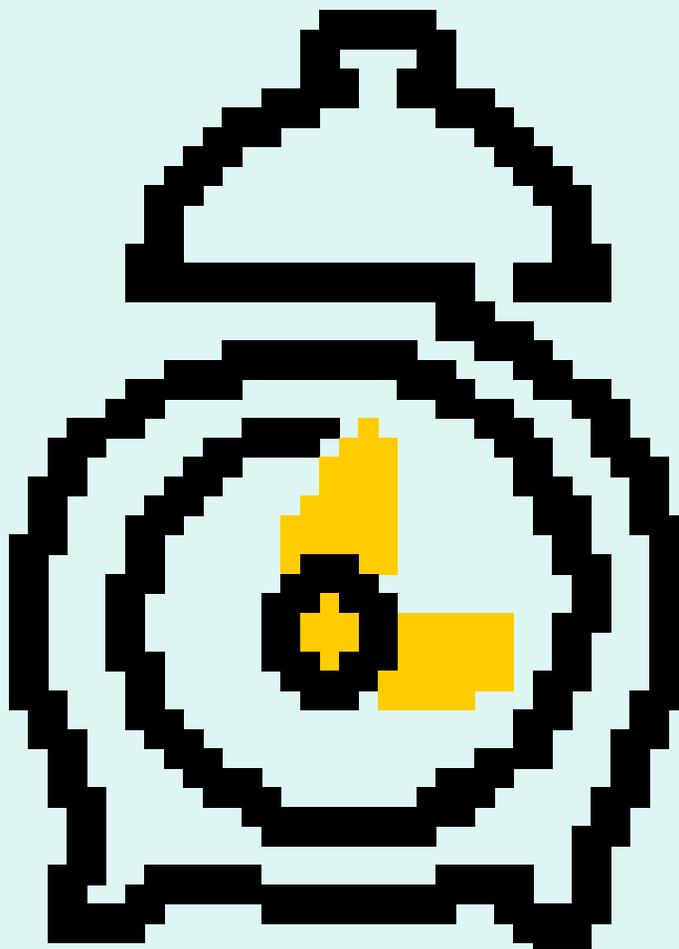
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# Questions, Comments, Observations

Hmmmmmm.....





**6. The most stressful phase for children of incarcerated parents is?**

**A. Witnessing the Arrest**

**7. According to the American Bar Association Center on Children, what percentage of police officers ask an arrestee if they have minor children?**

**B. 29%**

**8. Which one of the following is a false statement?**

**D. We should protect children from the truth about their parents.**

**9. Children of incarcerated parents are no more at risk than any other “at risk” population of kids.**

**B. False**

**10. Which of the following is a true statement?**

E. All of the above

(frequent visitation = reduced recidivism, parental incarceration is a risk factor for abuse and neglect, inmates who maintain their outside relationships do better on parole, strong family relationships positive impact on delinquency)

## Research on Children of Incarcerated Parents in Foster Care

*There are three basic routes these children enter the child welfare system*

- 1) As a result of abuse or neglect prior to the parent's incarceration**
- 2) As a direct result of the primary caregiving parent's arrest or;**
- 3) As a result of disruptions in the living arrangements (most often with a relative) made during a parent's incarceration**

Wright and Seymour (2000) *Working with children and families separated by incarceration: A handbook for child welfare agencies.*

## Research on Children of Incarcerated Parents in Foster Care

*Research on children in foster care shows that “family visits are vital to maintaining ties, bolstering children’s well being and healthy development, reducing the trauma of separation and assisting families to reunify after a parents release.”*

**Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law (2006) “Rebuilding Families Reclaiming Lives: State Obligations to Children in Foster Care and Their Incarcerated Parents”**

## **What can you do?**

- 1) Understand and acknowledge you own feelings about incarcerated parents and substance abusers.**
- 2) Understand that the child may be grieving.**
- 3) Alleviate the child's uncertainty.**
- 4) Reassure the child that it is not their fault.**
- 5) Honor and preserve the child's connection to the parent.**

## **What can you do?**

- 6) Create streamlined, systematized processes for handling cases where a parent is incarcerated**
- 7) Improve data gathering such as incorporating information about children in Child Welfare System at jail intake, and incarcerated parents at Child Welfare Intake.**
- 8) Training for child welfare staff and foster parents via Title IVE match to develop concrete skills and ideas for working with this population.**
- 9) Develop a system to follow the child and the family from their entry into the child welfare and corrections systems to their successful exit and integration into the community.**

# Current Areas of Focus

- Arrest
- Judicial Proceedings
- Visitation at Correctional Facilities
- Reentry
- Child Welfare – Placement Management
- Education K-12

# Reducing Disparity and Disproportionality

African American parents are grossly over-represented at the intersection of the child welfare and criminal justice systems, a model that would preserve family connections during an incarceration will help reduce racial disparities in the Child Welfare System.



# Advocacy Required

To improve *outcomes for children whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system you need someone with:*

- Objective vantage point for policy review
- Coordination of activities across the system
- Technical assistance and training
- Encourage evidence-based practices
- Ability to advocate for system reform
- Ability to generate funds and leverage resources

# Conclusions

- Persistent and growing problem nationally
- Continuing to search for solutions that involve entire family
- Efforts require systemic change in all agencies that interact with these families

It's the action, not the fruit of the action that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, it's guaranteed there will be no result.

Mahatma Ghandi.

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