



Touchstone

Best Practices to Expand Your Reach



Best Practice (BP) | Best practices are specific, discrete ministry activities that measurably increase program scale, effectiveness, and/or efficiency, and can be replicated by other National Ministries. Best practices should be supported by evidence (data).

BP#9: Connect Children of Prisoners With Their Incarcerated Parent

Benefits:

Connecting children with an incarcerated parent may be what holds this key relationship together. Parental separation due to incarceration profoundly impacts a children's psychological, affective, relational, developmental, and financial well-being; part of our ministry to prisoners can be to provide an opportunity to minimize the negative relational impact. Both the child and the incarcerated parent need to stay connected.

EU-funded research indicates that 25 percent of prisoners' children are at risk of increased mental health difficulties; further studies suggest that regular, direct contact with an imprisoned parent helps promote resilience in children.

Strengthening the connection between incarcerated parent(s) and children could also bring about positive societal benefits in the form of reduced recidivism, healthy child development, and breaking the generational cycle of crime.

Some of the best ways to maintain this connection include visitation (contact and no contact), telephone, video-conferencing, letter writing, drawing and pictures.

Planning Considerations (*How to do it*):

- Remember that the safety of the child is always the number one priority.
- Begin collecting a list of incarcerated parents and their children and caregivers.
- Speak to caregivers to understand the situation of the child and the family dynamics.
- Determine if the parent-child relationship was positive.
- Determine if both parties are open to meeting.
- Hold preparatory conversations with both parties about the goals, needs and expectations of the visit.
- Research current processes and procedures for access to incarcerated parents at all prisons in your country.
- Determine what types of communication/connection are possible at each correctional institution - contact or non-contact (separated visits, telephone, video-chat, letters, and pictures).

POC (whom to contact for more info):



Cambodia



Colombia



Czech Republic



Malawi

- In all interactions with families and children, work to reduce the stigma of having a parent incarcerated.
- Develop partnerships with government officials and other NGOs that work with prisoners or families of prisoners.
- Work with psychologists to develop tools (stories, role plays, etc.) that will help a child prepare to visit a prison.
- Offer the child a support person (caregiver, friend, pastor, etc.) to provide emotional support during the prison visit.
- Find volunteers through church partnerships that are willing to be involved - transporting families to visits, build relationships with the incarcerated, etc.
- Establish a consistent schedule for contact between children and incarcerated parents.
- Establish group letter writing or art days that allow children in similar circumstance to connect with each other.
- Debrief with the child and caregiver after each visit.
- Monitor how the interactions affect the children and continually work to develop meaningful, healthy connection.
- Conduct trainings for caregivers regarding connecting children with an incarcerated parent.
- Train the church community to support and encourage incarcerated parent/child relationships.
- Consider holding an annual Angel Tree event where children feel seen and remembered by their incarcerated parent.
- Work with prison officials to advocate for child-friendly facilities and hours, plus contact visits with incarcerated parents.
- Work with local social workers to develop prisoner-parent support groups and parent trainings.
- Work with prison officials to establish “family” days at the prisons.
- Work with church community to receive children and parents (after their release from incarceration) into their community.

Required Resources (What you need to do it):

1. Human Resources.

- Someone will need to coordinate with prisons/government officials.
- Someone will need contact families and prisoners.
- Someone will need to research in-country psychologists and social workers that can help develop strategies and plans.
- Someone will need to communicate with churches and volunteers.
- Someone will need to develop plans and schedules for connecting children and incarcerated parents.

2. Systems

- You need a system to link child, caregiver, and incarcerated parent.

3. Collateral

- Age-based tools to help children prepare for visiting an incarcerated parent.

3. Time

- Collecting lists of children, caregivers, and incarcerated parents.
- Planning and creating training materials.
- Meetings with stakeholders.
- Meeting and planning with government officials to make child/parent connections possible.

4. Space

- You will need space to hold meetings.

5. Cost

- The cost varies. Considerations include travel expenses, training expenses, meals with officials and families.