



“Until third grade, a child learns to read. After third grade, a child reads to learn.”

In pre-school and the first few years of school, the aim is to teach children to read. After third grade, the aim is for children to use their reading comprehension skills to learn new material. Research shows that reading abilities in third grade act as a tell-tale barometer for later school success.

- Ten to fifteen percent of children with serious reading problems will drop out of high school, and about half of youth with criminal records or with a history of substance abuse have reading problems.
- Low literacy is strongly related to crime. Seventy percent of prisoners fall into the lowest two levels of reading proficiency
- Low literacy is strongly related to unemployment. More than 20% of adults read at or below a fifth grade level – far below the level needed to earn a living wage.
- Eighty-five percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate.
- More than 60% of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate.
- Penal institution records show that inmates have a 16% chance of returning to prison if they receive literacy help, as opposed to 70% who receive no help. This equates to taxpayer costs of \$25,000 per year per inmate and nearly double that amount for juvenile offenders.
- Illiteracy and crime are closely related. The Department of Justice states, “The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is *welded to reading failure* Over 70% of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level.

Evidence shows that children who do not read by third grade often fail to catch up and are more likely to drop out of school, take drugs, or go to prison. So many nonreaders wind up in jail that officials have found they can use the rate of illiteracy to help calculate future prison needs.

Indiana’s former governor has stated that determining the number of new prisons to build is based, in part, on the number of second graders not reading at second-grade level. In California they plan how many jail cells they will build in the future by how many children are not reading on grade level by third grade.

A SENTENCE OF THEIR OWN

More than 2.5 million American children will go to bed tonight with one of their parents locked up behind bars. And 60% of those little ones may one day end up there themselves.

Statistics

- According to a study from the Pew Research Center’s Economic Mobility Project, released in October 2010, 2.7 million children in the U.S. have parents incarcerated in the prison system.
- According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, 1 in 31 Americans are now under correctional control.

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SQUIRREL CAGE JAIL





“THERE ARE CHILDREN WHO TELL [US] ABOUT HOW THEY WERE SITTING AND EATING DINNER WHEN THE DOOR WAS BROKEN DOWN AND UNIFORMED OFFICERS MARCHED IN AND HANDCUFFED THEIR FATHER. THIS IS NOT AN IMAGE THAT IS EASY TO LET GO OF AGAIN. IT STAYS WITH THEM PERMANENTLY”. (FAMILY THERAPIST)

- Some 10 million young people in the United States have had a mother or father-or both-spend time behind bars at some point in their lives. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of incarcerated women in the United States increased by 57 percent compared to an increase of 34 percent for men.
- Seventy-five percent of incarcerated women are mothers. Sixty-three percent of federal prisoners and 55 percent of state prisoners are parents of children under age 18.
- The average age of children with an incarcerated parent is eight years old; 22 percent of the children are under the age of five.
- African-American children are nearly nine times more likely and Hispanic children are three times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children.
- More than 60 percent of offenders in state and federal prisons in the United States are incarcerated more than 100 miles from their last place of residence.
- Parental incarceration creates financial instability and material hardship as well as instability in family relationships and structure.
- Having an incarcerated parent often results in school behavior and performance problems as well as social and institutional stigma and shame.
- Having a parent in prison can have a number of significant effects on children, ranging from emotional issues to physical problems. While some effects might be relatively short-term, in some cases a child's entire life can be shaped by his or her parent's incarceration.
- Children can often develop emotional issues from the temporary loss of one parent to incarceration. These can include anger, which might be directed at the parent or at the legal forces, who have taken the adult away, as well as sadness, fear and guilt. In the long-term, these emotional issues might remain, and more profound problems could develop, such as a decline in self-esteem or a tendency toward violent outbursts.
- In addition to lowering the likelihood of recidivism among incarcerated parents, there is evidence that maintaining the child-parent relationship while a parent is incarcerated improves a child's emotional response to the incarceration and encourages parent-child attachment.

**“When a parent goes to prison, they never go alone . . .
Their children go with them.”**

The trauma of separation due to a parent’s imprisonment is severe. How children respond to the pain of separation varies according to age and may change over time: children may have seen their parent commit a crime, witnessed the arrest, and fear the prison. The effects of parental incarceration on children are wide-ranging, profound and just beginning to be understood. What is clear is that having a parent behind bars can leave lifelong emotional scars.

“Any time a child loses a parent to prison, there is going to be abandonment issues,” says Dr. Sal Severe, nationally known parenting expert and former school psychologist. “The question often is ‘why did my parent choose criminal activity over me?’ It’s easy for them to blame themselves.” He explains that children often feel angry with their incarcerated parents yet also desperate to be with them. Although they may feel ashamed of what their parents have done, they still love them. All of this can be very confusing. When families lie to children about their parent’s imprisonment, it only compounds the situation. “Denial is a big problem in families affected by incarceration,” says Marge Scanlon, a former middle school teacher who spent 13 years teaching parenting classes to prison inmates. “I knew a child who didn’t know for years where her mother was,” says Scanlon. “It wasn’t until her grandmother died and her mother came to the funeral in shackles that she found out the truth.”

Family deception can increase children’s fears and mistrust. Emotional distress is only one part of a constellation of difficulties that children of prisoners face. Many are transient, moving from caregiver to caregiver, particularly if their mother is incarcerated. The removal of a parent can send families into an economic tailspin, making it hard to meet basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. Many live in neighborhoods plagued with drug addiction, violence and poverty.



“When a parent goes to prison, they never go alone . . . Their children go with them.”

According to the Child Welfare League of America, children facing these overwhelming challenges often become depressed or act out. They have a difficult time trusting others. These children are at increased risk for problems at school and running away as well as drug and alcohol abuse. They are also prone to running into trouble with the law. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that roughly half of all juveniles in custody have a parent or sibling who is or has been incarcerated. “These kids often grow up hating the system that took their parents away,” says Scanlon, whose middle school students included children of prisoners. “They can end up with a world view in which the authorities are the enemy. This obviously can be a huge problem.”

Knock Knock – Daniel Beaty

As a boy I shared a game with my father. Played it every morning 'til I was 3.
 He would knock knock on my door, and I'd pretend to be asleep 'til he got right next to the bed,
 Then I would get up and jump into his arms.
 "Good morning, Papa." And my papa he would tell me that he loved me. We shared a game.
 Knock Knock

Until that day when the knock never came and my momma takes me on a ride past corn fields
 on this never ending highway 'til we reach a place of high rusty gates.
 A confused little boy, I entered the building carried in my mama's arms.
 Knock Knock

We reach a room of windows and brown faces behind one of the windows sits my father.
 I jump out of my mama's arms and run joyously towards my papa Only to be confronted by this window.
 I knock knock trying to break through the glass, trying to get to my father.
 I knock knock as my mama pulls me away before my papa even says a word.

And for years he has never said a word. And so twenty-five years later, I write these words
 for the little boy in me who still awaits his papa's knock.

Papa, come home 'cause I miss you. I miss you waking me up in the morning and telling me you love me.
 Papa, come home, 'cause there's things I don't know, and I thought maybe you could teach me:
 How to shave; how to dribble a ball; how to talk to a lady; how to walk like a man.
 Papa, come home because I decided a while back
 I wanted to be just like you. but I'm forgetting who you are. And twenty-five years later a
 little boy cries, and so I write these words and try to heal and try to father myself
 and I dream up a father who says the words my father did not.

Dear Son,

I'm sorry I never came home.
 For every lesson I failed to teach, hear these words:
 Shave in one direction in strong deliberate strokes to avoid irritation.
 Dribble the page with the brilliance of your ballpoint pen.
 Walk like a god and your goddess will come to you.
 No longer will I be there to knock on your door,
 So you must learn to knock for yourself.
 Knock knock down doors of racism and poverty that I could not.
 Knock knock down doors of opportunity
 for the lost brilliance of the black men who crowd these cells.
 Knock knock with diligence for the sake of your children.
 Knock knock for me for as long as you are free,
 these prison gates cannot contain my spirit.
 The best of me still lives in you.

Knock knock with the knowledge that you are my son, but you are not my choices.
 Yes, we are our fathers' sons and daughters,
 But we are not their choices.
 For despite their absences we are still here.
 Still alive, still breathing
 With the power to change this world,
 One little boy and girl at a time.
 Knock knock
 Who's there?
 We are.



**CHILDREN OF
INCARCERATED
PARENTS**

**A BILL
OF RIGHTS**

Ten Questions Often Asked By Children Whose Parents Are In Prison

1) Where is my Mom or Dad?

Parents and caregivers often believe it is best to protect children by not telling them where their mothers or fathers really are. Children may be told that their parents are working in another state, going to school, or serving in the military. Sometimes children are told that their parents are ill and had to go away for special treatment. Sooner or later children will realize the truth and know they have been lied to. While the adult who hides painful reality does so believing it is in the best interest of the child, such an action creates a family secret that results in children feeling ashamed. Most childhood experts advise that children be told the truth.

2) When is he or she coming home?

The outcome and schedule of a parent's arrest and/or imprisonment is often uncertain. However, it is important to keep children up-to-date about what parents or caregivers do know. Children need to have concrete information they can deal with, even if it is, "We don't know what will happen yet."

3) Why is she or he in jail or prison?

Children need to know that there are consequences when people do things that are against the law or harmful to others. While a child's parent may be serving the consequences for something wrong s/he did, the parent is still worthy of love and capable of loving. A child can learn to trust a caregiver who is honest about what a parent has done wrong. This practice of honesty allows the child to believe other things that the caregiver tells her or him as they progress together on this journey.

4) Can I talk to my mom or dad?

Jails and prisons have specific and often constraining rules about prisoners talking on the phone to their loved ones. When phone calls are difficult, letters can be especially important. Although young children may find it hard to express themselves through words, they may find it more meaningful to make drawings.

5) When can I see my mom or dad?

It is helpful to explain to children that prisons have specific times for visiting, and their caretakers will get that information so that they can see their loved ones. If a parent is incarcerated at a distance, the child should be prepared for seeing his or her mother or father infrequently. Some children are angry and do not want to see their parents, or at least they're ambivalent about the possibility. Before the first visit, they should be prepared for the circumstances of the visit. The caregiver should explain the security around the prison. The children should also know that there will be limits upon where they can visit and what they can do with their parents.

6) Who is going to take care of me?

Children in this situation often feel insecure. It is important to let children know who will be caring for them. If there is uncertainty about their living arrangements, children may need to be told that, but they also need to be reassured that plans for their care are being made and that they will not be abandoned.

7) Do my parents still love me?

When children are separated from their parents, they often worry about whether their parents love and care for them. Most children need reassurance that they are loved by their parents no matter where the children happen to be living and with whom.

8) Is this my fault?

Children often blame themselves for being separated from their parents or even for their parents' misbehavior. They may imagine that if they had behaved better their parents would still be with them. They need reassurance: that what happened to their loved one is not their fault, and that it happened because that person did something wrong or harmful.

9) Why do I feel so sad and angry?

Sadness and anger are children's common responses to a parent's incarceration. But most children do not understand their feelings or the origins of them. It is helpful for them to be reassured that their feelings are normal. Ideally, they can be encouraged to talk about their feelings of sadness or anger. Children often find it helpful to know other children in similar situations because they can understand each other's feelings.

10) Can I do something to help?

Children typically feel helpless and responsible. They need to know that their loved ones usually appreciate letters and pictures. They can be encouraged to send them as often as they want to.

1. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE KEPT SAFE AND INFORMED AT THE TIME OF MY PARENT'S ARREST.

2. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT ME.

3. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT MY PARENT.

4. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE WELL CARED FOR IN MY PARENT'S ABSENCE.

5. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SPEAK WITH, SEE AND TOUCH MY PARENT.

6. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SUPPORT AS I STRUGGLE WITH MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.

7. I HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO BE JUDGED, BLAMED OR LABELED BECAUSE OF MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.

8. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENT.



FOUR DEATHS OCCURRED WITHIN ITS WALLS. ONE MAN DIED OF A HEART ATTACK, ANOTHER IN A FALL WHEN HE TRIED TO WRITE HIS NAME ON THE CEILING, ANOTHER HANGED HIMSELF IN HIS CELL, AND THE LAST AFTER AN ACCIDENT WHEN AN OFFICER ACCIDENTALLY SHOT HIMSELF IN THE CONFUSION OF PROTECTING THE JAIL FROM AN ANGRY MOB DURING THE FARMER'S HOLIDAY STRIKE OF 1932. IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT THESE UNLUCKY INDIVIDUALS -- ALONG WITH OTHERS -- ARE BELIEVED TO STILL LINGER AT THE OLD JAIL.



NEXT ISSUE:
GRADUATION

Squirrel Cage Jail

What cage is three stories high, rotates, and was designed for human beings, not rats?

It's the Squirrel Cage Jail in Council Bluffs, IA, and from 1885 to 1969, this prison stacked its inmates in pie-shaped cells that revolved, so jailers could see all the prisoners from a single vantage point. If it sounds like a lazy Susan jail, that's exactly what it was. The design and size of the Historical Pottawattamie County Squirrel Cage Jail, make it a one - of - a - kind structure. It was one of 18 revolving ("squirrel cage", "human rotary", "Lazy Susan") jails built. It is the only three - story one ever built. Built at a cost of about \$30,000, the jail has three floors of revolving pie - shaped cells inside a cage. Today, only 3 revolving jails remain, a one-story structure in Gallatin, Mo., a two-story jail in Crawfordsville, In. and the unique three story in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The purpose of the this type of jail was “to produce a jail in which prisoners could be controlled without the necessity of personal contact between them and the jailer.” The outside walls of the jail are three layers of brick thick while all interior layers are two bricks thick. The cylinder has three floors with ten pie shaped cells on each floor designed to hold two prisoners per cell. Since there was only one entrance or exit on each floor, the entire cylinder had to be turned with a hand-crank until the cell was lined up with the opening of the cage. Although no prisoner was ever taken out of the jail there were a few close calls. The first inmates of the jail were in place on September 11, 1885 and consisted of: Cuff Johnson for murder, Miles Mullen for horse theft, Frank Scofield for forgery, Ed Rankin for being a confidence man, and Mr. and Mrs. Brock with their teenage daughter for larceny.

In December of 1903 there were several reports of women in Council Bluffs being robbed of their belongings while walking down the streets, Neely Zimmerman and George Burk were arrested. A crowd gathered in front of the jail and were egged on by ex-convict “Dutch” Stevenson and a few others to storm the jail. As the price of produce sank to new lows, many desperate Iowa farmers gathered in 1932 to form the Farmer's Holiday Association under the leadership of Milo Reno. After violence broke out at the pickets on HWY 275, 84 protesters were arrested and taken to the Squirrel Cage Jail. Out of fear that the angry farmers would storm the jail and set the prisoners free, the police used machine guns to turn the grounds of the jail into a “no mans land” and one officer died during the confusion after he shot himself in the jail.

Tour Guides routinely tell visitors NO BODY has called the Squirrel Cage Jail home since 1969. Some folks may disagree with the wording "NO BODY" may call it home, but as for spirits that's a different matter. The spirit may actually date back to the jails origin. A former jail tour guide claimed she believed the ghost to be that of J. M. Carter, the man who oversaw the buildings construction. Mr. Carter was the first resident of the top floor apartment and according to the theory, has never left, continuing to watch over the one - of - a - kind building to this day.