

Children of Incarcerated Parents: Considerations for Professional School Counselors



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The rate of school-aged children with incarcerated parents continues to rise in the United States. These children are especially prone to experiencing social-emotional, behavioral, and academic issues in school as a result of various factors, including general strain and stress associated with incarceration. Given their unique role in schools, professional school counselors are well positioned to provide support to children of incarcerated parents. This article presents a review of relevant literature, including key theories that explain the challenges faced by children with incarcerated parents. The impact of incarceration on children as well as protective and risk factors are presented. Finally, strategies and resources school counselors can use when working with this population are offered.

Keywords: incarceration, school counselors, children, risk factors, protective factors

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Graham & Harris, 2013). Over the last 30 years, the rate of incarceration has significantly increased, and as a result the number of children whose parents are incarcerated has risen (Boudin, 2011). In 2007, approximately 809,800 incarcerated parents in the United States had minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Graham & Harris, 2013). In 2008, around 2.7 million children of incarcerated parents were under the age of 18, with most incarcerated parents having two or more children (Johnson & Easterling, 2015). The rate of parental incarceration has continued to grow over the last decade. According to the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (2014), approximately 10 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.

Although reasons for jailing or imprisonment vary, a central concern persists: the impact of parental incarceration on children. The sudden disruption of a close relationship can cause traumatic stress and inadequate care—factors that influence and in some cases delay a child’s development (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Incarceration often leads children to experience unwarranted stress, lack of supervision, socioeconomic strain, and additional responsibilities at home (Robertson, 2007). Many children suffer emotionally, mentally, physically, and academically as a result of the loss of a parent to jail or prison. The identification of educational resources and support mechanisms are central to ensuring that the needs of children with incarcerated parents are met.

Operating within their scope of practice and the national model advanced by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2012), school counselors can offer enhanced services to support children with incarcerated parents. However, school counselors have expressed the need for additional training and resources to effectively work with this student population (Brown, 2017). Without a firm understanding of theory, research, and best practice for working with children of incarcerated parents, school counselors can fail to deliver sufficient support. In this article, we aim

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to further develop school counselors' knowledge and increase awareness of available resources for working with this student population. To this end, we present historical and theoretical perspectives of parental incarceration and describe the effects of incarceration on children. Support mechanisms applicable to school counselors' work with children of incarcerated parents are provided.

Incarcerated Parents and Their Children: An Historical Perspective

Between 1991 and 2007, there was a 79% increase in the number of parents in state and federal prisons and an 80% increase in the number of children with incarcerated parents, because some parents had more than one child (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). In 1999, over 1.3 million children had a father in a state or federal prison; almost 130,000 children had a mother in prison (Mumola, 2000). Since 1990, the rate of female prisoners has grown at a rate of 106% compared to 75% for male prisoners (Lopez & Bhat, 2007). The average age of children who have an incarcerated parent is 8 years old; one in five children with an incarcerated parent is under 5 years old (La Vigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008). The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) estimated that one in 28 children has an incarcerated parent. One in 14 children has had a parent incarcerated at some point in their life (Murphey & Cooper, 2015).

Historically, children of color experience parental incarceration more frequently than White children. For example, "African American children were nearly nine times more likely to have a parent in prison than Caucasian children. Hispanic children were three times more likely than Caucasian children to have a parent in prison" (Lopez & Bhat, 2007, p. 141). More recently, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016) reported that African American, Hispanic, and American Indian children were significantly more likely than their Caucasian peers to have an incarcerated parent. Today, the rates of parental incarceration remain polarized by race. Morsy and Rothstein (2016) indicated that 10% of African American students have an incarcerated parent, with 25% experiencing parental incarceration at some point in their life. Perhaps these statistics are, in part, explained by the mass incarceration of persons of color resulting from social injustices that stem from initiatives such as the war on drugs. The use of incarceration in the United States to retaliate against nonviolent drug offenses has contributed to a large number of children separated from their parents and explains the emotional and psychological distress they often experience (Allard, 2012).

Theoretical Perspectives on Incarceration

Numerous sociological, criminal justice, and psychological theories articulate the effects of incarceration. *General strain theory* and *attachment theory*, in particular, are useful to conceptualize the impact of incarceration on children. These theories offer valuable insights for school counselors who aim to support children with incarcerated parents. However, it is important that these theories only serve to guide school counselors toward greater awareness of this population rather than to dictate services; no two children are impacted by incarceration in the same manner.

General Strain Theory

General strain theory originated from the work of Merton (1938). The theory explicates the manner in which individuals experience strain and their response to the strain during adverse situations. According to general strain theory, a lack of goal attainment, negative experiences, and loss can lead to strain (Brezina, 2017). Individuals who experience strain are more susceptible to emotions and behaviors that lead to problematic outcomes. As strain intensifies, more extreme responses often emerge.

Incarceration of a parent can lead to strain on the child and caregiver left behind. As a result of parental incarceration, fewer caregivers provide for the household. Additionally, children of incarcerated parents often are limited in resources required to meet their basic needs. Nichols and Loper (2012) suggested that the removal of financial and social resources can contribute to the strain experienced by both the child and the caregiver. Therefore, children generally are unable to respond in acceptable ways to the social, emotional, and academic expectations or challenges of school.

Strain can have a significant effect on a child's academic performance and motivation. As strain increases, the child can become vulnerable to feeling disconnected from school (Nichols & Loper, 2012). When children are in strained homes, their focus shifts from academics to difficulties faced within their microsystems. Children with an incarcerated parent might become more concerned with food security or personal safety. Adolescents are often tasked with taking on more responsibilities to alleviate the strain and work to help support the family or care for siblings because of the loss of a parent to incarceration; school is no longer a top priority.

The well-being of caregivers also is a concern. When dysfunction arises in the home, the caregiver and child experience stress or strain. When a parent is incarcerated, there is less supervision of the child "due to the indirect effect of increased strain on their caregiver" (Nichols & Loper, 2012, p. 1456). The parent or guardian who remains in the home with the child often is ill-equipped with the time and resources necessary to provide adequate supervision and support. The adjustment as a new primary caregiver can determine their ability to provide basic needs, support, and protection to the child. The caregiver often has ongoing concerns about the level of protection and support that they can provide for the child (Feeney & Woodhouse, 2016; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Myers et al. (2013) indicated that children of incarcerated parents often live in adverse conditions. Many of these children live in poverty or have an unstable home life. Although children typically are unaware of the strain they experience, they are aware of the strain on their caregiver and often try to alleviate that stress by taking on more responsibilities (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Notably, incarceration adds to the strain of an already potentially unstable living condition.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory emerged from Bowlby's (1958) work with children and parents. This theory suggests that children who are consistently cared for have stronger and healthier attachments with their caregivers. Alternatively, when parents provide inconsistent support, children maintain less secure attachments. According to Bowlby (1988), the quality of early parent-child interactions plays a significant role in the development of a child's relationships across their lifespan.

Based on attachment theory, a child's attachment organization, or the manner in which they attach to caregivers, is disrupted when a parent becomes incarcerated (Nichols & Loper, 2012). These disruptions, such as those that occur when children move from one caregiver to another, can have detrimental effects (Kobak, Zajac, & Madsen, 2016; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). For example, children who fail to receive direct attention from their parent or guardian can feel confused and lack support for academic and social-emotional development.

Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2012) and Dallaire, Zeman, and Thrash (2015) explored the effects of parent incarceration on child and parent attachment. In instances of a noncontact visitation policy (i.e., physical contact between the incarcerated parent and child is forbidden), children experienced

more insecurity and disorganization, including vulnerability, emotional distance, isolation, tension, and anger. The “experience of parental incarceration represents a significant family stressor that may negatively impact children’s feelings of safety and security” (Dallaire et al., 2012; p. 161). Poehlmann (2005) stated that in order for young children to cope with the detachment of their incarcerated parent, they must have additional emotional support.

Additionally, Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) used the Attachment Story Completion Task to assess the relationships of children ages 2.5 to 7.5 years old and their incarcerated parent. The majority of the children studied fit the criteria for an insecure attachment with their incarcerated parent. Alternatively, children who received consistent care by one individual as opposed to multiple caregivers were classified as having a secure relationship with their caregiver (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). A key determinant of a child’s level of attachment is the ability to be in close proximity with another attachment figure and feel protected. Attachment theory and general strain theory are useful frameworks for conceptualizing the impact of incarceration on the children with whom school counselors frequently work.

Impact of Incarceration on Children

Children’s experiences with parental incarceration are vast. Some children have witnessed their parent’s crime or observed their arrest. Children also experience custodial separation, instability in living arrangements, and stressful visitations with their parents who are in jail or prison (Davis & Shlafer, 2017). Moreover, these experiences impact the mental health, behavior, and academic performance of children.

Disruption at home because of incarceration often weighs heavy on the life of a child, leaving them unattached, dissociated, and strained (Murray, 2007). For example, early signs of antisocial behavior were present in children who experienced parental incarceration before the age of 10 (La Vigne et al., 2008). Additionally, Kjellstrand, Reinke, and Eddy (2018) found that parental incarceration led to an increase in externalizing behaviors during adolescence. Incarceration can lead to a host of mental and behavioral health issues, including anxiety and depressions (Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Wilbur et al., 2007), aggressive behaviors (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Wildeman, 2010), delinquency or criminal activity (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007; Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012), and school-related problems (Cho, 2011; Hanlon et al., 2005; Johnson & Easterling, 2015). Nichols and Loper (2012) suggested that these effects often extend beyond children to other household and family members.

Children who have a parent in jail or prison often are viewed differently than their peers. For example, peers and teachers can associate the actions of an incarcerated parent with that of the child. Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) found that students with incarcerated parents were more likely considered at-risk and faced stigmas in the school setting. Moreover, teachers maintained low expectations of students with incarcerated parents; knowing that a parent was incarcerated was a factor in determining expectations and the perceived competence level of a student. This is especially problematic for students of color who frequently are susceptible to low expectation from teachers (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2019). Children with incarcerated parents are often stigmatized as inferior because of their parents’ life choices and subsequent incarceration (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). This stigma can lead students to feel unaccepted by school staff and classmates, and disconnected from the academic environment (Nichols & Loper, 2012). In an attempt to manage the stigma, children often do not disclose information and isolate themselves from relationships (Saunders, 2018).

Cho (2009) indicated that the negative effects of having an incarcerated parent often are short-lived and do not last the entirety of a child's educational career. However, the effects of parental incarceration on a child's academic performance are evident. For example, Dallaire et al. (2010) suggested that children who have an incarcerated parent or guardian are at risk of academic difficulties or eventually drop out of school. Most children do fairly well in school and eventually go on to have a good life; however, a significant number of children do not share such a positive fate (Shillingford & Edwards, 2008).

Long-Term Effects of Incarceration

Martin (2017) referred to children of incarcerated parents as "hidden victims" (p. 1) because often the impact of incarceration on the child is not considered. However, when children witness a parent's arrest, for example, they can experience high levels of stress that can result in a traumatic emotional response (Johnson & Easterling, 2015). The stress children experience as the result of an incarcerated parent or guardian can continue as long as that parent is incarcerated, and in many cases, after the parent or guardian returns home. Factors that can have a long-term impact on the child include duration and frequency of disruptions in caregiving relationships (Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Murray & Murray, 2010; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003); degree of economic and residential stability (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006); social stigma and pressure to keep the incarceration hidden (Saunders, 2018); and having a parent that is physically absent, yet socially and emotionally present (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009).

Children of incarcerated parents can learn attitudes, behaviors, and a way of life that positions them for lives similar to their parents. Aaron and Dallaire (2010) found that children who had parents with a history of incarceration reported more delinquent behavior. This finding was moderated by a parent's recent incarceration. Similarly, Farrington (2000) found that the conviction of a parent was a predictor of their child's antisocial behaviors and eventual incarceration. These findings suggest that exposure to parental incarceration and related issues may result in children becoming incarcerated themselves. However, a variety of risk and protective factors often serve to facilitate the outcomes of these children.

Risk and Protective Factors

Separation or loss of a parent is considered one of six indicators of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), according to Felitti et al. (1998). Findings from a study conducted by Turney (2018) suggested that children experience five times as many ACEs when they have an incarcerated parent. ACEs can impact brain development and lead to impulse control issues, emotional dysregulation, and the inability to anticipate consequences, recognize social cues, and manage interpersonal conflict (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). These psychological challenges also can result in poor school performance, gang involvement, substance use, and pregnancy.

Children often have an insecure attachment with their parent when support and encouragement are inconsistent (Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017). According to Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010), some children have a positive relationship with their incarcerated parent, while others report negative experiences. Children who have no contact with their incarcerated parent often have greater feelings of alienation and minimal attachment. The Federal Interagency Working Group for Children of Incarcerated Parents (2013) suggested that children, especially those in the adolescent stage, typically work toward finding an equilibrium between individuality and their connection to society. However, the separation between the parent and child during incarceration impedes the ability of the child to acquire the proper social skills needed to function effectively on a daily basis.

In some instances, children are unable to recover from the traumatic experience of parental incarceration. As a result, children are at risk of becoming antisocial, internalizing symptoms, and struggling academically (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). When parental incarceration is recurrent, children are at risk of continuous emotional strain; oftentimes children do not know how long their parent will be gone or when they will return (van Agtmael, 2016). Children can become defiant, aggressive, antisocial, experience a loss of self-esteem, have difficulty sleeping, or develop an attachment disorder, and may go on to exhibit other problematic behaviors if they lack support during these times (Lopez & Bhat, 2007). Children of incarcerated parents are at higher risk for exposure to stress, violence, and abuse (Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002; Shillingford & Edwards, 2008). These experiences can further exacerbate a child's struggle to manage life, including school, with an incarcerated parent.

According to Johnson and Easterling (2015), the majority of children who experience parental incarceration employ a combination of coping strategies to manage the situation including "de-identification from the incarcerated parent, desensitization to incarceration, and strength through control" (p. 244). However, a variety of protective factors can serve to help thwart or reduce the negative impact of parental incarceration on children. Frequent contact visits (i.e., physical contact is allowed) and quality communication with the incarcerated parent can serve as protective factors for the child (Cramer, Goff, Peterson, & Sandstrom, 2017). Kumpfer, Alvarado, and Whiteside (2003) identified several such protective factors, including self-control, academic self-efficacy, and family supervision. The identification of and access to positive influences and role models, engagement in leadership opportunities through school or community organizations, social-emotional skill development, as well as maintaining faith and hope also are factors that help mitigate the impact of incarceration (Adalist-Estrin, Krupat, deSousa, Bartley, & Hollins, 2019).

A key protective factor is the positive relationship the new caregiver forms with the child (Buss, Warren, & Horton, 2015; Cramer et al., 2017). A secure and stable home for children of incarcerated parents offers an opportunity to overcome challenges and succeed in school and life. School counselors can help facilitate student success through the use of a variety of targeted approaches and resources that serve to protect children with incarcerated parents.

Approaches and Resources for School Counselors

Professional school counselors offer a variety of services within a comprehensive school counseling program that can meet some of the needs of children with incarcerated parents. Many of these services are well-suited for supporting this group of children. Although these services often are beneficial to these children and their caretakers, in many instances, alternative or targeted services are needed. Therefore, it is important for school counselors to consider students' strengths and needs within the context of emerging literature and evidence-based practices. A variety of strategies and resources rooted in theory and research are available to support school counselors' efforts to develop and promote protective factors for children of incarcerated parents.

Determining Student Strengths and Risk

In order to provide targeted services and support, school counselors must first identify students who have incarcerated parents. Strain is not always obvious to teachers or school counselors, and families, caregivers, or students may not readily seek help. As a result, building and maintaining healthy relationships with parents, grandparents, or other guardians is central to identifying and

meeting the needs of these students (Hollihan & Krupat, 2016). School counselors also should consider becoming familiar with community professionals who are likely to interact with children of incarcerated parents. For example, Brown and Barrio Minton (2017) suggested that when school counselors collaborate and consult with community stakeholders such as social workers, child protective services, mental health counselors, and other child advocates, they better understand the child as well as acquire pertinent information that facilitates meeting the needs of the student. School counselors who are proactive and regularly demonstrate community investment as a component of their comprehensive school counseling program are well-positioned to identify, assess, and meet the academic and social-emotional needs of children of incarcerated parents.

Once a student is identified as having an incarcerated parent, school counselors are encouraged to conduct an assessment to determine the risk and protective factors for the student and the family. Students, teachers, caregivers, and other stakeholders can provide valuable information during the assessment process (Petsch & Rochlen, 2009). Measurements such as the Child Behavior Checklist, Teacher's Report Form, and Youth Self-Report, available via the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (2019), are valuable tools for capturing family, teacher, and student concerns. These instruments assess for social problems, anxiety, depression, cognitive issues, and aggressive behaviors. School counselors can use these types of instruments to identify areas of support and formulate approaches that meet the students' academic and social-emotional needs. It is important that assessments and student support plans are completed in a collaborative manner while remaining sensitive to the students' and caregivers' experiences.

The assessment process should include an evaluation of the student's family history, school performance, and risk and protective factors. It also is important to assess current services and determine the lack of services that may not be available, but needed (Solomon & Uchida, 2007). School counselors should consider age as a factor when determining the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Younger children can process potentially traumatic situations, such as the incarceration of a parent, differently than older children (Buss et al., 2015). Unhealthy coping, along with emotional and behavioral problems at this stage of development, are likely to arise and should be taken into account when determining needs (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). Furthermore, school counselors should determine the exact relationships between the incarcerated parent, the caregiver left behind, and the child. In some instances, the incarcerated parent or caregiver is not the biological parent, yet the relationship is strong enough that separation can significantly impact the child. The caregiver left behind often is the other parent or a grandparent, but in some cases is a foster parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Graham & Harris, 2013).

School counselors are encouraged to gather as much data as possible in order to determine the risk and protective factors at play for the family and child. Additionally, school counselors are encouraged to be aware of and reflect on their own perceptions of incarceration and ensure those beliefs do not interfere with their assessment of student needs or the services provided. School counselors must be sensitive and understanding of the needs and worldviews of the family and student's culture, especially their views on incarceration. Furthermore, when discussing incarceration with the family or child, it is important to specify the type of incarceration (i.e., jail, prison) and use terms such as *felon*, *con*, and *inmate* with caution, or not at all. A child will perceive the severity of his or her parent's incarceration based on how it is described (Bennett, Lewis, & Hunsaker, 2012). Prison often is perceived more negatively than jail because of different aspects between the two such as demographics, sentencing, and capacity.

Children who have an incarcerated parent or guardian often struggle with a variety of significant social-emotional, behavioral, and academic problems in school (Poehlmann, 2005). Professional school counselors who understand student challenges, as well as strengths, can intervene and support this group of children who often are vulnerable and underserved. School counselors should recognize the benefit of home–school–community collaboration in assessment and consider it an important aspect of implementing effective strategies that can help children of incarcerated parents succeed.

Strategies and Interventions

Comprehensive school counseling programs that align with the ASCA National Model (2012) include components that aim to meet the needs of all students. A number of direct and indirect student support services exist that encompass strategies and interventions that can increase protective factors for children of incarcerated parents. Brown (2017) suggested these services are essential to meeting the needs of these children. However, school counselors are encouraged to utilize results of a needs assessment when determining the provision of targeted services within a system of support. For example, school counselors can offer support prior to and after visits with the incarcerated parent; these are isolated occasions that can present emotional challenges for the child. Alternatively, some students who display ongoing, unhealthy emotions or behaviors may need more intensive support, such as small group or individual counseling. Goals of these services should include building on student strengths, fostering resilience, and addressing challenges that directly impede student performance.

During individual and small group counseling, it is important for school counselors to broach the topic of incarceration with caution; school counselors should not disclose this information during group work, yet provide a safe space for the student to do so. Bibliotherapy and expressive art strategies can serve as valuable opportunities for children of incarcerated parents to gain awareness and process their thoughts and feelings. As such, school counselors are encouraged to maintain access to developmentally appropriate literature on incarceration via their own collection or the school's library. For example, the book *Far Apart, Close in Heart* (Birtha, 2017), written for elementary-age children, explores life with an incarcerated parent, and *Clarissa's Disappointment* (Sullivan, 2017), a book written for upper-elementary and middle school students, is about the transition of a parent out of prison. Books such as *Surviving the Chaos: Dontae's Story: Daddy, Jail & Me* (Bell, 2013) and *Coping When a Parent is Incarcerated* (DeCarlo, 2018) are appropriate for upper-middle and high school students. These resources are useful for facilitating family conversations about incarceration as well. School counselors who know that parental incarceration often impedes student performance are best positioned to help students develop protective factors including strong relationships with peers and the community, appropriate social and self-regulation skills, and academic achievement (Lopez & Bhat, 2007).

School counselors are well-positioned to advocate for children of incarcerated parents through the delivery of in-service trainings and other awareness-building activities. Given their role, teachers are often the first school staff members to have academic or behavioral concerns for a child with an incarcerated parent. However, Brown and Barrio Minton (2017) suggested that many school personnel, such as teachers and other school staff, face barriers when working with children of incarcerated parents because of their inability to identify them and meet their needs. In-service training for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders can increase awareness of the negative effects of parental incarceration on the social-emotional and academic development of students. For example, school counselors can share the video, *School Staff: Supporting Youth with Incarcerated Parents* (<https://goo.gl/uDmYvu>), followed by an open discussion during a staff meeting. School counselors can empower school staff through the dissemination of information that challenges barriers, stereotypes, and stigmas about this student population. It is important for teachers to explore their

beliefs and feelings about incarceration as well as their perceptions of students with incarcerated parents. For example, teachers who maintain a deficit ideology toward children with incarcerated parents are not best equipped to meet their needs (Gorski, 2016). Additionally, school counselors should advance schoolwide trauma-informed practice initiatives, address insensitive schoolwide policies, and encourage collaborative efforts to remove barriers that impede the well-being of children of incarcerated parents (Buss et al., 2015). Through basic knowledge, skill development, and collaboration, teachers and other school personnel can support children of incarcerated parents and help facilitate success in and outside of school.

Finally, collaboration is useful when engaging a variety of stakeholders while working with children of incarcerated parents. Stakeholders can include caregivers, mental health providers, correctional officers and facilities, school resource officers, teachers, and social workers. For example, Brown (2017) found that professional school counselors consulted and collaborated with school social workers to support students who needed financial assistance because of parental incarceration. School counselors also can provide targeted and intentional consultation to teachers and administrators to address student academic and behavioral performance concerns (Warren, 2018). School counselors are encouraged to coordinate with stakeholders to facilitate the incarcerated parents' access to report cards and virtual participation in school-related meetings. Maintaining community connections can help establish a wealth of resources that can be delivered to children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. When student or family need necessitates therapeutic services, school counselors should refer the family to a community-based agency.

It is important for school counselors to support the academic, social-emotional, and career development of children with incarcerated parents. However, school counselors are encouraged to not engage in the provision of long-term counseling, unless there are extreme circumstances. Resources such as the Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (New York City Office of Training and Workforce Development, 2019) and those listed below offer a variety of community-based services and are eager to partner with professional school counselors to promote protective factors for children with incarcerated parents.

Complementary Resources

Several organizations across the nation offer resources and informational material that aim to reduce risk factors for children of incarcerated parents. For example, the National Mentoring Resource Center (nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org) provides a wealth of information on mentoring children with incarcerated parents. This program is designed to strengthen services that focus on the academic and social-emotional development of children who are experiencing parental incarceration (National Mentoring Resource Center, n.d.). The program provides no-cost training and assistance as well as evidence-based support services to students. Benefits of this mentoring program include practice reviews, webinars, a blog, implementation strategies, and additional readings.

The Prison Fellowship (www.prisonfellowship.org), a faith-based organization, trains community stakeholders in restorative practices. This organization provides resources that help link children and caregivers to support groups and other services. A central focus of this organization's work is to restore the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children. The Prison Fellowship (n.d.) supports families and children of incarcerated parents by offering a variety of resources and programming such as the Angel Tree, a Christmas present donation program for children of incarcerated parents. School counselors should consider the religious beliefs of families prior to making a referral to the Prison Fellowship.

In addition to the National Mentoring Resource Center and the Prison Fellowship program, Save Kids of Incarcerated Parents (SKIP; skipinc.org) supports children of incarcerated parents by conducting academic and behavioral support groups. The program offers an online community that serves as a vehicle for teenagers of incarcerated parents to connect. SKIP (n.d.) provides research reports and other useful practitioner-focused resources. The program also provides online and hands-on training to interested participants. Trainees are provided relevant information for working with children who experience parental incarceration. School counselors may find it beneficial to collaborate with programs such as SKIP because of its focus on community involvement and partnerships with other support services.

Finally, the Service Network for Children of Inmates (www.childrenofinmates.org) provides a model of comprehensive, community-based services for children of incarcerated parents. Based in Florida, this network has demonstrated the role state-based agencies can play in supporting children of incarcerated parents. The organization works to re-establish positive relationships between parents and children by facilitating bonding visits and providing assistance with linking children and their families with community services for support. The organization offers support groups for children to develop and refine social and emotional skills to help offset the negative impact of parental incarceration (Service Network for Children of Inmates, 2008). School counselors are encouraged to visit these organizations' websites, utilize the resources they provide, and seek out similar organizations in their state or region. School counselors can stay informed when working with children of incarcerated parents by visiting the following websites and taking advantage of the resources they offer: the Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov); youth.gov (youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents); National Institute of Corrections (nicic.gov); and The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu).

Conclusion

The number of incarcerated parents has continued to grow over the past decade, and children of color are more likely to experience the incarceration of a parent (Graham & Harris, 2013). Children of incarcerated parents face a number of challenges, including stigma, low expectations and academic performance, social and emotional issues, and behavioral difficulties. For example, Cho (2009, 2011) and Shlafer, Reedy, and Davis (2017) found that students of incarcerated parents were more likely to receive disciplinary referrals and earn lower grades, and were less connected to and engaged in school. These children are often required to navigate the experience of their parent's incarceration with little support while attempting to proceed with their day-to-day lives, including the everyday demands of school. School counselors can play a vital role by helping to support and advocate for these students. Research on incarcerated parents and the impact of incarceration on children is scant, especially in school counseling literature. However, there is clear evidence that the incarceration of a parent can significantly impact children. The degree to which children are impacted by incarceration is dependent upon a host of factors, including age and support system, and symptoms can emerge in a variety of ways.

A central goal when working with children of incarcerated parents is to increase protective factors while attempting to minimize risk factors. It is important for school counselors to identify and assess for risk and strengths of children in their school who have incarcerated parents. These students should be supported within the context of their lived experiences. Knowledgeable school counselors can effectively serve children with incarcerated parents through a comprehensive school counseling

program. In most cases, specifically designed programming is not required. Alternatively, some students may require additional school counseling services as well as community-based support. The recommendations provided in this article are based on theory and the best evidence available for working with students who have incarcerated parents. School counselors who are knowledgeable of the impact of incarceration and related support mechanisms can play an integral role in offering support and advocating for students.

In addition to utilizing the resources provided in this article, school counselors are encouraged to seek professional development to further their knowledge, attitudes, and skills for working with children of incarcerated parents. School counselors can serve as valuable advocates and strive to disseminate relevant information to teachers, school administrators, and the caregivers of children with incarcerated parents. It is important for teachers to develop empathy and provide a consistent and nurturing classroom environment for all students, especially those with incarcerated parents. Additionally, school counselors should place the emotions and behaviors of students with incarcerated parents within the context of theory and research when consulting with teachers. In order to best support these children, collaboration and the willingness of professional school counselors to intervene is critical.

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