

Working with Children and Caregivers of an Incarcerated Parent

If a family or student has disclosed to you that a parent is incarcerated, you might ask the caregiver:

- if a copy of the grade card and other school papers can be sent to the incarcerated parent or if the caregiver would prefer to mail a second copy to the parent
- how often the child visits, corresponds with and talks over the phone to the parent
- to inform the school of any changes that might affect the child's school performance or behavior
- if there is any additional support needed that you or the school might be able to provide (such as help in arranging car pools or referrals to after school care programs)

Families often worry that their child may be judged unfairly by teachers and peers. Typically incarceration is kept secret so you may not know a child has an incarcerated parent or may only have heard rumors. You might:

- routinely ask if parents/families need a second copy of school reports and papers for another adult who is important in the child's life
- ask the family of each child in your class to fill out a form such as the one attached
- be sensitive to patterns of change in children – a change in behavior at the same time each month may mean it is visiting time
- recognize that unexplained absences may mean the child is visiting their parent
- look for the strengths in each of your students and in their families
- display literature or read books to your students about all kinds of families (examples: *Visiting Day* and *My Mama Loves Me From Away* by Pat Brisson)

Children react to their life situation based on their developmental stage. Some general tendencies include:

Young children pre-school to primary:

- may fear abandonment by other adults in their life
- may feel they are to blame
- are more likely to be sad and withdrawn

Older children:

- will probably be defiant and angry
- may be at risk for dropping out of school
- may be engaging in risky behaviors

Additional Guidance

- children almost always love their parents no matter what
- children are not destined to repeat their parent's actions
- children need to feel safe at school
- peers may need guidance in understanding there are all kinds of families
- there is really no need for anyone to know why the parent is incarcerated

COMMUNICATE WITH THE SCHOOL

Student's name _____

Student's grades should go to: (feel free to include more than one address)

____ Please send a second copy of grade reports and newsletters to me and I will share them with another adult who is important in my child's life

Parent Teacher conference(s) should be with: _____

___ Joint Conference

___ Separate Conference

I would like for _____ to know _____

Form completed by _____ Date _____