

Working Collaboratively to Overcome the Barriers

Barriers such as travel to and from visits, legal timeframes, do occur. It is important to be aware of some of the ways to overcome the barriers. To do so, it is important to know the roles of all involved and what actions they/you could take to help the child, the parent, and the family. Consider the following list and add to it based on your experiences and your county's policies and procedures:

CHILD or YOUTH:

- Should let others (parents, guardians, caseworkers) know what their wishes/feelings are.
- Can talk to the judge, caseworker, Guardian Ad Litem or attorney, or the Court Appointed Special Advocate about their wishes as they pertain to visiting the parent in jail or prison.
- In order to maintain consistent contact with their parent, the child can write letters, send pictures, and talk on the telephone in his/her absence.

CASEWORKER:

- Should help inform the child of their parent's whereabouts and facilitate contact quickly after the initial arrest.
- Should acknowledge the child's needs and refer them to services in their schools or communities that work with children with an incarcerated parent.
- Should ensure that the child is able to communicate with and visit his/her parent, and advocate for contact/visitation.
- If appropriate, could arrange for mentored or supported visits. If contact visitation is not available, advocate for frequent contact through telephone or video conferencing.
- Should work with the counselor in the correctional facility to arrange contacts/visits. This person is the link to the parent who is incarcerated.

JUDGE:

- Could order child-parent visitation, providing that it is in the best interest of the child to have contact with his/her parent. If contact visitation is not available, the judge could inquire about the availability of visitation through telephone or video conferencing or some other means of preserving the connection to the parent.
- Could order them to take part in anger management and domestic abuse programs in addition to parenting classes as a part of the treatment plan.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY STAFF:

- Should support quality parenting education in prisons and help create a child-friendly visiting area where contact visits can take place.
- Must be respectful of children during visitation and encourage others to do the same.

CHILDREN'S COURT ATTORNEY:

- Present to the court a plan for parent-child visitation or other contact that is in the best interest of the child.

YOUTH ATTORNEY or GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL):

- In accordance with the wishes of the client or the best interests of the child, should advocate for parent-child contact visitation.
- Should talk with the child about visitation issues, and whether or not he/she would like to have contact visitation with her parent.
- If contact visitation is not available, should advocate for visitation by telephone or video conferencing.

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RESPONDENT ATTORNEY:

- Should advocate for visitation and other contact for the client with his/her child.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER:

- Could visit the child in his/her current placement and help ensure that he/she understands and is aware of the whereabouts of his/her parent.
- Must become familiar with the issues that children with incarcerated parents face and be prepared to educate others.
- Should help advocate for the child to be connected to other children with incarcerated parents, and help inform the child's school staff about the child's situation. Report observations and recommendations to the court.

CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL MEMBER:

- Could inquire about the child's needs, the services being provided, and the child's progress in foster care.
- Could inquire about the parent's treatment plan and the available services while incarcerated.
- Must document observations and recommendations in the report.

PARENT WHO IS INCARCERATED:

- Must be aware of what the child is going through because of the incarceration.
- Should express to the judge a desire to be connected to the child.
- Should ask for contact visitation with the children.
- If contact or other visitation is not available, could participate in telephone and video visits.

PARENT WHO IS NOT INCARCERATED:

- Should talk with the child about what he/she wants to do.
- Must remember that this is a difficult time not only for the parent but also for the child. Should work with everyone involved to get the help that the parent and the child needs.
- When appropriate, and despite strained relationships that might exist, could advocate for visitation or contact in a manner that is in the best interest of the child.

RESOURCE PARENT:

- Should help inform the child about his/her parent's whereabouts and current situation.
- If appropriate, should help facilitate communication and contact visitation by providing transportation and support.
- Must help advocate for needed services and support systems for the child.

Source: Adapted from PB&J Family Services, Inc. Child protection best practices bulletin: Innovative strategies to achieve safety, permanence, and well-being: Connecting children with incarcerated parents. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on September 26, 2008 @ http://www.cyfd.org/bestpractices/Best_Practices_Bulletin-Connecting_Children_with_Incarcerated_Parents.pdf.