



When Distance Is Protection: Reframing Father "Separation" in Contexts of Community Violence

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www.ffhc.org

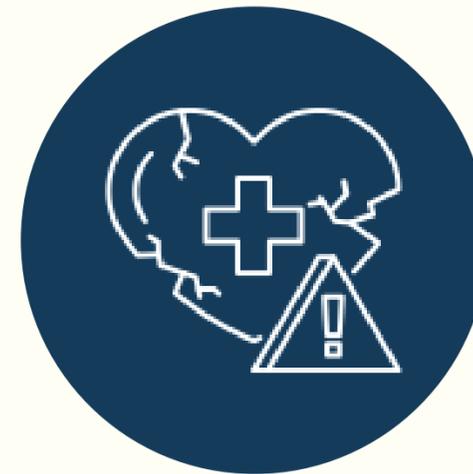
March 11th, 2026

The Misinterpretation: *When Systems Misread Father Behavior*

MAIN ASSUMPTIONS



**Physical distance
means disengagement**



**Reduced presence
reflects a lack of care**

Reframing Separation: *When Distance Is an Act of Protection*



**Intentional acts of protection,
not disengagement.**



Avoiding spaces where retaliation risk is high



Temporarily relocating to stabilize safety



Limiting visibility to reduce threats to family members



Creating distance during periods of active conflict

Strengths on Display

When we apply an **asset-based lens**, important fathering strengths come clearly into view.



Situational Awareness



Self-regulation under threat



Protective instinct



Long-term thinking about their children's safety

These are protective parenting behaviors under extreme conditions

Practice Implications

What Practitioners *Must* Do Differently



Recognize Protective
Decision-Making



Lead With an Asset-
Based Lens



Provide Trauma-Informed
Support for Fathers



Create Pathways for
Transformation and
Leadership



Policy Implications

What Systems *Must* Do Differently



Strengthen Support
for Fathers and Families

Prioritize Prevention
and Early Support

Expand Economic
Opportunity for Fathers

Reduce Structural
Barriers to Family Stability



Thank you!



Contact Us



www.ffhc.org



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Introducing the Modern Military Family



Jonathon Gonzales

Military Family Projects at ZERO TO THREE



ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE MISSION

ZERO TO THREE's mission is to ensure all babies have a strong start in life.

We envision a society that has the knowledge and will to support all infants and toddlers in reaching their full potential.



Military Family Projects: Our Work and Focus

- New Parent Support Program, training to the field to ensure latest research and best practices can be applied to serving military families
- Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders and Military Service Members and Families
- Military Father Engagement and Parent Training Development





Who Are Military- Connected Children?



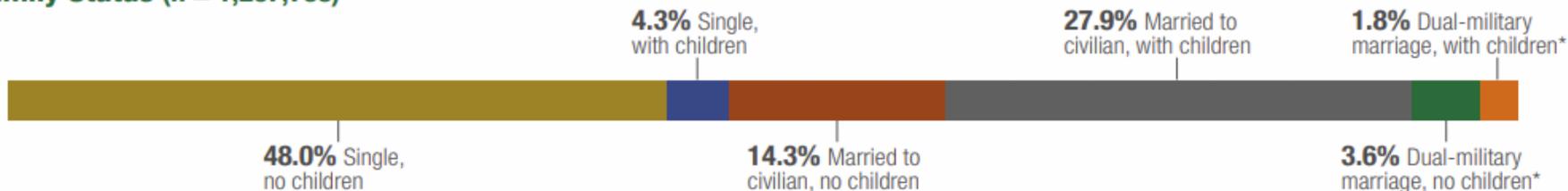
U.S. Department of Defense

2024 DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE

ACTIVE-DUTY FAMILIES

There are 1,495,107 active-duty family members. 41.6% of active-duty family members are spouses, 58.1% are children, and 0.3% are adult dependents.

Family Status (n = 1,267,738)



*Note: The Army did not report dual-military marriages in 2024

Active-Duty Spouses (n = 621,400)



47.6% of active-duty members are married



13.9% of spouses are men



86.1% of spouses are women



32.1 Average age of spouses



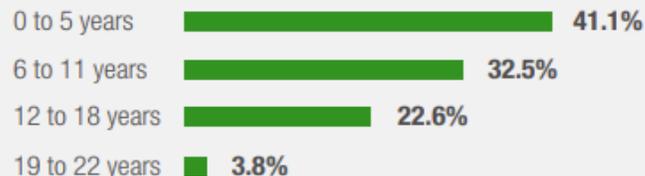
56% Civilian spouse employment

Active-Duty Children (n = 869,007)



34.0% active-duty members with children

Children in each age group



Active-Duty Adult Dependents (n = 4,700)



88.8% Over the age of 50



78.8% of adult dependents are women



35.0% of adult dependents are associated with active-duty members in the E5-E6 pay grades

Source: 2024 Demographics Profile of the Military Community (Department of Defense); <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2024-demographics-report.pdf>



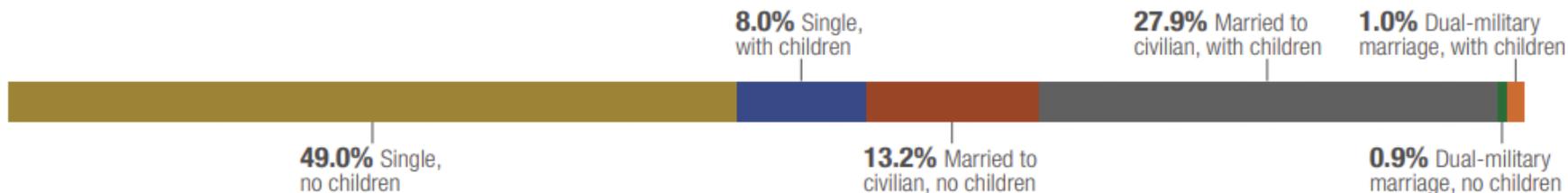
U.S. Department of Defense

2024 DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE

SELECTED RESERVE FAMILIES

There are 887,107 selected reserve family members. 36.6% of selected reserve family members are spouses, 63.3% are children, and 0.1% are adult dependents.

Family Status (n = 760,744)



Selected Reserve Spouses (n = 324,599)



43.0% of selected reserve members are married



15.2% of spouses are men



84.8% of spouses are women



36.8 Average age of spouses



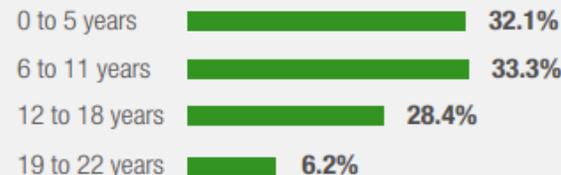
71% Civilian spouse employment

Selected Reserve Children (n = 561,214)



36.7% selected reserve members with children

Children in each age group



Selected Reserve Adult Dependents (n = 1,294)



80.3% Over the age of 50



73.3% of adult dependents are women



27.7% of adult dependents are associated with selected reserve members in the E5-E6 pay grades

Source: 2024 Demographics Profile of the Military Community (Department of Defense); <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2024-demographics-report.pdf>

Knowing Your Service Member and Families

- More than 1.2 million active-duty members serve in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force
- 227,114 (17.9%) *female* active-duty service members and 1,040,618 (82.2%) *male* active-duty service members.
- 169,759 (22.3%) *female* selected reserve members and 590,983 (77.7%) *male* selected reserve members.
- Average age of *Active* enlisted service members across all branches is 27.4 years old and officers is 34.3 years old.
- Across active and reserve components, there are a total of 2,521,792 service members.



Veterans with Children

- The term "veteran" means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.*
- 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey found that 7.1% of children had a veteran parent.**
- Children with a veteran parent were less likely to live in poverty than children without a veteran parent.*



*<https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/Determining-Veteran-Status.pdf>

**Hemez, Paul. U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Working Paper

What does parenting mean for the *Millennial* and *Gen-Z* Service Member?

Get There

Why parenting is even more daunting for millennials than it was for their parents – or their grandparents

FAMILY | Compiled by Mandy Morgan

Sunday, July 26, 2015

Millennial parents more likely to say their children are their best friends



MEDICAL EXAMINER

HEALTH AND MEDICINE EXPLAINED.

DEC. 2 2013 1:58 PM

Why Millennials Can't Grow Up

Helicopter parenting has caused my psychotherapy clients to crash land.

By Brooke Donatone

How millennials are parenting differently than their Baby Boomer parents

To the occasional chagrin of Boomer grandparents, millennial moms and dads are letting their kids be more emotional

#Parenting: Millennials & Screens

- **94%** of Millennial parents own a smartphone
- **71%** value the advice they receive from online sources
- **90%** are social media users
- **58%** of millennial parents say they are “overwhelmed” by the volume of information available to them
- **85%** say social media creates “unrealistic” parenting expectations
- **45%** say social media influencers “make them feel bad”



On the Horizon: Demographics of Gen Z Parents

- Born between 1997-2009
- 36% of Gen Z parents grew up with parents who were not married
- True digital natives
- Most educated – more likely to be enrolled in college than all previous generations
- 8 in 10 say that they are lonely
- 6 in 10 Gen Z young adults report diagnosis of anxiety or depressive disorders



On the Horizon: Gen Z

Still Small Numbers

- 1 in 5 of annual births are to Gen Z mothers
- 60% of pregnancies unplanned
- 86% have felt judged as a parent

Child-Centered, Child-Focused Approach

- 4 in 5 say they have a different approach to parenting than their parents
- 72% say their children teach them how to be a parent better than anyone else
- 60% say they consider themselves and their child(ren) as equals



Military-Connected Families Aren't Always Visible

- Live in all 50 states, US territories and in international (OCONUS) locations.
- Some live on installations and others live in communities near installations.
- May use healthcare and childcare services outside of the military installation.
- There are over 4.4 million individuals who make up the Total DOD Force community.





What Does Military Life Mean?

Military Life Means...

Possible Risk Factors

- Deployment: Long-term deployments can be stressful for children and their families.
- Separation: Frequent separations can disrupt family routines and increase stress.
- Relocation: Frequent moves can be stressful for children and their families.
- Trauma: Military service can expose family members to physical injury, death, and traumatic experiences.
- Mental health: Military service can increase the risk of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.
- Parenting: Military service can impact parenting practices, such as discipline and monitoring.
- Family communication: Military service can lead to impaired communication and a lack of open emotional expression.
- Financial strain: Military service can cause financial strain for families.



Military Life Means...

Active-Duty: Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States to include Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, Space Force, and active duty or full-time training duty in the Reserve Component.

Base: Facility that houses military personnel and their equipment for training, operations, and support. It often includes amenities such as churches, gyms, and schools.

Deployment: Any movement from a military Service Member's home station to somewhere outside the continental U.S. and its territories.

Enlisted: Has joined the military ranks through a training process at boot camp or basic training. Are distinct from officers, who hold positions of leadership and command and usually have a university degree.

Installation: A broader term that encompasses any facility used for military purposes, including bases, camps, and posts, or referring to any location where military activities take place.

Permanent Change of Station (PCS): Official orders relocating service members from one duty station to another.

Post: Smaller facility, less permanent than a base and may not have the same amenities. Often used for temporary assignments or training purposes.

Active Guard and Reserve: National Guard and Reserve members who are on voluntary active duty providing full-time support to National Guard, Reserve, and Active Component organizations for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the Reserve Components.

Temporary Duty (TDY): Temporary assignment for servicemember

Veteran: A person who has served in the naval, air, or space military service and was released or discharged honorably.



Protective Factors Framework-Military

Protective Factors and Child Well-Being

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Concrete Supports in Times of Need
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Social Emotional Competence of Young Children



The Parent-Baby Connection

Family functioning has been shown to predict returned soldiers' PTSD symptoms

(Evans, Cowlshaw, Forbes, Parslow, & Lewis, 2010)



Caregiver strain can lead to, or worsen, parent mental health issues

(Brannan & Hefflinger, 2001)

Child behavior problems can predict parent stress, which in turn can predict child behavior problems

(Baker et al., 2003)





Serving Military Connected Families

Provide Professional Development for Staff

- Learn and build understanding of military and veteran culture
- Build awareness and understanding of military programs and services available to families
- Explore cultural humility to help remove barriers and aid rapport building



Engage with Installation Agencies Serving Families

- Family Advocacy Program (FAP)
- New Parent Support Program (NPSP)
- Early childcare and education
- Installation Child Development Centers
- Early intervention
- Healthy Steps



Supporting Veterans and their Family

- Develop relationship with your local and/or state Veteran Affairs
- Learn and connect with other programs in your community and/or state or territory that serve Veterans and their families
- Ask families directly about military and Veteran status, including participation in the National Guard and Reserve



Resources

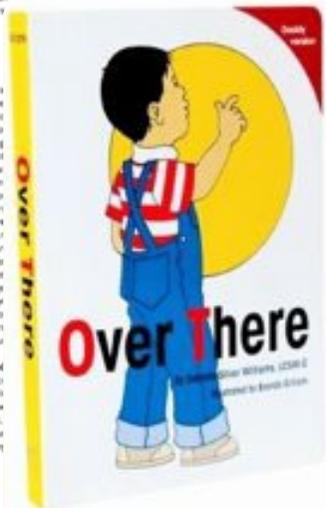
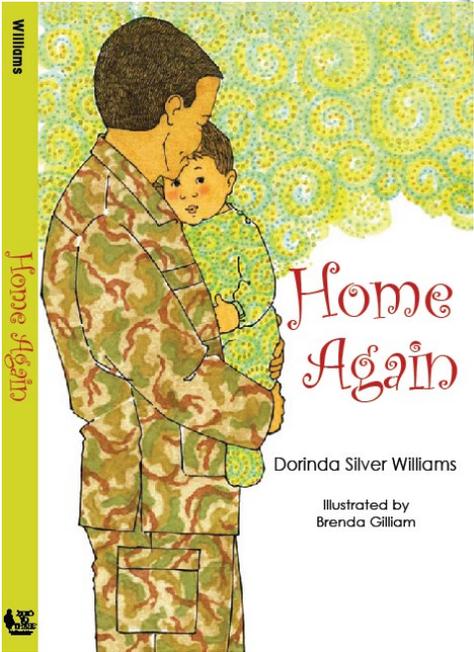


- Babies on the Homefront app and website
- Military One Source (Phone: 1-800-342-9647)
- Sesame Street for Military Families
- DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, March 2017
- Uniformed Services University (USU), Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP)

ZERO TO THREE:

- Brochures, pamphlets, and board books for families with very young children
- Guides for professionals supporting families with very young children
- Some materials are distributed free through Military OneSource
- Some materials available on ZTT website

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/coming-together-around-military-families-flyers/>



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ZERO TO THREE

Together, we have
the power to create
**transformative
change in every
child's journey**

Thank you for being a part of Military Family Projects' mission to improve the lives of military-connected children and families

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DIRECTOR, MILITARY FAMILY PROJECTS,
ZERO TO THREE



MATTHEW ALEMU

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Research Interests: Absentee Fatherhood, Black Men, Race, Culture, Qualitative Methods

Current Publications:

- Alemu, Matthew. 2025. “*Better than My Father or Better than his Absence: Understanding how Variation in Patterns of Absence Influence Intentions for Fatherhood.*” *Qualitative Sociology*
- Washtenaw County, MI, Co-Response Unit (CRU) Pilot [Implementation Evaluation](#), *Lead Evaluator*, University of Chicago Health Lab. February, 2026

Works in Progress:

- Alemu, Matthew. “*‘I Didn’t Know Anyone with a Father’: Toward an Understanding of Pervasive Communal Father Absence.*” (journal article) (**covered in webinar today**)
- Alemu, Matthew. “*Am I My Absent Father: How Young Black Men with Absent Fathers Envision Fatherhood.*” (book project)
- Alemu, Matthew. “*How Absent are Black Fathers, Really?: Implications from Measuring the Evolution of Father Absenteeism Throughout Childhood.*” (journal article)



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Justice-Impacted Fathers and their Children: *Strategies to Mitigate Harm Caused by Separation*



Pajarita Charles, PhD, MSW, MPA
Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work
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March 11, 2026

Who, how, and where

Who: Justice-impacted families (parents, children, caregivers) and key actors who shape their lives

How: Basic research, intervention research, teaching and training students, and community and institutional partnerships

Where: In local jails, state prison systems, community reentry spaces



JAILS

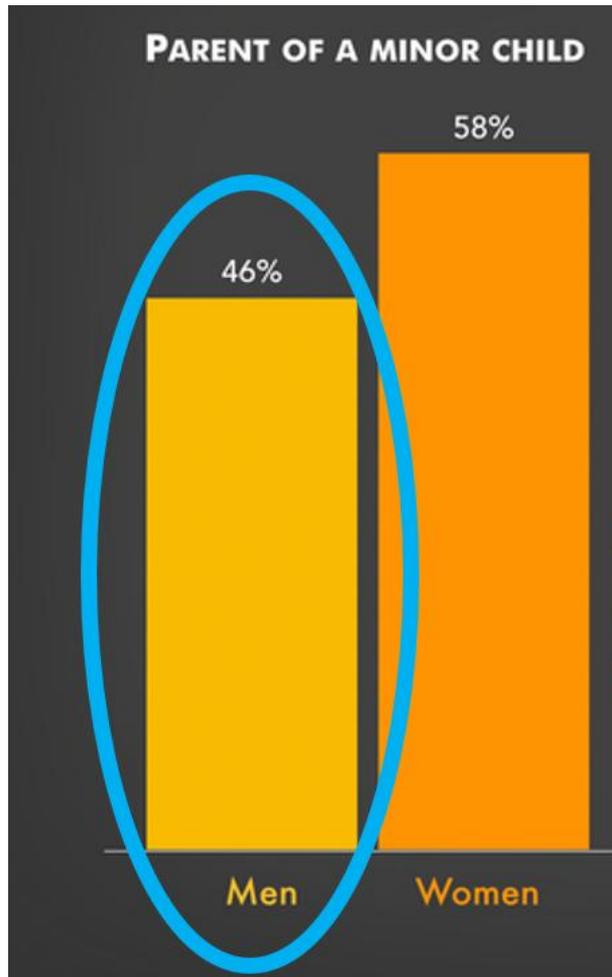


PRISONS



COMMUNITY
REENTRY

Approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of American Prisoners are Parents



46%

represents
626,800
fathers



58%

represents
57,700
mothers

Consequences for Children & Adults

- **For children**¹
 - Behavioral problems
 - Cognitive delays and academic challenges
 - Food insecurity
 - Depression, PTSD diagnoses by mid-life²
- **For adult partners and relatives**³
 - Relationship strain
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Income loss
 - Housing precarity
 - Child support delinquency

¹Turney & Haskins 2019. Parental incarceration and children's well-being: Findings from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study. In J. M. Eddy & J. Poehlmann (Eds.), *Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents*. Springer; Wildeman C, Goldman AW, Turney K. Parental incarceration and child health in the United States. *Epidemiol Rev.* 2018;40(1):146–156. ²Ward V, Rew HG, Franz B. The Association Between Parental Incarceration During Childhood and Mental Health Diagnoses in Mid-Life. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health.* 2025;16. doi:[10.1177/21501319251362978](https://doi.org/10.1177/21501319251362978); ³Wildeman C, Goldman AW, Lee H. Health consequences of family member incarceration for adults in the household. *Public Health Rep.* 2019;134(suppl):15S–21S; Charles, P., Landrum, G., Kim, Y., & Meyer, D. (2024). *Incarceration, child support, and family relationships* [Report]. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CSRA-2022-2024-T11-05192024.pdf>

Parental incarceration is the waste product of
mass incarceration.

It is a silent American epidemic more common
than childhood asthma.

*Joshua Martoma, age 17, child of an incarcerated father;
among 11 winners of the NYT Student Editorial Contest in 2023¹*

Despite evidence that incarceration does not
provide safety or justice, and instead
perpetuates **inequities, racism, violence,** and
family separation, it is still used as the default
approach in America.

¹Martoma, J. (2023). Parental Incarceration Is a Silent American Epidemic More Common Than Childhood Asthma <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/26/learning/parental-incarceration-is-a-silent-american-epidemic-more-common-than-childhood-asthma.html>; American Public Health Association. (October 2021). Advancing public health interventions to address the harms of the carceral system. Policy number: 202117. <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2022/01/07/advancing-public-health-interventions-to-address-the-harms-of-the-carceral-system>

Partnerships in Practice

Partnerships are key to conducting research and implementing evidence-based programs.

correctional institutions
(e.g., prisons, jails, judges)

other stakeholders
(e.g., credible messengers, researchers, non-profits, advocates)



Dane County Jail



Second Edition



Parent Management Training

parenting inside out®

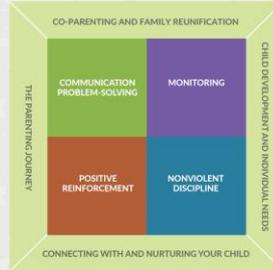
parenting inside out

Parenting Inside Out

THE PIO MODEL

Parenting Inside Out (PIO) is based on the best-practice Parent Management Training (PMT) program and includes its core elements: communication and problem-solving, positive reinforcement, monitoring, and non-violent discipline. Based on input from criminal-justice-involved parents and their families, parenting educators, and social service providers, PIO developers added key topics to the PMT base to create a well-rounded parenting program. The result is a program designed, specifically, for incarcerated and criminal-justice-involved parents that addresses the unique challenges they and their children face.

Parenting Inside Out (PIO) Model



PIO is an outcomes-based, developmentally focused program that helps parents promote healthy child adjustment, prevent child problem behavior, and increase the child's resiliency. Through PIO, parents develop and refine social skills and citizenship behaviors they can use in all aspects of their lives and that will help them guide their children toward becoming healthy, pro-social adults.

EVIDENCE-BASED

What is an evidence-based program? To be evidence-based a program must:

- > have rigorous evaluation research
- > demonstrate that results can be attributed to the program
- > have study and results subjected to critical peer review
- > be endorsed by a federal agency or respected research organization and included in their list of effective programs.

PIO meets all of the criteria and is the highest-rated parenting program for criminal-justice-involved parents on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP).



*What Works, Wisconsin - Research to Practice, Issue #4, Oct. 2007, University of Wisconsin



For more information, contact us at 503-977-6399 or info@childrensjusticealliance.org

PIO Presence in the United States

Parenting Inside Out is used in 46 states and 4 countries



International Sites

- ★ Canada
- ★ Australia
- ★ US Virgin Islands



<https://www.thepathfindernetwork.org/>

Curriculum Versions

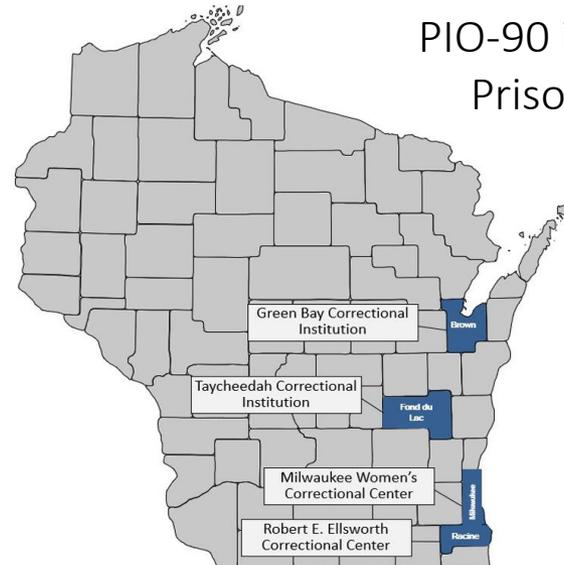
PIO-24
Jails

PIO-48
Community Reentry

PIO-60
Prisons

PIO-90
Prisons

PIO-90 in WI Prisons





Partnership Expansions

After PIO was introduced in 2018, Child-Friendly Visits were added in 2020 with [Dr. Julie Poehlmann](#) and student volunteers

PIO Research



OVERVIEW

In 2020, the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB), researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-MADISON), and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) partnered to implement and evaluate Parenting Inside Out (PIO-90).¹ The four participating prisons included Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI), Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center (MWCC), Taycheedah Correctional Institution (TCI), and Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (RECC).² Parenting Inside Out is an evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral parent management skills training program that promotes parenting skills and parent-child bonds through effective communication, problem-solving strategies, positive reinforcement, monitoring, and constructive discipline.

¹ Parenting Inside Out-90 refers to 90 hours of manualized curriculum that is delivered to participants over 6 months to complete one programming cycle of PIO-90. Other versions of PIO are shorter, including PIO-60 (prisons), PIO-48 (community reentry), and PIO-24 (girls). For the purpose of PIO-90 as PIO. For more information about PIO, please visit www.parentinginsideout.org.

² GBCI is a maximum-security prison for men. The remaining three prisons make up the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) system and are female-only facilities. MWCC is a minimum-security prison; TCI is a maximum-security prison; and RECC is a minimum-security prison.



Supporting Incarcerated Parents and Children: An Implementation Toolkit for Parenting Inside Out in Prisons

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August 2023



Assessment of Feasibility and Acceptability of the Pathways for Parents After Incarceration Program

OPEN

Pajarita Charles, PhD; Luke Muentner, PhD; Gene Grade, BA; J. Mark Eddy, PhD

Most incarcerated fathers have connections to their families, and the quality of their family relationships is important not only to their reentry success but also to shaping positive child and family outcomes. However, there is a lack of rigorous evidence about interventions designed to strengthen parent-child and other family relationships among formerly incarcerated parents. The purpose of this study was to develop and assess for feasibility and acceptability an intervention for formerly incarcerated fathers, co-parents, and their children. We created and implemented the Pathways for Parents after Incarceration Program (P4P), a multilevel intervention that focuses on strengthening positive parenting skills, building constructive co-parenting strategies, providing social support, and connecting families to needed specialized services. We delivered P4P virtually to 3 groups of participants, collecting data at several points. Results suggest that while the program was well liked and appreciated by participants and parent coaches and had a positive effect on parenting skills and attitudes, recruitment and retention were challenging. Findings suggest that P4P has the potential to support child and family well-being when fathers reenter by bolstering protective factors, and supporting access to necessary supports associated with improved reentry outcomes. Additional research is needed to address feasibility concerns and establish program efficacy.

Key words: feasibility and acceptability, incarceration, intervention, parents, reentry

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The authors thank the individuals and families who so generously shared their time and experience for the purposes of the project, Carmella Glenn, and James Morgan for the unwavering support and expertise, and organizations including JustDane, Anesis Therapy Center, Art + Literature Laboratory, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and Dane County Sheriff's Office, who offered guidance and materials.

This research was funded by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (grants K99HD081273 and R00HD081273). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NICHD. Support for this research was also provided by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Roughly half of men incarcerated in the United States (US) are fathers of minor children,¹ with the impact of imprisonment disproportionately felt by families from minoritized racial and ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic adults, for example, are incarcerated at 5 and nearly 2 times, respectively, the rate of white adults.² Although the vast majority of men return to their home community upon release,³ fathers typically leave prison or jail without sufficient preparation for reentry, including a lack of tailored parenting-focused skills and knowledge relevant to reentry,^{4,5} making their reintegration into their families' lives complex.

Because of structural obstacles to successful reentry such as finding employment,⁶ housing,⁷ health care, and paying child support,⁸ fathers often turn to their families after release for both tangible and emotional supports.⁹ Furthermore, as part of the effort to resume their role in society, fathers often try to engage with their children and work toward reclaiming their fatherhood identity.¹⁰ A myriad of interpersonal issues, however, including mental

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New Analyses: Multi-site Evaluation

EVALUATION OF A JAIL-BASED PARENTING PROGRAM

1

Parenting Inside Out (PIO-24): Findings from a Multi-Site Evaluation of a Jail-Based Parenting Program

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Daniel W. Grupe, PhD¹

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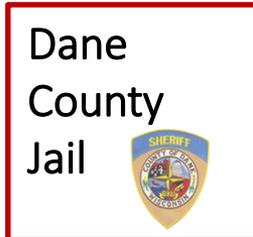
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Disclosures:

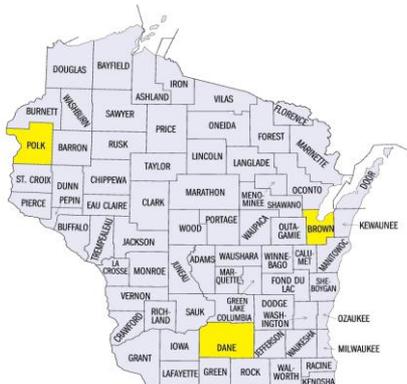
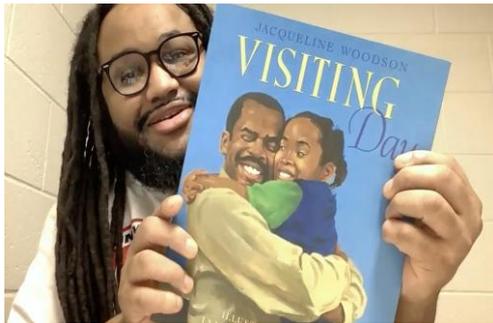
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Another Example



Making Reading Memories: Reading Connections During Parental Incarceration



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**BUILDING READING AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH
JUSTICE-INVOLVED FAMILIES: FINDINGS FROM AN
EVALUATION OF MAKING READING MEMORIES**

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB) joined efforts with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's WI Idea Collaboration Grant program to support the implementation and evaluation of Making Reading Memories (MRM). MRM is a core strategy of the UW-Madison Division of Extension's Literacy Link program which aims to promote literacy skills and foster healthy parent-child interactions among justice-involved families. This innovative community-engaged research study was made possible by several partners including three Sheriff's Offices in Wisconsin, as well as UW-Madison's Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work, School of Human Ecology, and Division of Extension (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Study partners including Wisconsin Sheriff's Offices, UW-Madison units, and study funders.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT
Prevention Board

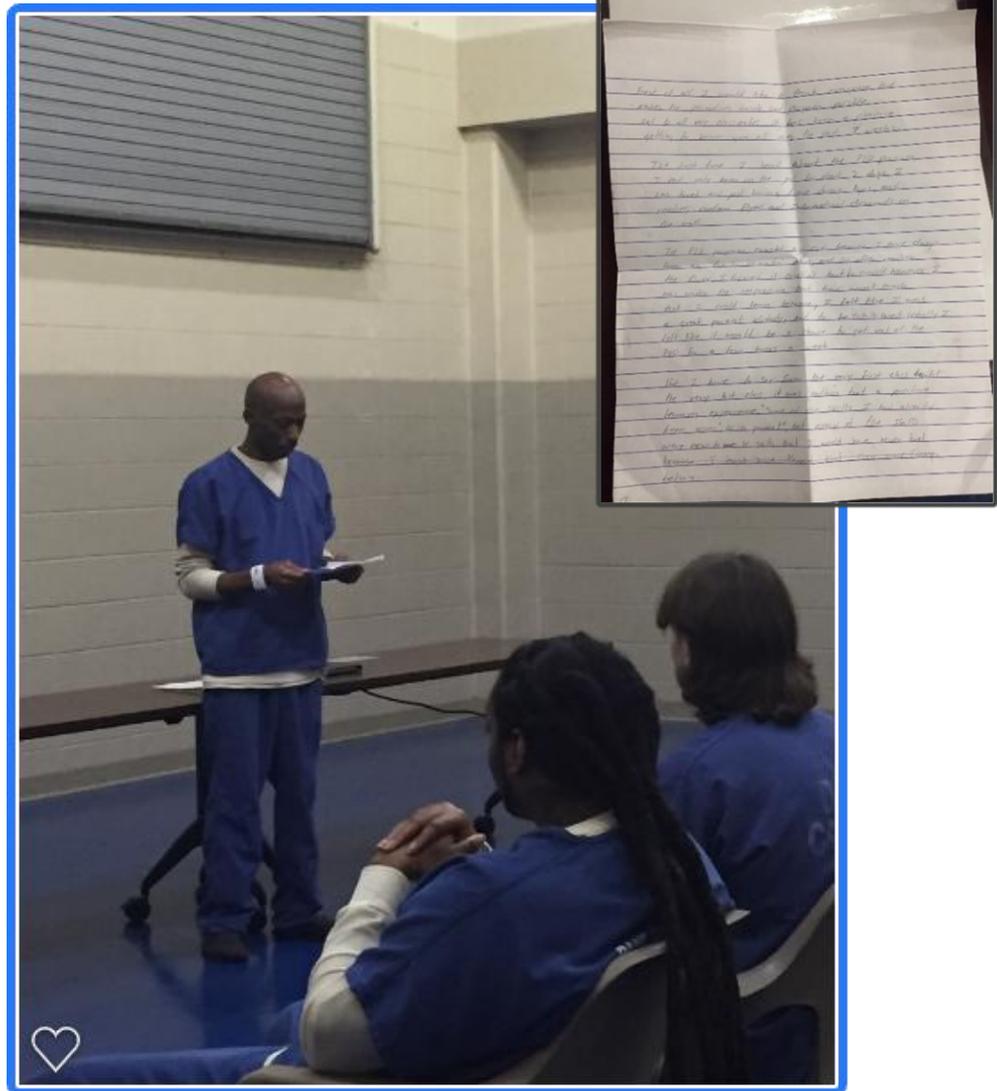
WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

THE LITERACY LINK

Full brief available:

[https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Documents
/Publications/MRM%20Final.pdf](https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Documents/Publications/MRM%20Final.pdf)

Response from Parents



Thank you

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