

## Coping with Incarceration

[www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/](http://www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/)

More than 5 million children, or one in 14, in the U.S. have had a parent in state or federal prison at some point in their lives, yet few resources exist to help the youngest of these children.<sup>1</sup> To meet this need, *Sesame Workshop* created multimedia, bilingual materials for young children (ages 3-8) of incarcerated parents, their families and caregivers, and service providers. *Sesame Street in Communities: Coping with Incarceration* is designed to:

- Support, comfort, and reduce anxiety, sadness, and confusion that **young children (ages 3-8)** may experience during the incarceration of a parent.
- Provide **at-home caregivers** with strategies, tips, and age-appropriate language they can use to help communicate with their children about incarceration.
- Inform **incarcerated parents** that they can parent from anywhere, and provide them with simple tips highlighting the importance of communication.



### Resources include:

- “Coping with Incarceration” topic area on Sesame Street in Communities including:
  - Videos featuring Alex, a 7-year-old muppet whose father is incarcerated. Additional videos include an animation from a child’s perspective on visiting prison, and short-documentary films featuring real children and families
  - *In My Family* storybook
  - Short articles including *Ask Me Anything*, *Little Children, Big Feelings*, and *Staying Connected*
  - Printables including a tip sheet for incarcerated parents
- *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration* App, available in the App Store, Google Play, and Amazon
- A training video introducing providers to resilience-building strategies for kids and families who are facing the feelings and changes brought on by a parent’s incarceration
- *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration* printed kit including *In My Family*, a Guide for Parents & Caregivers, and a DVD.

### Distribution and Implementation:

Sesame Workshop worked closely with advisors and partners to integrate *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration* resources into correctional facilities and organizations that specialize in early childhood education, mental health and counseling, parenting programs, and foster care. In several key pilot states, there was also a deeper implementation of these resources. To date over 500,000 copies of the kits have been distributed free of charge to partner organizations.

### Impact Study:

An impact study on the effectiveness of the *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration* toolkit was completed in 2014. As a result of using the toolkit, caregivers:

- Had more appropriate language and were better able to answer their child’s questions about incarceration.
- Initiated activities recommended to foster communication at home and with the incarcerated parent, like letter writing.
- Reported an increase in the child’s expression of feelings and improvements in behavior.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/05/24/having-a-parent-behind-bars-costs-children-states>