


DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR CORRECTIONS STAFF

Video: Creating Conditions that Promote Safety, Healing, and Growth in Child-Parent Visits

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Using guiding principles to inform daily practice can help to ensure a trauma-informed approach is used during child-parent visits. These principles should reflect an understanding of the effects of stress and trauma and what is needed to support healing and foster resilience for everyone at the facility.

These principles include:

- Trauma Awareness & Understanding
- Safety
- Youth and Family Voice, Choice, & Empowerment
- Cultural Humility & Responsiveness
- Trustworthiness & Transparency
- Collaboration & Power Sharing
- Peer Support
- Recovery, Resilience, & Growth

To find out more about a trauma-informed approach and the supporting principles, visit [SAMHSA.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov).

WHO CAN USE THIS GUIDE?

This discussion guide is designed for corrections staff and volunteers who interact with children and young people during child-parent visits. The video and discussion guide can be used to supplement professional development trainings or as part of organizational capacity-building. Expanding skills and awareness around trauma-informed approaches during child-parent visits creates conditions that promote safety, healing, and growth and can prevent further re-traumatization.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was developed to accompany the video, *Creating Conditions that Promote Safety, Healing, and Growth in Child-Parent Visits*, to increase the knowledge and understanding of how integrating key concepts like safety, collaboration, and transparency into policies, procedures, and practices can benefit child-parent visits. To extend this learning opportunity, we have developed a list of questions to foster conversations to increase understanding and skill-building. This discussion guide and video extend learnings from previous work on supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents.

Content for the video was informed through close collaboration with the Virginia Department of Corrections and conversations with the Oregon Department of Corrections and The Council of State Governments Justice Center.

This guide was created by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for youth.gov. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Funding info: Contract number: HHSP2332015000321

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With awareness and understanding of trauma and its impact, corrections facilities can work to integrate visitation practices that foster safety and connection for children visiting their parents and, when possible, create an environment where healing and resilience-building is supported. Consider how you might implement learnings and reflect on the core guiding principles of a trauma-informed approach to explore further to foster resilience for everyone at a facility.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Recognize the role of trauma-informed practices and strategies to help corrections staff better serve the needs of children with incarcerated parents.
- Find guidance for facilities to incorporate trauma-informed practices to help parents, caregivers, and children throughout visits.
- Identify appropriate practices and strategies to incorporate these trauma-informed policies and practices in the preparation, implementation, and follow-up for a visit.
- Explore changes that staff can make to advocate for and support the implementation of trauma-informed practices at their own facilities.

BEFORE THE VISIT


- Consider ways to make the areas visitors will be in more **welcoming and friendly** for children. This can include adding decorations or making physical changes to the facility, as well as providing child-friendly activities or books in the waiting area, child-sized seating, and child-friendly posters, information, and signs where young people will be.
- Prepare staff with **script ideas and discussions** about ways they can set a welcoming tone for children and caregivers, focusing on relationship-building, not dictating behavior. Staff should also be ready for a range of emotions from parents, children, and caregivers, and think about the support they can offer.
- Staff can also help parents prepare logistically by **co-planning a list of topics** to cover with caregivers and children in advance of the visit. For example, depending on the age of the child, they may be confused about certain rules, like no hugs, or why a guard is present.

DURING THE VISIT

- Emotions can run high during a visit, and difficult topics can often come up. As much as possible, give family members the **privacy** they need to connect and talk about their emotions and hard topics.
- If permissible, allow for as much **contact** as possible between child and parent, as this can be a way to ease the stress of the visit and is an important way for children — especially younger ones — to feel connected with their parents.
- If a child breaks a rule, allow the **parent or caregiver** to correct the behavior first. If staff need to step in, use a calm voice, age-appropriate language, and friendly demeanor to help the child understand the rule.

AFTER THE VISIT

- If visitors are required to undergo any security procedures upon leaving, make sure to **explain** these to the child in a calm, easy to understand manner. Remind them of the process they went through to enter and explain how these parts are connected. This can help younger children internalize the process for their next visit.
- Make sure caregivers have any **information or materials** they need for the next visit, such as a calendar, information about schedule changes, or any other policies. If there were support staff working with the family during the visit, provide the information they need to access any **follow-up** services, programming, or other topics that were discussed.
- If you know the child and caregiver will return for another visit, it can be helpful to let the child know you and their parent are **looking forward to their next visit** or let the child know how much you appreciated their visit.



The questions in this discussion guide can be reviewed and discussed as a large group, or staff can be organized into smaller groups. In smaller groups, each one could take a different question to discuss then share their conversation with the larger group to promote peer-to-peer learning.

PLANNING TIPS

- Decide **who will facilitate** the conversation using these discussion questions.
- Determine which staff members **will be part of this conversation**. Ideally, your facility will share this information with all staff, but your discussion sessions may look different depending on who is present. Do you want corrections staff and support staff to view together? Management and staff? Volunteers or other outside supports? Deciding who will be present can help facilitators plan best practices and the most useful topics of focus.
- Ideally, the chosen facilitator should **review** the discussion prompts and video ahead of time and consider which pieces they might **highlight** to meet setting and audience needs.
- Plan for participants to **watch** the whole video session (approx. 20 minutes).
- Allow about 30 minutes for participants to review this guide and **discuss** the prompts below. If the group is larger than 10 people, consider breaking into smaller groups.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. *Identify two or more facts about children with incarcerated parents you learned through viewing this video. Did any of them surprise you? Were any particularly meaningful to you? Did any change your outlook about your role as a corrections staff member?*
2. *Considering the examples given in the video and above, where do you see your child-parent visit practices already aligned with a trauma-informed approach? Which would you like to see your facility focus on in the future?*
3. *Reflecting on the tips provided in this guide and the examples given in the video, what are ways you already help families manage feelings and feel safe during child-parent visits? What are some new ideas you can try?*
4. *What are some challenges for parents and staff before, during, and after a visit? How can the facility support collaboration to address these challenges?*
5. *What larger policies or procedures might need to be modified, changed, or added to support a trauma-informed approach to child-parent visits?*

ACTIVITY

Break into three groups – representing before, during, and after a visit – and discuss how you might support these stages of a visit at your facility.

Consider where you may already be integrating trauma-informed practices and where there are opportunities to build in more, including changes you would like to see implemented at your facility.

Come back together and discuss each group's suggestions for future practices.



RESOURCES

- **Strengthening and Maintaining Family Connections: Best Practices for Child-Friendly Video Visiting:**
 - **Publication:** csgjusticecenter.org/publications/strengthening-and-maintaining-family-connections-best-practices-for-child-friendly-video-visiting/
 - **Webinar:** nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/events/strengthening-and-maintaining-family-connections-best-practices-child-friendly-video
- **Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections:** nicic.gov/resources/nic-library/all-library-items/model-practices-parents-prisons-and-jails-reducing-barriers
- **Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails:** urban.org/research/publication/parent-child-visiting-practices-prisons-and-jails