

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Caregiver incarceration

Research indicates there is a wide range of negative impacts from caregiver incarceration. Both the caregiver and child may experience worse physical and mental health; financial stress and instability; stigmatization; and relationship and/or housing instability, which may involve placements with other relatives or foster homes (Barnes-Proby et al., 2022; Martin, 2017; Poehlman-Tynan & Turney, 2020; Shlafer & Poehlman, 2010; Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Children may also experience worse academic outcomes and negative impacts to their cognitive development, and while most youth do not experience incarceration themselves, they are at elevated risk (Barnes-Proby et al., 2022; Martin, 2017; Turney & Goodsell, 2018).

Witnessing the arrest of a caregiver can also be distressing, confusing, and traumatic for youth (Metcalf et al., 2022). For the most current local data on the percentage of students reporting they have a caregiver who is currently incarcerated or has been in the past, please visit MDH's interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data \(www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html\)](http://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

However, many services, programs, and practices exist that can mitigate or prevent these negative impacts and promote family well-being and resilience despite these challenges.

Effective strategies

Strategies for supporting families with an incarcerated caregiver include:

- **Parenting education and relationship skills**, such as effective and healthy discipline strategies (e.g., positive reinforcement), communication, identifying children's emotions, promoting empathy, understanding child development and appropriate behavior, self-care, and emotion management (Barnes-Proby et al., 2022; Brubacher et al., 2023; Eddy et al., 2022; Gonzalez et al., 2007; Matz et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2011; Purvis, 2013; Schubert Center for Child Studies, 2014; Shortt et al., 2014; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017; Turner et al., 2021).
- **Facilitating consistent communication** between the caregiver and their child, reducing barriers to communication, and providing visitation opportunities (Barnes-Proby et al., 2022; Haverkate & Wright, 2018; Peterson et al., 2019; Purvis, 2013)
- **Providing perinatal, postnatal, and/or doula support** throughout an incarcerated person's pregnancy and birth (Eddy et al., 2022; Shlafer, Gerrity, et al., 2015; Shlafer, Hellerstedt, et al., 2015)
- **Providing opportunities to connect with other caregivers** experiencing incarceration, such as support groups and peer support services (Peterson et al., 2019; Purvis, 2013)

Relevant indicator(s):

- Caregiver incarceration

Strategies for promoting positive parenting skills may also be relevant for supporting families with an incarcerated caregiver.

- **Subsidizing the costs related to visiting** the incarcerated caregiver, such as transportation or child care (Haverkate & Wright, 2018)
- **Engaging and ensuring buy-in among facility staff** on supporting the incarcerated person’s caregiving role and facilitating caregiver-child connection (Haverkate & Wright, 2018; Minnesota Department of Health, 2021)
- **Creating a welcoming environment** for visits (Cramer et al., 2017; Haverkate & Wright, 2018)
- **Providing re-entry support** tailored specifically to caregivers, such as finding housing and facilitating conversations with family members (Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza, 2021)

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

Minnesota Model Jail Practices Learning Community

The Minnesota Model Jail Practices Learning Community is a program to help county jails support families with an incarcerated caregiver. The program aims to improve family relationships, reduce recidivism, improve youth and family well-being, and improve public safety. The Learning Community includes evidence-based parenting education programming and staff training to improve understanding of caregiver incarceration, its impacts on child development, and ways jails can support families with an incarcerated caregiver.

Olmsted County is one of seven communities participating in the Minnesota Model Jail Practices Learning Community program. Watch a video about Olmsted County’s efforts:

For more information about [Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/mentalhealth/jail.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/mentalhealth/jail.html)

Minnesota Prison Doula Project

The Minnesota Prison Doula Project provides pregnancy and parenting support to caregivers who are incarcerated in county correctional facilities and at Minnesota’s women’s state prison. The project provides prenatal and parenting education and support groups, peer counseling, supportive visitation with program staff to help caregivers practice parenting, and support throughout the pregnancy and birthing process from a trained doula.

More information about [MN Prison Doula Project \(www.mnprisondoulaproject.org/\)](http://www.mnprisondoulaproject.org/)

Examples of national initiatives

Residential Parenting Program

The Residential Parenting Program in Washington state provides residential parenting units in its facility, allowing incarcerated individuals to stay with their newborns after birth, and early childhood education. This ultimately increases the amount of bonding time between parent and child and provides additional opportunities to practice parenting and support the child's development.

More information about [Current Programming \(doc.wa.gov/corrections/programs/descriptions.htm\)](https://doc.wa.gov/corrections/programs/descriptions.htm)

InsideOut Dad

InsideOut Dad is an evidence-based program designed specifically for fathers experiencing incarceration. The program aims to improve the relationship between fathers and their children, increase understanding and knowledge of parenting, and improve parenting attitudes. Topics include men's health, communication, the role of a father, discipline, child development, co-parenting, masculinity, and managing and communicating emotions. In addition to sessions focused on fathers currently incarcerated, there are also sessions about the reentry process.

More information about [InsideOut Dad \(store.fatherhood.org/insideout-dad-programs/\)](https://store.fatherhood.org/insideout-dad-programs/)

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