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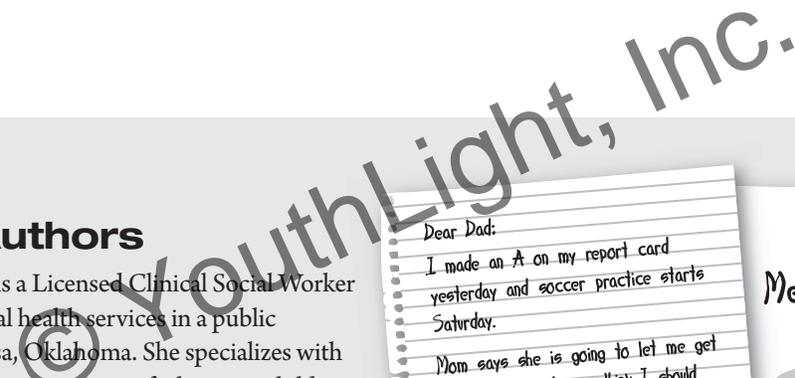
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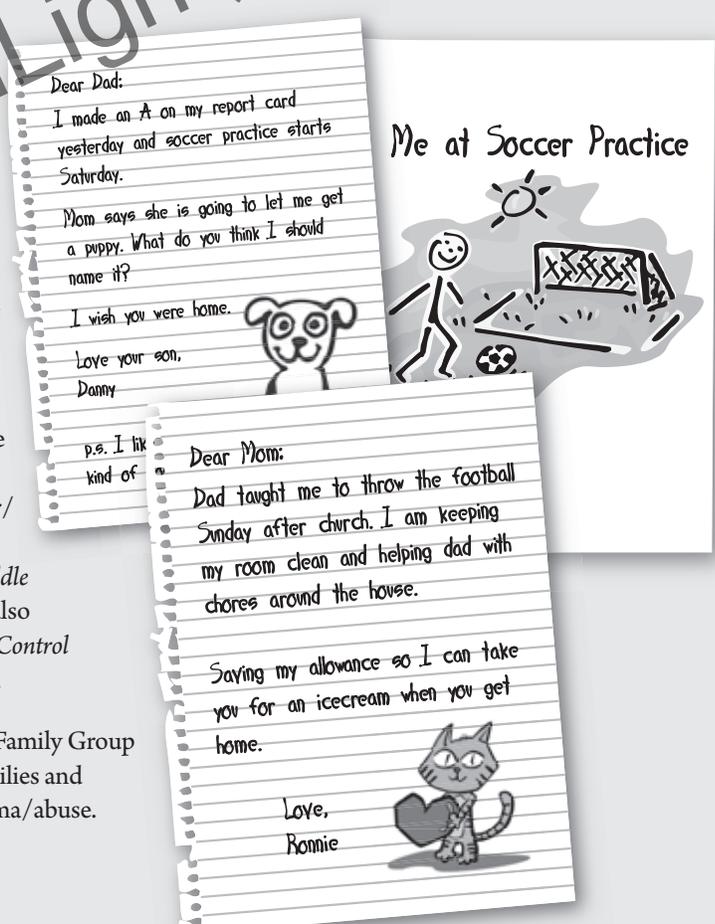


About the Authors

Stacey Burgess, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker currently providing mental health services in a public elementary school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She specializes with at-risk children living in poverty, many of whom are children of incarcerated parents. Stacey has a background in Child Welfare, and currently provides training for foster and adoptive parents. She enjoys incorporating humor and activity into her practice.

Tonia Caselman, PhD, LCSW, is an Associate Professor at the University of Oklahoma. She also maintains a private practice where she specializes in children and families. She is the author/co-author of several journal articles and books, including *Impulse Control for Elementary Students*, *Impulse Control for Middle Schoolers*, *Boundaries*, and *Empathy: The Social Emotion*. She is also co-author of several therapeutic games, including *The Impulse Control Game*, *Remote Control Impulse Control*, and *Boundaries Baseball*.

Jennifer Carsey, MSW, currently works in Child Welfare as a Family Group Conferencing Facilitator. She has experience working with families and children in crisis particularly in the areas of addiction and trauma/abuse. She uses a systemic, solution-focused approach in her practice.



Lesson 1

Understanding What Happened

Notes to Facilitator

Children have an intense need to understand the world around them. For some children a parent's arrest can spark a chain of events they have no control over, and research has indicated the emotional distress of children may be intensified by the unwillingness of family, friends, or caregivers to discuss the parent's incarceration (Snyder-Joy & Carlo, 1998). Though adults try to shelter children from the ugliness of the situation, this often has an inverse effect upon their emotional well-being. Moreover, there is often limited opportunity for children of incarcerated parents to obtain correct and unbiased information about her/his parents' incarcerations (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Circumstances surrounding the parent's arrest also can have lasting emotional consequences. Approximately one out of five children of incarcerated parents witnesses the parent's arrest. The effects of this cannot be understated (Johnston, 2001). Children who witness their mother's arrest, for example, often suffer nightmares and flashbacks of the arrest incident (Kampfner, 1995). Similarly, the abrupt and unexpected changes surrounding the parent's arrest can have the effect of multiple traumas on children as they witness the forcible removal of their parent from the home, lose the caregiver and protector they have known, and often must move to a different location away from the home they know (Kampfner, 1995).

Children who do not personally witness the arrest are still profoundly affected. For example, children who are in school at the time of the arrest may return to an empty residence and be unaware of what happened. Also, children may have expected to visit with a noncustodial parent on a particular day and then not understand why s/he did not show up.

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Children are often intentionally deceived "for their own good" about their parents' incarcerations (Mazza, 2002). Children may be told their fathers have

moved away or their whereabouts are unknown. This may increase the child's sense of abandonment, which can lead to anger, anxiety, shame, and depression. Short-term effects of parental arrest can include an array of traumatic stress reactions (Kampfner, 1995), and long-term effects can include a distrust of the police and the courts as well as unwillingness to look to law enforcement for protection (Stanton, 1980).

While each child's experience of his/her parent's arrest and incarceration is unique, children benefit from having developmentally-appropriate information so they do not form their own erroneous conclusions about what has happened or what will happen in the future. In the absence of correct information, children often use their imaginations to "fill in the missing pieces" (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). While there may be valid reasons for secrecy (e.g., jobs, welfare payments, child custody, housing, etc.,



being in jeopardy), children need to understand what has happened to their families and to be able to talk about their experiences. In fact, families who were open and honest about discussing difficult topics showed improved social and academic outcomes (Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008). The more a child's caretakers are able to talk about the incarcerated parent, the more comfortable the child will be discussing his/her parent and the feelings surrounding their incarceration.

Suggestions:

- » Encourage caregivers to be honest (in a developmentally appropriate way) with children regarding their parent's incarceration. Likewise, encourage children to ask questions about their parents when they feel confused.
- » Provide children's books regarding parental incarceration to both caregivers and children.
- » Children may not understand how long their parent is going to be away. Explain to them this depends on what law was broken, if the parent has been in jail/prison before, and the way s/he acts in jail/prison.
- » States and individual jails/prisons vary on visitation practices. It is reassuring to children to know how they can communicate with their parents while they are in jail/prison. Help children and caregivers obtain information regarding visitation, telephone calls, letter writing, etc.

Script

Did you know there are many children in the United States with parents in jail or prison? You are not alone in going through this difficult time in your family. Many times when a parent goes to jail, the kids have to go live with grandparents or other adults who can take care of them. Other times they stay with the other parent, but many things in their life may change. People go to jail or prison for breaking laws. This is a consequence for breaking rules like kids having to go to time-out or getting grounded when they get in trouble. Usually police take people to jail for breaking laws, and then a court made up of judges, lawyers, and other people decide how long that person will have to stay in jail. When a parent goes to jail, it is never the child's fault. Many times kids can stay in touch with their parent in prison by writing letters or even visiting. It is normal

Understanding What Happened

Children have rules. When children break rules, they can get into trouble. What are some rules that you have to follow?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are some of things that happen to you when you do not follow the rules? Circle the consequences that you have experienced from not following rules:

Put in time-out

Wrote sentences
repeatedly

Did extra chores

Got a spanking

Couldn't watch
TV or play with
video games

Sent to the
principal's office

Listened to a lecture

Went to bed early

Couldn't play with a
favorite toy

Grown-ups have rules, too. These are called laws. Sometimes when grown-ups don't obey laws, they get in trouble. They are told to pay fines (money to the court) or are sent to jail or prison. Jail and prison are like long time-outs for adults. Do you know what law your parent broke?

How did you find out that your parent was going to go to jail or prison?

The Purpose of Laws

Laws keep the community peaceful and orderly. They are written to keep people and their belongings safe. Look at the laws written on the left and match them to their purpose (reason they were written) on the right by drawing a line. The first one is done for you.



Wear a seatbelt when riding in a car.

Stop the car when you see a red light.

No one can go onto someone else's property without her/his permission.

Do not play music too loudly.

No one can be refused a job based on her/his gender or race.

Do not write on statues that are part of parks and buildings.

Do not take things from a store that do not belong to you.

Do not hit, push, kick, or hurt someone else in any way.

All children have the right to a free and public education.

To keep people safe

To protect people's belongings and property

To keep things as fair as possible

To keep the neighborhood or community peaceful and attractive