



## ***UNLOCK THE HEARTS OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE LOVED ONES IN PRISON***

*“My mother was arrested last night-what do I say in school?”*

*“I am not allowed to talk about where my father is and I do not know why.”*

*“Is it my fault that Dad is not here?”*

*“I have a test today but all I can think about is my brother in prison”*

Sound familiar? On any given day, there are tens of thousands of children in New York State who feel alone and misunderstood. When a child has a loved one in prison, it adds to his/her life a special set of circumstances and feelings that can be complicated to negotiate.

In my presentation, I will address what to say to prisoners’ children, what to do, how to assist with these feelings and situations--and---

- Basic prison information
- Visiting in prison—what is it like for children and families
- How do children deal with the loss of a parent/loved one to the prison system—various responses
- Addressing acting out/acting in
- Encouraging success
- Physical and mental health issues of prisoners’ children and families
- Strategies to support the parent/child relationship
- Working with the caregivers
- The impact of separation on the child's self-esteem, personal and cultural identity.
- How to start a support group/ mentoring program for children
- Resource programs for adult prison family members

We prisoners’ children have some tough things to handle. We can do better with the help and support of our parents and other loved ones, educators, doctors, clergy and communities. I can help you get the information you need to work better with prisoners’ children.

Cecily J. Coleman  
Children of Prisoners Initiative  
Prison Families of New York, Inc.  
40 North Main Avenue  
Albany, NY 12203  
518-453-6659

[childrenofprisoners@nycap.rr.com](mailto:childrenofprisoners@nycap.rr.com)

## **A Message from Cecily**

My name is Cecily Coleman. I am 26 years old. I am a person of color and have a degree in criminal justice. In October, 2005, my father was released from NYS prisons after 25 years, for a non-violent crime. He and I had maintained a special daughter/father bond all those years, I visited him as often as possible and talked to him on the phone at least every week.

There are about 63,000 prisoners in NYS prisons alone and most of them have children--but we hardly ever hear about what it is like for those children--at home, in school, in their communities and in prison visiting rooms. We are a population of children that has not been recognized in the past. Our society does not discuss our feelings, our challenges, our distinct medical issues and our futures except to say that we are at risk and may well end up in prison, too. Obviously, I did not and there are many like me--and there would be more who do well if they had the understanding and support of the educators, pastors, doctors and program staff who work with them.

Many prisoners' children enter juvenile facilities where our issues and our complicated feelings about our incarcerated parents continue to go unaddressed. Through the agency Prison Families of New York, Inc. in Albany, I work with prisoners' children and people who care about us, anywhere. I help to start support groups and visit those groups to talk to children of all ages, provide trainings for staff so that they really understand what having a loved one in prison is like for us and how that affects our school work, health, relationships, self-esteem, and so much more. I present talks in communities that want to help us with our special issues. If you would like to discuss how I can help your school, agency, medical practice, church, your family or your neighbor's family, please do not hesitate to contact me.

## **Training Topics Available**

- An introduction to NYS Department of Correctional Services and its prisons, policy and practice as related to children and families.
- Grief, relief, worry, fear, confusion—what children of prisoners may feel
- A day in the visiting room- how it looks and how it feels.
- What children really think/feel about prison visiting
- Prisoners' children and the school environment
- Special issues of teenagers who have parents in prison
- Prisoners' children in juvenile facilities
- How to respond in difficult moments
- The importance of confidentiality
- Why prisoners' children need to know the truth
- How to encourage success
- Health care issues of prisoners' children and their families/caregivers
- Mental health care issues of prisoners' children and their families/caregivers
- Children at risk vs. children with great potential—“when was anyone ever at risk of doing anything positive?”
- Seeing prisoners' children as experts in this area
- The importance of being with others in similar situations (peer support, safe spaces)
- Mentoring children of prisoners
- Issues of the caregivers
- Preparation for workers who accompany children on prison visits
- Reunification and feelings it can bring about (positive and negative)