Nurturing Parent-Child Relationships when Mothers are Involved in the Criminal Justice System

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Stable, Responsive Relationships: An Essential Building Block

• Lay the foundation for later physical and mental health, including influencing gene expression and brain structure\textsuperscript{1, 2}

• Provide a buffer from physical and emotional stress\textsuperscript{3}

• Can affect the success of interventions in other areas\textsuperscript{4}

• Prolonged separation, repeated “detaching” and “re-attaching” cause distress\textsuperscript{5}
Policies to Support the Mother-Child Relationship

- Proximity in facility assignment
- Visitation: Video and In-person, Supported
- Phone and mail contact
- Infant Nurseries (“Prison Nurseries”)
- Community Alternatives to Incarceration
- Early Release: Home or Mother-Child Residential Program
U.S. Prison Nursery Outcomes: Effectiveness

- In New York State
  - Family Preservation⁶:
    - At release: 59% of children left with their mothers
    - 1ˢᵗ reentry Yr: 62% of children with mother; 83% in those who left together
    - 3ʳᵈ reentry Yr: 60% of children with mother; 75% of those who left together

- Attachment⁷-⁹: Comparable to healthy community samples; inverse of stressed and CJ-involved families; higher than expected from mothers’ attachment representations
U.S. Prison Nursery Outcomes: Effectiveness

In New York State:

Child Development

- Infancy & toddlerhood (Birth - 2 years):
  - Cognitive and Motor Development\textsuperscript{10}: Clinically normal during nursery stay and first reentry year

- Preschool (3-5 years)\textsuperscript{11}: Significantly lower Anxious/Depressed scores than children separated due to incarceration
U.S Prison Nursery Outcomes: Efficiency

- Systematic research unavailable

- From corrections perspective:
  - Budget tightening: Kids are liability/not our problem, Benefits accrue to other agencies
  - Improved by community collaborations and use of non-corrections public funding$^{12}$
U.S. Prison Nurseries: Equity

General eligibility criteria:  

1) Pregnant upon admission
2) Expected release date 12-18 mo. after EDC
3) Nonviolent crime
4) No history of crimes against children

✓ Women must apply
Community Alternatives to Incarceration

**Place-Based**

- Residential Drug Treatment
  - Limited eligibility: Charge & Children
  - Institutional
  - Not needed for all women

- Supportive Housing: Drew House
  - Expanded eligibility: Charge & Children
  - Non-institutional

**Home-Based**

- JusticeHome
  - Limited eligibility: Charge
  - No limits regarding children in mother’s custody
  - Non-institutional: Remain in home; Can stay with partner/family member helping care for kids

“There’s a lot more to public safety than just locking people up.”
- Charles J. Hynes
Future Directions

- Scale up and replicate ATIs

- Critical research needs:
  - Describe maternal, child, and dyadic outcomes associated with different ATI types
    - Non-experimental comparison groups
  - Test interventions: Programs must provide more than just co-residence
    - Design or translate interventions for families and staff to support the parent-child relationship and long-term family health
  - How far can eligibility safely be expanded?
References


