



# Children of Prisoners LIBRARY

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For Caregivers: CPL 203



## ***What Do Children of Prisoners and their Caregivers Need?***

### **From Interviews with Caregivers**

By Ann Adalist-Estrin

Every child, family, and circumstance is different. Some children are used to parents who were not around much before their incarceration. Some children have parents who are unpredictable because of depression or drugs or alcohol. Other children's parents were actively involved with them before they went to jail or prison.

Some children may have been traumatized by witnessing a violent arrest or may have a history of traumatizing experiences. Some children of prisoners may have no contact with their parent; others talk to their incarcerated parent every day.

Some children move to a new city or state. Some change schools or go into day care so their caregivers can work. Children will need different things from caregivers depending on their age, temperament and personality, the family circumstances, the facts and details of the crime, and the availability of outside resources.

### **Most Children of Prisoners Need**

- Consistent caring adults who understand that, in general, children love their parents, even when they have committed a crime
- People who will not condemn the incarcerated parents as worthless
- People who will understand that children of prisoners feel angry, sad, confused, and worried
- A chance to express these feelings and learn to cope with them
- A chance to learn and practice skills and keep busy with activities
- Faith or affiliation with a community that can provide meaning for the child beyond their own crisis
- People who can help them to maintain contact with their incarcerated parent or parents or explain to them why they cannot maintain contact

### **Most Caregivers Need**

- Support and understanding from friends, family, clergy, and the community
- Emotional support, such as counseling or group activities
- Information about children of incarcerated parents as well as about services in the community
- Guidance about what is generally best for children and how to answer their questions
- Rules, boundaries, and space in the home: for the children, for the family and for the caregiver
- Opportunities for respite care and relief from the duties of care giving
- Help with managing the needs and services that are all too often fragmented, unavailable, or costly



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The Children of Prisoners Library was written by Ann Adalist-Estrin, who adapted material from *How Can I Help* and authored other materials in the Children of Prisoners Library. It was edited and published by Jim Mustin.

