



## Engaging Incarcerated Parents

### Expectations regarding engagement with parents who are incarcerated:

- Monthly face-to-face contact with parents is expected when their sentence is shorter than 2 years
- When parents have a sentence greater than 2 years during the case or is incarcerated in another state, engagement remains expected through other contacts (calls, letters, virtual conference)
- Engagement should focus on involving the parent in case planning, providing reasonable efforts in support of reunification, and promoting the well-being of the child through a positive relationship with their parent

### Where is Dad Incarcerated?:

Caseworkers may encounter cases where a child's parent is incarcerated, but the facility in which the parent is being held is unknown. If this is the case, in addition to gathering as much information as possible from mother, children, and other collaterals, try the following searches-

- Search Federal prisons at <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>
- Search State prisons or local jails at [www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com), (you also can register to receive notifications when there are changes in an inmate's status or location)
- The Colorado Department of Corrections can be searched at <http://www.doc.state.co.us/oss/>

### Facility Information:

Prior to contact with parent, determine what is possible in parent's facility. Counties can determine the following in advance for local facilities and make it available to workers:

- If the facility has a liaison to child welfare
- What options exist regarding visitation/contact between parents/children and parents/professionals, and how to schedule
- What programs are available inside the facility for parent treatment/education
- Whether outside treatment/education can be provided to parents
- Whether parents are able to participate in court hearings/case planning meetings and how to schedule

### Questions to Answer in Discussion with Parent:

- 1) How long is parent incarcerated for? Is there a chance of early release? Who is their case manager?
- 2) What could parent's contact with their child look like? Is face-to-face contact possible? What could additional contact look like? (letters, pictures, drawings, calls, video conference, audio recordings)
- 3) What treatment plan needs does parent have that will address safety concerns/improve their ability to function as a parent? Can these needs be addressed while incarcerated?
- 4) How can parent be involved in case planning? What will contact between caseworker and parent look like? How can parent be involved in family engagement meetings and court hearings?
- 5) What additional information can parent contribute? What family/supports does parent have? What does parent know about their family history, their family's medical or mental health information that may be helpful?
- 6) What information does caseworker need to be prepared to provide to parent? (Information on case progress, upcoming court/family engagement meeting dates, and updates on how their child is doing)

### What if Parent Doesn't Want to be Involved?:

Caseworkers will be responsible for regular engagement with incarcerated parents unless a court order exists alleviating that responsibility. If parents do not want to be involved in case planning or doesn't wish to have contact with their child

- Communicate the value of a parent's involvement in their child's life
- Try to determine the barriers to involvement; what are the reasons behind parent's reluctance?
- Keep parent informed of case progress and upcoming events, provide avenues for input into case planning
- Keep parent informed of how their child is doing and provide parent with recent pictures
- Discuss parent involvement with their appointed counsel; do they have ideas regarding engagement?

### Questions to Consider in Planning for Visitation

- What is the process and timeline for initiating and scheduling visits? ▫
  - What does the visit process look like? (Is documentation/identification required? Is there a dress code? What can be brought; food, toys, gifts? Are there age minimums? Is contact visitation allowed? What types of documentation or identification are required? ▫What are the security procedures for the day of the visit?)
  - How can the child best be prepared for the visit? (involving therapist, discussion regarding what to expect re: the parent and the process, desires regarding contact and feelings around visiting)
  - How can the parent best be prepared for contact? (what might the child want to know? Ideas for discussion points, avoiding promises)
  - How can the caregiver best be prepared for contact? (discussion how visits may impact behavior and ideas regarding response)
  - How can visits be made as comfortable as possible for the child? (if possible bringing food, vending machine money, ideas/toys for occupying time while waiting)
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### Ideas for Planning for Discharge

- Is the facility aware of any programs that help parents transition out?
- What will visitation look like? What additional stresses may this place on the child/parent/caretaker?
- Determine what referrals will need to be made and when so that parent can continue working towards their treatment plan goals immediately upon release
- Determine what community resources may need to be accessed regarding health care, housing, employment
- When will parent be meeting with team members after release? What will communication look like?
- Can a facilitated family engagement meeting be held to help coordinate parent's release?

This overview has been adapted in part from [Child Welfare Practice with Families Affected by Parental Incarceration](#), which was developed by the Children's Bureau