

## HOW DO CHILDREN HANDLE THE INCARCERATION OF A PARENT?

The following information is based upon studies conducted by 18 different researchers over a period of thirty years. Up until 1965, there was very little research available that addressed the impact on a child of having a parent incarcerated. This information appears to be some of the most accurate and current information.

### GENERAL:

Parental incarceration (including crime & arrest) “produces a typical series of events in the lives of these children.” The most frequent problems include:

1. School Problems - Aggressive behaviors, truancy, poor academics (low grades) and classroom behavior problems.
2. Behavioral Problems: - Aggression, tension, withdrawal, fighting, hostility and acting out inappropriately .

*The majority of children share common concerns and perceptions about their parent's incarceration, including:*

1. Worry about the outcome of the case, situation or prison sentence.
2. Uncertainty over whether or not the parent will return.
3. Worry and fear that they will be swept of to prison, too.
4. Uncertain how to adjust to the situation.
5. Do not know what to expect for the future.

Young children, especially, see their parents as being **omnipotent** (all wise/important/powerful). When they witness their parent actually being in a situation of powerlessness or violation, such as arrest and incarceration, they become **very vulnerable** (susceptible to attack or criticism; in a position to receive greater penalties or perceived danger).

It is also not uncommon for children to live in impoverished conditions while their parent is away. This, of course, would increase their personal stress levels.

Often the kids are not allowed to talk or discuss the situation with their care givers. This “imprisons” the child in the sense that they are experiencing forced silence. If they are told to “forget” Mom, it makes the situation even worse. Usually this results in them thinking about her more frequently and increases their tension level.