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## **Families with Fathers in Minimum Security Prison: A Family Treatment Approach to Treating Families with Fathers in Prison**

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**Families with Fathers in Minimum Security Prison:  
A Family Treatment Approach to Treating Families with Fathers in Prison**

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Family Systems: Theory & Practice

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## **Abstract**

The population of those in prison is increasing, and many of those who are in prison have families. Much research has been done on the effect prison has on prisoners, but not as much has looked at the children and what the effect is of having a parent, specifically their father, who is absent in prison. It is important to understand the possible behaviors, risks, and challenges that children face. This research essay looks at what it is like for children between the ages of 5 and 10 to have a father in minimum security prison while also examining the effects parental imprisonment has on the child and the challenges of family reuniting after release. This essay also includes a 6-week therapy curriculum that therapists can use with families whose fathers are imprisoned.

*Keywords: incarcerated fathers, minimum security, children, prison, families, reentry*

## **Families with Fathers in Prison Literature Review**

### **Statistics about the Population**

The prison population has been growing for many years. Out of all countries in the world, the United States has the highest incarceration rate totaling 2.6 million people (Herrerros-Fraile et al., 2023). The United States is five times higher than the United Kingdom which holds the second-highest incarceration rate in the world (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Of those incarcerated in the United States, approximately 50 to 60% are parents (Eddy et al., 2022), and 90% are males (Reef & Dirkzwager, 2019).

Since many prisoners are parents, their children are extremely impacted. Instead of improving the situation, it continues to worsen as prisoners of minor children have increased by 79% between 1991 and midyear 2007 (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). More than 2.7 million children in America have a parent in prison (Father's Day Without a Father, 2013), and 47% of the fathers lived with their children a month before incarceration (Eddy et al., 2022). Not only did these men have young children, but 75% were employed at the time of their arrest, and 54% were the family's financial supporters (Eddy et al., 2022). The fathers of these children are influential in the children's lives, and their lack of presence creates issues.

### **Characteristics and Common Issues**

Previous studies regarding parental imprisonment have shown common characteristics of children whose father is in prison. Specifically, the age of the child is an important characteristic as various ages respond differently. For example, a father's incarceration occurring during a

child's early life puts the child at greater risk (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Children ages 7 to 11 are most developmentally impacted by parental incarcerations (Herreros-Fraile et al., 2023) as their physical and cognitive development is negatively impacted and the child is likely experiencing traumatic events for the first time (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). School-aged children with incarcerated fathers are also more likely than their peers to develop depression and anxiety and affiliate with deviant peers (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Similarly, children are more likely to have problems in school as they are at an increased likelihood of expulsion and suspension (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). In contrast, the mental health of children ages 7 to 18 years is at great risk (Herreros-Fraile et al., 2023). Finally, the stigma a child faces from their father's imprisonment discourages youth from being involved in school and other community activities prompting social exclusion (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). These effects of parental incarceration negatively impact the child's life and behavior causing an increase in issues in adulthood.

Another factor placing children at risk of parental incarceration is their race and socioeconomic status. Statistically, African American and Hispanic children are at the greatest risk of experiencing parental incarceration (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Particularly, 33% of all African Americans and 17% of Hispanics will experience incarceration in their lifetime compared to only 5% of Caucasian males (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Of the African American children in the United States, 11.4% currently have a parent in jail (Father's Day Without a Father, 2013). Incarcerated fathers also tend to have a low socioeconomic status and live in low-income neighborhoods leaving the children in those low-income neighborhoods with little financial assistance (Roettger & Swisher, 2011).

The child's exposure to the parent's criminal activity and arrest is another common issue. Children are more at risk of developing PTSD symptoms if they have witnessed their father's

arrest (Shehadeh et al., 2016). Between 20% and 83% of children have seen their parent's arrest and retained vivid memories years later (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). When fathers are arrested, they are likely engaging in criminal activity they have exposed their child to such as illegal drug use (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). During the arrest, the child is in a chaotic scene that may involve altercations, violence, or weapons (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). As a result, the parental context of a father's arrest can be more detrimental to a frightened child than the arrest itself (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010).

Gender also does play a relevant role in how children are impacted (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). For example, studies showed that girls with a father in prison “scored significantly lower in reading comprehension and math pro skills” (Herrerros-Fraile et al., 2023) than girls without an imprisoned father. Daughters of incarcerated fathers also have a more challenging time retaining employment and establishing intimate relationships with men later in life (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). A father's presence and involvement in his daughter's life enhances her decision-making process, academic engagement, self-esteem, and health (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). Prior research indicated that fathers emphasize parenting and caretaking their sons more than daughters, putting a father-daughter relationship at greater risk when the father is incarcerated (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014).

Boys who have a strong father-son bond reduce their son's recidivism (Peniston, 2014). The socioeconomic achievements of boys as adults are also impacted negatively due to parental incarceration (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Boys with incarcerated fathers also become anti-social, and their psychological well-being deteriorates (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Boys have lower memory and attention skills than those without an incarcerated father (Herrerros-Fraile et al., 2023). Studies have also revealed that sons tend to have higher substance abuse and

interaction with the criminal justice system (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). Overall, everyone is impacted negatively by their father's imprisonment but share common characteristics such as age, gender, race, and exposure to criminal activity.

### **Risk Factors**

There are several risk factors to examine in children with fathers in prison such as their mental health, delinquency, and behavior. (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). For instance, one-fifth to two-thirds of adolescents reported considerable mental health problems (Shehadeh et al., 2016). These psychological difficulties include

posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bedwetting, nightmares and anxiety, attention deficits, antisocial behavior and violence, hopelessness, and feelings of rejection and guilt. (Shehadeh et al., 2016)

It is believed that children's mental health deterioration could be caused by the forced separation between a child and their father (Shehadeh et al., 2016). In fact, 39% of fathers report less contact with their children during their incarceration (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). Children's mental health is also at risk due to changes in caregivers, witnessing the crime or arrest, and the dehumanization children endure due to the stigma of parental incarceration (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019).

Another risk factor of parental incarceration is changes in the child's behavior. Children experiencing parental incarceration are at an increased risk of anti-social behavior (Murray et al., 2012). The risk of anti-social behavior begins as young as 10 and could last until age 48 (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). A father's imprisonment can also influence the development of self-control (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). These negative behavior patterns affect the child's



development and social skills alongside the child's caretaker struggling to cope with new behaviors.

Several studies have shown the relationship between parental incarceration and a greater probability of early juvenile delinquency (Herrerros-Fraile et al., 2023). Specifically, those between the ages of 18 and 25 are at an increased risk (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Children with incarcerated parents are seven times more likely to go to prison (Father's Day Without a Father, 2013). Children of incarcerated parents are likely at a greater risk of future arrests due to their exposure to low socioeconomic status and disadvantaged neighborhoods (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). In summary, imprisoned fathers create a lot of risk factors in the child's life such as their mental health, behavior, social skills, and the likelihood of criminal offenses.

### **Major Concerns or Problems**

Considering that over half (54%) of imprisoned fathers were the primary supporters of their families before their arrest, finances and unemployment are concerns (Eddy et al., 2022). Davison, D'Andreamatteo, Markham, Holloway, Marshall, and Smye (2019) show that due to fathers' incarceration, they cannot be part of the labor market. As a result, a family's income will decrease leading to food insecurity during and after the father's incarceration (Yocum & Nath, 2011). Many families expect financial help once the father is released from prison (Yocum & Nath, 2011). However, fathers are unlikely to get employment because of their status of being previously incarcerated. This is a major concern as it puts stress on the family trying to meet their basic needs and may lead the father to return to criminal activities.

Having socioeconomic instability also causes harm to the mental health of the children's mothers as they are increasingly stressed (Wildeman et al., 2012). Mothers are also at an increased risk of a major depressive episode and lower life satisfaction (Wildeman et al., 2012).

Aside from financial struggles, mothers' worsening mental health could be due to their forced separation from their partners or their association with their partner in prison (Wildeman et al., 2012). The extreme stress of mothers during their partner's incarceration affects their children as they may provide poor parenting behaviors (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Children are impacted by their mother's mental health as their family can become unstable. This instability causes a decrease in the well-being of children (Wildeman et al., 2012). Finally, the effects children experience during parental imprisonment depend on their well-being, patterns of visitation, and whether the child visits their father in prison (Wildeman et al., 2012). All in all, the well-being of mothers declined for several reasons, but the severity depends on the mother's characteristics and relationship with the father (Wildeman et al., 2012).

Another problem that families face is co-parenting. Research has shown that when parents have good co-parenting created by lower parental stress for both, this creates better relationship quality (Tadros et al., 2023). For couples where one is incarcerated, partners are unable to support each other through changes of roles and responsibilities. Due to this tension, there is more conflict in the relationship which can lead to hostility among the siblings (Tadros et al., 2023). Not only can bad co-parenting lead to hostility between siblings, but it can also lead to a disconnect between the father with his children. Peniston's (2014) research shows that fathers believe the mothers are the most likely reason for hindering reconnection. When the two parents are not able to communicate, support one another, and be there for one another, they can put stress on themselves, their relationships with each other, and their relationship with their family. It is important, therefore, to make sure there is support for the mother and father to relieve the stress of both parents (Yocum & Nath, 2011). This is important for the relationship of the couple

but also the kids as they feel the stress of their parents. Reducing stress means that children do not have to worry about their parents and can be a child instead.

Finally, the last major problem or concern is how the father handles prison. Muth (2016) talks about two strategies that men might have while in prison: looking up and looking down. Looking up is an optimistic approach where the prisoner looks for ways to reconnect with children and be there for them; however, there is the constant fear of abandonment as experienced by the child (Muth, 2016). With that comes the realization for the father of what he has done resulting in guilt, self-hate, shame, fear. Looking down is more survival as the prisoner focuses on life inside the prison, not thinking of the outside world and suppressing feelings of shame and sadness (Muth, 2016). However, as they suppress these emotions, they destroy their sense of self and lose hope for the future. Both these strategies can hurt the father, which in turn hurts the family. Looking up can create false hope for kids or fear of the father disappearing again as well as for the father dealing with emotions of guilt. Looking down helps prisoners avoid those feelings of guilt, but they lose their sense of self in the process. No matter whether it is through visitation or after the prisoner is released, these strategies can have multiple risks for the family. There are many concerns to consider with families whose father is in prison such as food insecurity due to financial instability, the well-being of the mother, good relationship of co-parenting between the mother and father, and how the father handles prison which in return affects how he handles his family.

### **Engagement**

There are several issues in engaging with children from this population. As a result, social workers must be intentional with their actions to avoid these. While fathers try to engage with their children in prison, it is challenging to keep a connection. Fathers may write letters,

make calls, or have their family visit them; however, the ability to truly interact and connect with their children is difficult (Peniston, 2014). One part that makes it challenging to stay connected is the quantity of which the father gets to call or have visits with their kids as it depends heavily on the mother. Many times, romantic relationships are put through stress when one is sent to prison and terminated. Thus, the father may assume that the mother does not want him talking to the kids since their relationship is over, and she controls the children's phone calls and visits (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). If the family decides to do visits, it may be challenging. There are many barriers with visits such as the prison distance, no physical contact, and children feeling disrespected by staff members (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). While many challenges arise with visitation, it is good for children to have contact with their father. Research shows that doing ordinary activities, such as eating, playing, talking, and watching television, helps affirm family ties (Oldrup, 2019). Visitations help them be able to talk in person with their father and reunite in some ordinary activity. However, one area that is difficult to engage in is intimacy. Intimacy in the case of the family is “an intimacy that involves ‘practices of close association, familiarity, and privileged knowledge’” (Oldrup, 2019, p. 311). Although the father may be able to check in weekly by phone calls, having the intimacy of familiarity and privileged knowledge is challenging when the father is not there every day for the child. Another challenge is the risk that comes with prison. For parents, it may be risky to have their child visit their father as it can be dangerous, or some parents do not want their child to know about the imprisonment (Oldrup, 2019). Even some fathers feel the need to protect themselves when their kids visit them in prison. Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, and Wieling’s (2014) research shows that the fathers felt protective over their daughters coming to visit them due to the possibility of inmates being inappropriate, the staff not being respectful, and possible desire to no longer go to school for the daughter.

Even when fathers are released from prison and can physically reconnect, different challenges arise. Part of the challenge could be that legally they are unable to be with their children. The mother may have full custody of the child or fathers come to find that their child has been put in foster care and have to regain custody (Peniston, 2014). If the family is still together, there is the possibility that the mother does not want the father in the children's lives. If the mother does not want the father around, the child may take on the same position because children tend to read their mother's emotions and desires (Yocum & Nath, 2011). If the mother is open to having the father come back into the family, it is not always easy for the child to want to reconnect. Sometimes the child fears the father or has found a different father figure to attach to (Peniston, 2014). Another challenge for fathers is not having the same role as they did before incarceration. This same issue prevails while fathers are in prison. They have a hard time knowing their role as they cannot take care of their family while they are away (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). Being released they may be able to protect their families, but it is more challenging to take care of them. Many fathers were the income for the family; however, now being in jail it is harder for them to acquire employment (Peniston, 2014). Fathers need to understand their new role in their family's life. What is important for both the father and the family is that there must be clear expectations going into the relationship (Yocum & Nath, 2011). The father may be optimistic that he can continue the relationship he had with his children before he was imprisoned (Kelly-Trombley et al., 2014). The reality is the family has been through immense stress and had to reconstruct what the family dynamic looked like without him. For the children, it is important to talk about what possible outcomes could happen with their father. Children get attached and give their whole confidence to people, especially their fathers. When it comes to a father reentering, however, the child must be aware of all possible scenarios: the good and the

bad. The reality is that not only may the father fail the child, but he might be reincarcerated, and the child might experience losing the father again.

There is also the option that the father may not want to engage with the family. The father may be released from prison and decide to continue in their life of crime that their family does not fit into, or some feel defeated knowing that they could not give something meaningful to their children and choose to stay away (Peniston, 2014). The sad thing is that children want to be involved with their father. Yocum and Nath (2011) show that 100% of children wanted some relationship with their fathers. However, guilt and shame sometimes push fathers to remain disconnected from their families even when they can be so close.

## **Terminology**

When researching specific topics, it is essential to understand certain terminology related to the chosen topic. The term “incarcerated fathers”, includes any father involved in the United States criminal justice system such as an arrest, probation, or incarceration at local, state, and federal levels (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Incarceration can be tied to correction supervision through prison or parole officers (Turney, 2014). It can also be defined as a penalty for criminal activity (Raphael, 2011). A person has committed a criminal act of some kind and needs supervision due to the act that is done. That supervision is usually achieved by imprisonment.

Another important term is minimum security prison. There are many different types of prisons depending on security. For example, there is minimum security and maximum security. Security is about the need for supervision for the prison meaning prisoners in a minimum-security prison need less supervision (Chen & Shapiro, 2007). Typically, many non-violent, drug-related offenses are sent to minimum security prisons (Secret, 2012). This type of prison

has had the greatest increase in population, but they have the least amount of restriction. Therefore, they can do more with their families while in prison (Secret, 2012).

Reentry is an important term to know when talking about families and their fathers who are incarcerated. Reentry is when a prisoner is released from prison (Raphael, 2014). Many challenges come with those who try to reenter society, and many will return to prison due to parole violations or new offenses (Raphael, 2014). However, reentry allows families to reconnect personally in ordinary activities and intimate practices of familiarity and receiving special knowledge.

## **Frameworks**

There are several frameworks and theories helpful to social workers working with children who have imprisoned fathers. For instance, structural family therapy is where after seeing how the family functions, the social worker or therapist looks to restructure the family by reestablishing boundaries, activating growth, and hopefully solving problems (Gerhart, 2024). The family looks at their strengths to help them interact with each other as their family is changing, developing, and tackling new challenges. The goals are to set clear boundaries, create an effective parental hierarchy, and encourage growth individually and as a family through boundary-making, challenging family worldviews, and more (Gerhart, 2024). This framework is important especially when the father is released from prison. It allows the family to establish expectations, understand each other's roles, and deal with the change from the father leaving, returning, and the possibility of re-imprisonment.

Another possible theory is experiential family therapy. This theory was created by Virginia Satir to instill values of hope into the individual while helping the family interact using

experiential exercises (Gerhart, 2024). The idea behind the theory is to grow relationships, grow the individual, learn how to interact and create family guidelines rather than rules. (Gerhart, 2024). This theory can be useful to help children grow as many face challenges when their fathers are imprisoned. They can grow themselves while improving relationships with other family members such as siblings if things are now hostile in their relationship or mothers as that is the only parent they can interact with. They can also learn how to communicate and interact while their father is in prison and when he is released.

No matter what therapy you use it is important to remember the framework of a person-in-environment. A person-in-environment is looking at a person from a micro, mezzo, and macro level to understand life's situation, how all things affect the person, and how the person affects things in life (Gree & McDermott, 2010). For example, when looking at a child who may be acting out and partaking in delinquent activities, one must understand that on a micro level, the child may be dealing with depression and unsure how to cope or manage depression. At a mezzo level, a parent of the child may be in prison leading to not having a good role model who shows exemplary behavior. At the macro level, a family may live in a low-income neighborhood and struggle for necessities. While one may want to focus on one specific level, it is critical to consider all levels of a person and how their environment is affecting the person.

## **Research Informed Practice: Article Summaries**

### **Article Summaries of Family Practice**

#### **Article 1:**

Poehlmann-Tynan, J., Cuthrell, H., Weymouth, L., Burnson, C., Frerks, L., Muentner, L.,

Holder, N., Milavetz, Z., Lauter, L., Hindt, L., Davis, L., Schubert, E., & Schlafer, R.



(2021). Multisite randomized efficacy trial of educational materials for young children with incarcerated parents. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(1), 323-339.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579419001792>

## **Introduction**

Research has looked at children and the effects of having a parent incarcerated. Some effects can be behavior problems, academic difficulties, and health concerns. However, little research has been done on how to intervene and help children whose parents are incarcerated. This study examined the effectiveness of having educational materials to help children adapt to having their parents in jail and see how it affected visits with their parents who are incarcerated.

## **Procedures/Description**

The research included 71 children ages 3 to 8 as well as their caregivers and father who was in jail. Of those 71 children, 32 children were randomly chosen to have the Sesame Street educational outreach and 39 were randomly selected to the wait-list control group. The Sesame Street material included videos and a children's storybook to help children reduce anxiety, sadness, and confusion during this time while building resilience. It also provided a caregiver guide and a 1-page tip sheet for incarcerated parents. This allowed caregivers to have strategies and language to use when communicating with the child about the parent's incarceration as well as how to facilitate the children's relationship with the incarcerated parent. Finally, the incarcerated parent learned about being a parent whether in prison or at home and how important it is to use positive communication. The children in the educational group would watch an educational incarceration video on an iPad and take education material home. Those in the control group watched a video about the weather instead but were also given the education

material to take home. The children were then observed 2 and 4 weeks after watching their selected video

## **Findings**

There was statistically significant evidence that children that were told honest, appropriate explanation about the father's incarceration were more likely to exhibit positive emotions during the visit. Age did play a factor as older children were more likely to exhibit positive behavior where younger children were more likely to cling on to caregivers. The findings also showed that 50% of the caregivers in the educational group talked to their children differently about the parent's incarceration using the advice given in the educational material and used statements like, "It wasn't your fault" and, "You are not alone".

## **Conclusion**

The educational material helped caregivers be able to communicate with their children about the incarceration of the parent in a positive, honest manner. This increased positive behavior in children during jail visits because of what the children were told about their parent who was incarcerated. The study did show that age played a factor in how the children reacted during the visit.

## **Article 2:**

Haas, S. C., & Ray, D. C. (2020). Child-centered play therapy with children affected by adverse childhood experiences: A single-case design. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 29(4), 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000135>

## **Introduction**

Children who have adverse childhood experiences, also known as ACEs, have been found to have long-term effects with physical health, mental health, addictive behaviors, criminal activities, and with adult relationships. Categories of ACEs include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, substance abuse, separation/divorce, domestic violence, incarceration, and living in foster care. One possible intervention studied is child-centered therapy. Child-centered therapy is a therapy that fosters connections and relationships in a safe, therapeutic environment. This study looked at child-centered play therapy on children who had 4 or more ACEs to see how it affected a child's emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer relationship problems, prosocial behavior, and posttraumatic stress.

### **Procedures/Descriptions**

There were two children who participated from a university-based counseling clinic. Both participants were between the ages of 4 and 9 years old, scored 4 or higher on the ACEs checklist, and were not participating in other forms of counseling. A baseline was found before the treatment phase began by taking the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire weekly also known as the SDQ. The participants would then participate in 45-minute play therapy sessions every other week for 24 weeks.

### **Findings**

For participant 1, there was a decrease in their difficulty score from a mean of 26.5 to 11.69 and as low as 3 in the follow up. The posttraumatic stress score also declined with T score being 98 prior to the intervention, 48 at the halfway point (12 sessions), and 46 at the end of treatment (24 sessions). The parent of the participant said that they had less anger, no longer

displayed sadness, was able to verbalize their feelings and opinions, and was more carefree. Participant 2 had a baseline difficulty score mean of 15.5 and went up to 16.18 in the treatment phase but decreased to 9.25 in the follow up. Their T score for Posttraumatic Stress was 78 before intervention, 76 halfway, and 50 at the final session. Parents reported that the participant had a greater attention span, started thinking before acting, stopped physically reacting when upset, discussed their feelings, and accepted responsibilities for mistakes.

## **Conclusion**

While the timing of growth was different between the two participants, both decreased problematic behaviors as well as increased self-acceptance, self-confidence, and prosocial behaviors. These two participants showed that child-centered play therapy can be a useful tool for children with multiple ACEs to help with posttraumatic stress and increase prosocial behavior.

## **Article 3**

Buston, K. (2018). Recruiting, retaining and engaging men in social interventions: Lessons for implementation focusing on a prison-based parenting intervention for young incarcerated fathers. *Child Care in Practice*, 24(2), 164-180.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2017.1420034>

## **Introduction**

Engagement is an important step in successfully implementing programs to parents in prison. Most studies have focused on the engagement of mothers; however, less research is done on how to engage incarcerated fathers. One research found that father's non-engagement was due to a mix of service delivery issues, complexities of their own vulnerabilities, prior negative

experiences of service and feeling excluded or judged. In Scotland there was a Young Offender Institution that successfully implemented a parenting program for incarcerated fathers. This study was done looking at the successfully implemented program in Scotland to see what aspects improved recruitment, retention, and engagement with this program as well as barriers.

### **Procedures/Descriptions**

The Scottish Prison Service had parenting services to 800 male prisoners who aged around 16-21 years. 16 fathers participated in the program. They used a program called *Being a Young Dad*. The *Being a Young Dad* program was given over a full day a week for 10 weeks as well as a condensed version that was 6 weeks long. The session would include topics like “attachment”, “self-esteem”, “budgeting”, “positive disciplining”, and more. This program was voluntary and included three enhanced family visits, a final celebratory visit, and an award ceremony for those who completed the program.

### **Findings**

When looking at recruitment, the primary way to recruit a father into the program was through parenting officers and peer mentor attending induction where new prisoners are introduced to the rules, guidelines, and processes of prison. Nearly all of the men who attended the first session went to attend the rest of the program and appeared to actively participate in their own unique ways. There were multiple factors that facilitated successful implementation. A key factor was the positive relationship between the facilitator and the participant. It was important that the facilitator demonstrated respect for the participant and built a caring relationship. Another factor was relationship between the men in the program. The hope was that the men would create an environment where everyone would listen, respect each other, and be

free of conflict and aggression. Throughout the program there was little or no conflict between the men. Classroom climate was also a factor. The facilitators would bring in milk each day with fruit or biscuits, and included coffee, tea, and juice. They usually were in a bright room with beanbags for sitting and had the radio on in the background. There were other factors as well such as how the content was delivered and the fact that there is not a lot to do in prison, which helps bring in participants. Some barriers that were discovered were introducing “new ways” in the institution was challenging and met with resistance by the prison staff. Situations outside the program also affected the men’s willingness to engage such as decisions not going in their favor with lawyers or disorganization with meetings. Finally, if the men did not work well together this made it difficult to facilitate the program and made it challenging for prisoners to want to engage.

## **Conclusion**

There are multiple barriers that affect men, specifically those in prison, to engage in programs. These include the institution, which is resistance to change, situations happening in their life outside the prison, and the relationships with men in the program. However, to have good engagement in a program, trust and respect from the facilitator was key to motivating engagement as well as the environment of the program and how the content was delivered to the prisoners.

## **Article 4**

Eddy, J. M., Martinez Jr, C. R., Burraston, B. O., Herrera, D., & Newton, R. M. (2022). A

Randomized Controlled Trial of a Parent Management Training Program for Incarcerated Parents: Post-Release Outcomes. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(8), 4605. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19084605>

## **Introduction**

Positive connection with family members is important while incarcerated in order to improve chances of long-term success after release. Positive connection improves the well-being of the parent, helps with family engagement, and allows for support after release. One way to create those positive connections is through prison-based parenting programs. This study looked at a cognitive-behavioral parent management training program called Parenting Inside Out and looked at the results of this program. The hypothesis was that parent adjustment and criminality would be directly related to parent-caregiver relationship as well as parent-child relationship and parenting. The idea was the increase in positive relationships would lead to a decrease in criminality and a less likely chance of returning to prison.

## **Procedures/Descriptions**

Those who participated in this study had to have at least one child between the age of 3 and 11, be able to contact the child legally, have had some role in parenting the child in the past and the possibility of parenting in the future, not commit a crime against a child or any sexual offense, to be in contact with the caregiver of the child, and have less than 9 months remaining before the end of their prison sentence. 453 prisoners were deemed eligible to participate and 359 consented to participate. 54% of them were women and 46% were men. Those who were assigned to the intervention were offered the PIO program which was a 36 session. Each session lasted 2 and ½ hours and were held 3X a week for 12 weeks. The participants were encouraged to talk to the caregivers and the caregivers also received materials in the mail and were encouraged to talk to the participants about the experience as well as the program staff if they had any questions. Those in the control group were not enrolled in the PIO group but were allowed to other services that they could receive through the institution.

## **Findings**

Most participants of the program indicated that they would “strongly recommend” the program to other incarcerated parents which signifies they enjoyed the program. Many participants said that the program was useful for incarcerated parents and had a positive effect on them. The impact was seen in their parenting, the parent-caregiver relationship, and parent adjustment when the parents were incarcerated. Once released from prison, participants of the intervention had 37% fewer arrests than control participants one year after release. They were also more likely to report no post-release criminal behavior with women more likely to report zero behaviors than men. They also reported no post-release substance abuse problem again where women were more likely to report no post-release substance abuse problems. When controlling though for things like gender and prior substance use problems, the intervention was found to significantly improve chances to report no post-release abuse problems.

## **Conclusion**

Parents that were part of PIO reported less problems with substance use and engaging in criminal behavior which resulted in fewer arrests as well as growing positive relationships with the family and growing parenting skills.

## **Article 5:**

Agorsor, C. F., Owen, J., Coleman, J. J., Reese, R. J., DeBlaere, C., Davis, D. E., Sinha, S., Porter, E. F., & Gafford, J. (2023). The effectiveness of psychotherapy in jails with spirituality informed care: A benchmark comparison. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000333>

## **Introduction**



The purpose of this study was to examine the incorporation of psychotherapy and religious interventions within jail settings. This article was written to share its findings and expand research on the effectiveness of therapy services as research on the topic is sparse. The primary research question leading this study was whether is psychotherapy “as effective as benchmarking comparisons from RCTs for psychotherapy treatment on psychological, relational, and spiritual distress outcomes?” (Agorsor, 2023, p. 3).

### **Procedures/Descriptions**

The sample consisted of 22 therapists and 138 prisoners incarcerated in two county jails in the Western United States. The prisoners who served as clients are most were mostly males aged 18 to 51. The therapists were doctoral or master levels trainees with professional experience ranging from 0 to 4 years. Both the therapists and clients met weekly and were assigned an anonymous number used for their studying materials. The clients completed a weekly survey packet while therapists completed a Therapy Session Checklist at the end of each session with an average of 4.95 sessions. Both the client's and therapist's responses were sealed in an envelope placed into a locked drop box.

### **Findings**

The study revealed that 60.1% of sessions had at least one religious or spiritual intervention. These interventions included discussing virtues, affirming beliefs, and the therapist praying with their client. Researchers also examined three outcomes including psychological, spiritual, and relational distress. They found a medium-to-large-sized effect on relational and psychological changes. Thus, researchers determined both interventions can be effective when working with incarcerated individuals.

### **Conclusion**

The researchers found evidence that psychotherapy in jail settings decreased psychological and relational distress in inmates. This finding implied a positive impact on mental health service providers across the United States. However, when analyzing spiritual distress, there was no clinically significant evidence of improvement in inmate's lives. As a result, researchers determined that further research is necessary to effectively reduce the psychological, relational, and spiritual distress of those incarcerated.

## **Article Summaries of Structural Family Therapy Theory**

### **Article 1:**

Tadros, E., Durante, K. A., McKay, T., & Hollie, B. (2021). Coparenting from prison: An examination of incarcerated fathers' consensus of coparenting. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2021.1913669>

### **Introduction**

The study focused on how the role of co-parenting and parental incarceration affects children. The researchers strived to answer the questions: *Do incarcerated fathers with stronger familial relationships perceive a higher consensus of co-parenting with their partner? Does race/ethnicity moderate the relationship between familial ties and perceived consensus of co-parenting?* They hypothesized that fathers who have been incarcerated for a shorter period, have a stable life, and healthy partner relationship, will believe they have a higher consensus of parenting than their counterparts.

### **Procedures/Descriptions**

The participants were 1,109 incarcerated males who were co-parenting with a female partner. The men lived in several different states and had to be older than 18 years old and speak

English. They were asked questions about their relationship, co-parenting, and the well-being of their biological and nonbiological children during their incarceration. As researchers analyzed the men's responses, they controlled various aspects such as race, education, and earnings before incarceration by creating tables with criteria and then conducting ordinary least squares regression analysis.

## **Findings**

Following their analysis, researchers found that as the effect size increased, the level of education also increased. Fathers attending parenting classes during incarceration were also positively associated with the consensus of co-parenting. However, the incarcerated man's emotional well-being, drug history, years until release, or attendance of counseling were not related to the consensus of parenting. The researchers viewed their findings as useful but said developing validated measures of incarcerated co-parenting would be beneficial. They also expressed a need to have qualitative and quantitative assessments of therapy approaches for specific families with an incarcerated parent.

## **Conclusion**

The results suggest that familial relationships such as being married or romantically involved with the co-parent, living with the child before incarceration, and education are strong predictors of consensus of parenting; however, race does not moderate the observed relationships between familial ties and consensus of co-parenting.

## **Article 2:**

Hoegler, S., Mills, A. L., Feda, A., & Cummings, E. M. (2023). Randomized preventive intervention for families: Adolescents' emotional insecurity and attachment to fathers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 37(1), 79-91. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001042>

## **Introduction**

This study evaluated the effects of marital conflict interventions on children's emotional security and focused on father-child attachment. Researchers posed three research questions in this longitudinal study including: *Is the effect of the FCP on emotional insecurity in the interparental relationship at six months mediated by parent-adolescent attachment security at post-test? Is the effect of the FCP on emotional insecurity at 12 months mediated by parent-adolescent attachment security at post-test or six months? Finally, is the mediating role of attachment in the effect of the FCP on adolescents' emotional insecurity about the interparental relationship different for the father-adolescent relationship as opposed to the mother-adolescent relationship?* The researchers hypothesized that interventions in father-child attachment security would improve relationships over time.

## **Procedures/Descriptions**

The study took place in a midsized city in the mid-Western United States and included 225 families with adolescents between the ages of 11 and 17. The adolescents were representative of their community as they differed in race and gender. The adolescent's parents were required to be married or cohabitated for at least three years. Families were recruited by various community events and flyers. Upon participating in the study, they were randomly assigned to either the control group or group who received no treatment. Data was collected from families on five occasions over three years. Parent-adolescent attachment security was measured using the mother and father subscales of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. The adolescents were given several scales and subscales to rate the level of attachment with each parent.

## **Findings**

The researchers found no direct effect of the intervention on emotional security. However, there was a significant effect of the parent-adolescent condition for the father and mother at the post-test. Although there were helpful findings, there is still limited research on fathers and interventions. As a result, researchers say further studies should be completed.

### **Conclusion**

The findings support the importance of identifying mediating mechanisms that facilitate the effect of the intervention on emotional security. Thus, the study suggests that attachment may be a mechanism underlying the effects of the parent-adolescent condition on emotional security after six months.

### **Article 3:**

Tadros, E., Durante, K. A., McKay, T., Barbini, M., & Hollie, B. (2022). Mental health, perceived consensus of coparenting, and physical health among incarcerated fathers and their nonincarcerated, romantic partners. *Families, Systems, & Health, 40*(2), 210-224.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000671>

### **Introduction**

Research has shown that incarceration has negative effects on prisoners' mental health; however, the partner or co-parent of the prisoner also struggles. This study examined the association between self-reported mental health, the perceived consensus of co-parenting, and self-reported physical health for incarcerated males and their nonincarcerated, romantic, co-parenting female partners. The research questions include: *Do individuals with better self-reported mental health and a stronger perception of consensus of co-parenting experience better self-reported physical health? Is having a partner with better self-reported mental health and a stronger perception of consensus of co-parenting associated with better self-reported physical*

*health?* Based on these questions, the researchers hypothesized that better self-reported mental health and a strong consensus of co-parenting are associated with better physical health for the father and mother.

### **Procedures/Descriptions**

The participants of this study included 483 romantically involved co-parents from the Multisite Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting, and Partnering. Each couple was over 18 and consisted of an incarcerated male and a non-incarcerated female who were romantically involved (dating) or married. There was a diversity in race and location as participants differed in race, lived in several different states, and were serving various lengths of prison sentences. Initially, the participants were interviewed individually with questions addressing relationship quality, co-parenting, family contact, and the well-being of the family. Next, all participants were asked to self-report their mental and physical health as well as their partners using a Likert scale. The partners were separated from each other as they completed the survey.

### **Findings**

Upon analyzing the respondent's answers, women self-reported overall worse physical health than men. However, incarcerated men believe more than women that their co-parenting relationship could be stronger. Researchers found that while parental perceptions of the co-parenting relationship go up in response to one another, the relationship was weak. Researchers also noticed that a partner effect links perceived consensus of coparenting from men to women indicating that women whose partners reported a higher perceived consensus of coparenting also reported better physical health.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the researcher's findings, they concluded that incarceration is connected to feelings of detachment and health issues suggesting that weak coparenting can be related to physical health. Also, living with their child before incarceration predicts a higher consensus of co-parenting among incarcerated men.

### **Family Treatment Curriculum: Families with Fathers in Prison**

#### **Purpose**

The goal of the social workers was to improve family functioning and provide positive coping skills for each family member. For the mother, the purpose was to help her prepare her children for the father's release as well as cope with the emotions the mother was feeling. For the children, the goal was to educate them on what was going on with the father and prepare them for the possibility of having their father return to their life. Finally, the goal for the father was to have him have realistic expectations as he came back into the family system.

#### **Treatment Plan**

*This form will be reviewed again in no more than two months, and progress toward goals will be noted. Changes in interventions or goals should be noted immediately.*

**Patients' Name:** Jason (Primary Client) (8), Chad (Father) (29), Sharon (Mother) (28) , and Julia (Daughter) (5)

**Clinic Record:** N/A

**Number Insurance:** N/A

**Diagnosis:** N/A

**Summary of Patient's Concerns:** Mother is concerned about father coming back into the family's life. Father is to be released from prison and she is concerned about how the

children will react, how the father will be once he is released, and is feeling overwhelmed.

**Identified Patient Strengths and Resources:**

Chad has shown evidence of wanting to reconnect with his family and stay in their lives. Sharon has displayed care for the family as she took the step to have the family be in therapy to help with the re-entry of Chad. She is also strong as she is currently a working mother trying to financially support her children while her partner is in prison. Children are helpful and caring to mom. Jason has been trying to support his mother since his father’s incarceration and Julia shows resilience.

**Interview Progress Narrative**

**Long-Term Goals:**

To build on the strengths of the clients and assist each family member (father, mother, and children) in coping with the father’s reentry into the family to create a functional family dynamic.

<b>Problem/Concern #1: Stress of return of Father</b>		
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Progress Towards Goal</b>
Help family with stress and emotions of father returning	ACEs Assessment (Week 1) DSM Level 1 Adult Measure Screening Assessment (Week 1) Child Trauma Screen (Week 1)	



	DSM Level 1 Acute Stress Adult Screening (Week 1) Mindful Meditation (Begin every session) Play Therapy (Week 2) Talk about Family dynamics, roles, and boundaries (Week 4) Drawing (Week 4)	
<b>Problem/Concern #2: Children adjusting to Father</b>		
Understand children's feeling of father's return and help them prepare	Play Therapy to understand relationships (Week 1) Expressions About Me Worksheet (Week 2) Exploring Emotions with Legos Worksheet (Week 2) Education Videos (Week 3) Use Drawings (Week 4)(Week 6) Setting Boundaries Worksheet (Week 5)	
<b>Problem/Concern #3: Father and Mother having a tense relationship</b>		
Help father and mother find a way to work together to parent kids and live as a family.	Co-Parenting Articles (Week 2) Thought Challenging Worksheet (Week 4) Education about Boundaries and Conflict (Week 5) Enactment (Week 5) Write Letter (Week 6)	

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Patient signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*If patient is a child:*

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This curriculum used a theoretical orientation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT in conjunction with Play Therapy. The National Library of Medicine (2016) describes CBT as a way “to form a clear idea of your thoughts, attitudes, and expectations. The goal was to reveal and change false and distressing beliefs.” CBT looks at thought patterns and finds a way to change the way one thinks from negative to neutral to positive. It does not focus so much on the past. Instead, it focuses on current problems and shaping our thoughts and behavioral patterns. Not only does it help to change thought patterns, but “it also helps people think more clearly and control their thoughts better” (National Library of Medicine, 2016). Different types of cognitive behavioral therapy can be used such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy which uses mindful meditation to deal with stress and related symptoms (Washington Psychological Wellness, 2021). There is also acceptance and commitment therapy that works on how to cope with emotional pain through thoughts and feelings (Washington Psychological Wellness, 2021). There is rational emotive behavior therapy, exposure dialectical behavior therapy, and more.

Another helpful orientation was play therapy. Play therapy is an important approach with children because “Therapists strategically utilize play therapy to help children express what is

troubling them when they do not have the verbal language to express their thoughts and feelings” (Lilly et al., n.d.). Children’s worlds revolve around toys and playing, which is how they can speak without using words. Toys represent children’s words and playing represents their language (Lilly et al., n.d.). Many times, children act out in different areas of their life such as in school, at home, and in relationships. Play therapy can assess and understand the child as they play. Also, play therapy can help children cope with difficult emotions and find solutions to problems they face in their lives (Lilly et al., n.d.). Play therapy is beneficial for the entire family as “children and families heal faster when they work together” (Lilly et al., n.d.).

Finally, the last theoretical orientation that the social workers used is structural family therapy. Structural family therapy looks at families through boundaries, hierarchies, and subsystems and helps clients resolve individual symptoms and relational problems through those boundaries, hierarchies, and subsystems (Gehart, 2024). The idea is to help create clear boundaries in areas with diffused or rigid boundaries. These boundaries are vital to solving symptoms and problems because “Boundaries are rules for managing the physical and psychological distance between family members and for defining the regulation of closeness, distance, hierarchy, and family roles” (Gehart, 2024, p. 204). Using enactments, systemic reframing, boundary-making, and challenging worldviews allows family members to think about the boundaries they have created, adjust the way they think, and change the family dynamic to improve the problem.

### **Goals and Outcomes**

The goal of the curriculum was to build on the strengths of the clients and assist each family member (father, mother, and children) in coping with the father’s reentry into the family. There were four main ways this curriculum is designed to meet this overarching goal: (1) prepare

the mother for the father's reentry by challenging negative thoughts and emotions; (2) help the father adjust to society and his new role in the family; (3) teach positive co-parenting skills for both the father and mother; and (4) assist the children in adjusting to their father's return by teaching positive coping skills as well as strategies to regulate emotions.

### **Techniques and Methods**

To obtain the desired goals, the social workers used cognitive behavioral techniques with the mom and children. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy was used at the beginning of each session to help each member feel relaxed during the session and learn how to use mindfulness skills in everyday life. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy helped the client have a clear mind and give them the ability to make clear choices with moment-to-moment decisions (Washington Psychological Wellness, 2021). Some strategies were breathing meditations, deep muscle relaxation, self-calming techniques, and calming imagery. The mother also used cognitive behavior by completing a thought-challenging worksheet. This technique allowed her to write down her thoughts, analyze the evidence for and against the thought, and what she now thought looking at all the evidence.

Play therapy techniques were used to help obtain goals for the children. Play therapy allowed social workers to learn about children and how they view relationships around them (Lilly et al., n.d.). Play therapy was used in the first session to understand how the child felt, interacted with the world, what the child was thinking, and when their father returned to examine the interaction between the children and their father. Along with play therapy for the children, there was use of educational videos for the children to understand what was happening with their father. Worksheets were given to encourage the children to talk about their emotions and how to deal with them. The children also drew to express their thoughts and emotions.

Finally, structural family therapy helped the family function with the change of the father returning. The family discussed their uncertainty about the situation and then looked at other outcomes. Chad and Sharon used enactment to improve their communication skills. Enactment is when the family reenacts a situation that happened so that the therapist can mediate the situation and create changes through the situation (Gehart, 2024).

### **Family Dynamics**

Families with fathers in prison create an array of family dynamics. Thus, social workers needed to understand each family member's perspective on the situation and their relationships. Chad, the incarcerated father, had a strong bond with Jason. Chad was teaching Jason baseball, and they played catch together every night after dinner. Chad and his daughter Julia bonded as she was a baby and toddler, but they did not have the chance to build a relationship before his arrest. Chad and his wife were married for four years when he went to jail. They had a good relationship, and Chad still felt sparks when they were together. When he was in prison, Sharon came to see him as often as she could, usually every few months. During her visits Sharon seemed overwhelmed and stressed, but they still had the same love and affection as before. Chad expected his relationship with Sharon to pick off where they left off three years ago. On the other hand, Sharon resented Chad for being gone and taking her time away from the kids since she had to get a job and could not stay home. She was also frustrated with his choices and was anxious about the future of their relationship upon his prison release.

After Chad's arrest, Sharon had grown closer to her son Jason as he had become more responsible and mature. She viewed Chad's arrest as Jason learning what *not* to do in life and how our actions have consequences. Sharon was surprised that Chad had behavioral issues at

school since he was well-behaved and helpful at home. Sharon's relationship with her daughter Julia had worsened as Julia had become dishonest and often rebelled against her mother.

Jason understood that his father was away due to making poor choices. He felt like he needed to "make up" for his father's absence and put pressure on himself. He understood his mom was stressed and tried to help her but rebelled against the teacher at school. His misbehavior allowed him to show his true feelings and have control over something in his life. Jason also felt responsible for caring for Julia, which had strengthened their bond over the past few years. Julia did not know where her father was, but she was told that he would be back soon. She struggled with understanding why he left and why she was not good enough for him to stay.

Each family member had different views of the situation and reflected upon their relationships with each family member. Upon his release, Chad needed to enter the family with empathy and be willing to accept new roles. Sharon was to be upfront about her feelings with Chad and learn how to coparent with him regardless of their relationship status. Both Jason and Julia needed to learn how to express their feelings in a healthy manner and understand their father's absence was not their fault. Jason, specifically, had to control his outbursts at school and understand he was not responsible for the family. Julia needed to be less deceptive and more honest with her feelings. Overall, each family member strived to make these changes so that family dynamics and functioning could greatly improve.

### **Roles of Social Workers and Family Members**

Social workers had several different roles when working with each family member; however, their primary goal was to focus on each person's mental stability, well-being, and role within the family. The social workers strived to create healthy family dynamics as the father reentered the family. Therefore, the social workers were educators, educating both the parents

and the children. The social workers educated the parents on how to work together for the benefit of the children. The children were educated about prisons and the situation with their father. The social workers also were mediators once the father was released from prison and there were conversations between the mother and father during sessions. The social workers were brokers as they gave resources and referrals both to the family. Finally, the social workers were advocates for all families that have a father in prison wanting to create change to the prison system to help families stay together.

The father's name is Chad, and he was expected to be released from a minimum-security prison in a few weeks when sessions started. He was incarcerated for three years for a non-violent drug offense. Upon his release, social workers provided him with parental education and encouraged him to maintain a healthy relationship with his wife.

His wife is Sharon, and the couple had been married for seven years at the time of his release. During his incarceration, Sharon had been working at Walmart while caring for their two children. The social workers wanted to work with Sharon to be more willing to co-parent with Chad. Their oldest child's name was Jason who was eight years old. During family therapy, the social workers taught him behavior skills and how to express his anger healthily. Finally, the daughter's name was Julia, and she was five years old. Often, she struggled with honesty and sharing her feelings. Thus, the social workers taught her to be more open with others.

## **Structure of Curriculum**

### **Week 1**

Goals	Therapist <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observe the family</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn family dynamics</li> <li>• Provide assessment for each member</li> <li>• Explain the process of the therapy sessions</li> </ul>
Purpose	<p>The therapist's goal is to learn about each individual in the family and their roles. The goal is to also to understand what each family member is thinking and feeling about the father being released from prison. The clients and the therapist are to establish the desired outcome of the therapy. Then there will then be discussion of the steps to take to reach that result.</p>
Checklist Items	<p>Toys</p> <p>ACEs Assessment</p> <p>Child Trauma Screen</p> <p>DSM Level 1 Adult Measure Screening</p> <p>DSM Level 1 Acute Stress Adult Measure</p>
Psychoeducation	<p>The therapist will introduce their role in the therapy client relationship and talk about the treatment plan. The purpose for ACE, DSM Level 1 Adult Screening, and DSM I Level 1 Acute Stress Measure will be explained as well as the use of the different techniques that will be used in the sessions such as play therapy, CBT, and mindful mediation.</p>
Intervention	<p>Mom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete DSM 1 assessment and acute stress measure</li> </ul> <p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the ACEs assessment.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children will be given toys to play with (Gives therapist opportunity to learn about the children).</li> </ul> <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom: Journal how she feels of father returning</li> <li>• Children: Draw a picture of dad</li> </ul>
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**Week 2**

Goal	<p>Mom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To learn about Co-Parenting</li> </ul> <p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on emotions</li> </ul>
Purpose	<p>The main goal is to prepare mother for the father to return back into their lives. Both parents are to read about co-parenting to grow skills separately before they reunite. The goal for the children is to understand their emotions, how they are feeling, and how to deal with those emotions.</p>
Checklist Items	<p>Co-Parenting Papers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Do's and Don'ts of Co-Parenting Well</li> <li>• What to Know about Co-Parenting</li> <li>• How to Have a Healthy Co-Parenting Relationship, From Family Therapists</li> </ul> <p>Worksheet for Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expression of Me</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring Emotions Lego</li> </ul> <p>Toys</p> <p>Notebook and Pencil</p> <p>Papers and Coloring Pencils</p>
<p>Psychoeducation</p>	<p>Talk about the importance of co-parenting. Discuss how co-parenting has been shown to help reduce hostility both with parents and siblings of family. It is important that both mother and father understand why it is important to learn about co-parenting</p> <p>For the children it is important to know of the different emotions they can feel, how they feel them, and how to help if they are feeling sad or angry.</p>
<p>Intervention</p>	<p>Mindful Meditation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom: Deep Muscle Relaxation</li> <li>• Children: Deep Muscle Relaxation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Find a comfortable position, closed eyes</li> <li>○ Practice Deep Breathing</li> <li>○ Prompt child to progressively tense and relax various. Muscles groups until the child feel relaxed</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Co-Parenting Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go through one Article Together</li> <li>• Discuss thoughts about article</li> </ul> <p>Worksheets for Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressions About Me</li> <li>• Exploring Emotions with Lego</li> </ul>

	<p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom: Read another Co-Parenting Article and take notes</li> <li>• Child: Write one thing that made them happy in the week and 1 thing they did if they got mad</li> </ul>
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**Week 3**

Goal	<p>Mother</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on changing thoughts of Father</li> </ul> <p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on expectations and regulating emotions with father's return</li> </ul>
Purpose	<p>The main purpose for this session is to help the children prepare for the return of their father. Through play therapy and educational videos, the goal is to educate on what is going to happen and help them understand their feelings and behaviors. For the mother, the purpose is to create strategies to work on negative thoughts of father.</p>
Checklist Items	<p>Toys</p> <p>Sesame Street Educational Videos</p> <p>Paper and Pencil</p> <p>Paper and Crayons</p>
Psychoeducation	<p>Educational Videos help to explain father's incarceration to children in an honest, positive way. The purpose is to help the children understand that their father was in prison, but now is being released and has the option to come back to their family.</p>

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques help to change negative thought patterns in our brains. These techniques help the mother with negative thought patterns she has of the father. This way when the father returns, they can talk in a calm manner, having empathy and understanding for one another, and work on parenting the kids

Interventions

- Meditation
- Mom: Breathing Meditation
    - Find a relaxed, comfortable position
    - Notice and relax your body
    - Tune into your breath
    - Be Kind to your wandering mind
    - Stay here for 5-7 minutes
    - Check in before you check out
  - Children: Self-calming Techniques
- Children: Educational Video
- Have the Children watch the video
  - Fill out “How I Feel” Worksheet
- Mom: CBT Thought Challenging Worksheet
- Homework
- Mom: Journal each time thought of father comes in mother’s mind and use the thought challenging worksheet
  - Children: Sit down with mom to talk about dad returning and ask any questions they may have

## Week 4

Goal	Mother and Children <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss Family Dynamics</li><li>• Explain the shift that will occur with dad returning</li><li>• Prepare for changes</li></ul>
Purpose	As the father is returning by the next session, the purpose of this session is to help the family understand the family dynamics they have now to understand how there will be a shift in roles and function of family. This will hopefully help reduce stress in the family and have realistic expectation of father return.
Checklist Items	Toys Paper Pencil Crayons Markers Colored Pencils Whiteboard Markers for whiteboard Movable Chairs Forgiveness Letter Worksheet
Psychoeducation	It is important to understand boundaries in the family. For example, talking about diffused boundaries and this is when there is no clear

	<p>distinction between members that creates a strong connection of these members at the expense of autonomy. There will also be discussion about rigid boundaries where autonomy is emphasized at the expense of emotional connection creating isolation. Discussion will explain that both of these costs an individual something valuable and that is why it is important to have clear boundaries allowing each person to have a sense of identity and connection with family members.</p>
<p>Intervention</p>	<p>Mindful Meditation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on a calming imagery</li> </ul> <p>Family will work together to create a picture of family now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would mom be doing</li> <li>• What would the children be doing</li> <li>• After drawing, talk about how the drawing makes each individual feel</li> <li>• Look at what will dad possible be doing when he joins</li> <li>• Discuss emotions of adding dad</li> </ul> <p>Discuss Boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there diffused boundaries</li> <li>• Are there rigid boundaries</li> <li>• What steps can be taken to create clear boundaries</li> </ul> <p>Therapist will Challenge Family’s Certainty and Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about the assumptions they will have with the father</li> <li>• Look at the possible outcomes</li> </ul>

	<p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom: Make a list of strengths the family has and how they can use it once the father returns</li> <li>• Children: Right Forgiveness Letter</li> </ul>
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**Week 5**

Goal	<p>All</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate Father's Re-entry</li> <li>• Look at different family boundaries</li> <li>• Observe interaction of family members</li> </ul>
Purpose	<p>To see how relationships have changed since father has rejoined the family. Look at the emotions of each family member and how they are handling the father's return</p>
Checklist Items	<p>Toys</p> <p>Movable Chairs</p>
Psychoeducation	<p>Conflict is a natural part of life. Therefore, it is important to understand how to deal with conflict, especially with loved ones.</p> <p>Through enactment one can observe the interaction of a certain situation and then redirect behaviors or communications in the</p>

	<p>situation. Enactment will help give examples of what to look for in conflict and how to better handle conflict.</p>
<p>Intervention</p>	<p>Mindful Meditation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All: Breathing Exercises</li> </ul> <p>Family: Enactment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a conversation that they had a conflict over that week</li> <li>• Practice how to deal with that conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stop parents from interrupting each other</li> <li>○ Encourage emotional understanding</li> <li>○ Rearrange chairs if necessary</li> <li>○ If dealing with children, ask parents to actively establish an effective hierarchical position with a child</li> <li>○ Help children understand conflict</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with father (playing with the kids)</li> <li>• Setting Boundaries Worksheet</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents: When a conflict arises, sit as they did in the session, letting each other speak without interrupting</li> <li>• Worksheets from Chapter 15: Learning to Solve Problems</li> </ul>

**Week 6**

<p>Goal</p>	<p>Successfully terminate services with family</p>
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Purpose	To celebrate the achievements of each family member. To talk about possible challenges that may surface and talk about the strategies that were learned throughout the sessions.
Checklist	<p>Balloons</p> <p>Food</p> <p>Toys</p> <p>Papers</p> <p>Pencils</p> <p>Colored Pencils</p>
Psychoeducation	<p>Termination is a hard time no matter if it is celebrating completing goals or due to unfortunate circumstance. It is important to explain the process of termination, why it is necessary, and how it is ok to have certain emotions such as sadness, fear, uncertainty, etc. To help with termination, remembering the strategies and techniques used in sessions that can be applied their life will allow the family to feel more ready to end services. There should also be an opportunity for the family to ask questions about anything they have learned in the session or things they may be concerned about coming up.</p>
Interventions	<p>Mother: Write letter to father</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help explain her emotions</li> <li>• Allow her to show her respect towards the father</li> <li>• Hopes for the future of the father</li> </ul> <p>Children: Draw a picture of Father</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features they look of their father</li> <li>• What they would be doing with their father</li> <li>• Write qualities they like of their father</li> </ul> <p>Father writes goals he wants to accomplish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writes letter for mother and children</li> </ul> <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents: Continue learning about co-parenting and growing skills</li> <li>• Children: Managing Emotions, Coping with Loss and Change</li> </ul> <p>Worksheet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father: Create a plan for one goal that he wants to accomplish for his family and one goal for himself</li> </ul>
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### **Transitions and Endings**

Ending therapy required clear communication from both the therapist and the clients. From the first session, the therapist made it clear that the goal was to end therapy and have the family function on their own. At the end of the six sessions, the therapist and clients discussed if they felt there was still a need for the therapy based on the goals they created in the first week. The therapist and the clients agreed on ending the therapeutic relationship, the family reflected on the past sessions, what they had learned, and what had been most impactful for them. There was also writing of letters. The mother wrote a letter to the father talking about how she had felt while encouraging him about the future. The father wrote a letter to the mother sharing his emotions and what he wanted to do in the future. He also wrote letters to the children expressing his feelings whether that be love, sorrow, regret, or other emotions. The children drew pictures of their father and wrote the qualities they like in their dad. Doing so helped the father create a

positive connection with the children and have the children remember the good things about their father. Then, there was a ceremony to celebrate the family's progress and the end of therapy. This celebration was for the family to celebrate their progress and enjoy time with each other. The celebration included eating, talking, and playing together. The therapists wrote a letter, talking to each family member. The letter talked about the strengths of each family member, the strategies that they worked on during the sessions, and helpful steps to continue their progress outside of therapy. Finally, the family talked about goals for the future and how they would continue to work on those goals.

### **Methods for Assessing Outcomes**

The assessment tools used at the beginning of sessions assessed the outcome of each session. For the children, the child trauma screen was used to measure the symptoms of trauma compared to when they initially started therapy. The DSM Level 1 adult measure screening assessed symptoms in the mother, and the DSM Level 1 acute stress adult measure measured stress symptoms for the mother.

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