

**Children of Incarcerated Parents (COIP) Products  
International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Webinar  
Highlights of Model Arrest Policy Implementation  
Question and Answer Session**

On May 15, 2019, the Federal Interagency Working Group for Youth Programs (IWGYP) at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), held a webinar entitled, ***Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents: Implementing the Model Arrest Policy***. The purpose of the webinar was threefold:

1. To highlight how a locality has instituted the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) model arrest policy through collaborations (e.g., between non-profit organizations and government agencies) to protect children of arrested parents.
2. To share the experiences of a youth who has witnessed the arrest of her parent.
3. To highlight research on the effect a parent's arrest has on children, especially those who have witnessed the arrest.

The webinar has been archived and can be located at:

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents/presentations>

The team of presenters included a youth who witnessed her parent's arrest and endured his absence due to incarceration; a developmental psychologist and researcher who shared the data and science as related to the effect on youth of witnessing a parent's arrest; a former police chief, and an anti-violence coordinator (social worker) who were instrumental in implementing the IACP's model arrest policy in Albany, New York.

***Presenters:***

- Savannah, 11, Youth who witnessed father's arrest
- Dr. Rebecca Shlaffer, Developmental Child Psychologist and Researcher, University of Minnesota
- Mr. Brendan Cox, Former Police Chief, Albany, New York Police Department
- Ms. Katie Clark, Anti-Violence Coordinator, Albany, New York Police Department

This document, a companion piece to the archived webinar, represents the rich 20-minute question and answer session that followed the presenters' sharing of planned content during the formal webinar. The questions and responses have been organized by presenter.

Researcher:

**WHAT IS AN INCARCERATION EXPERIENCE?**

An incarceration experience for a youth is the whole context including witnessing a parent's criminal activity, witnessing a parent's arrest, or witnessing or participating in the court process or the parent's sentencing, verbal altercations that happen before and during arrest, as well as violence and exposure to weapons, witnessing substance abuse, drugs and alcohol, and the environment in and of itself often being chaotic, loud, and unpredictable. These exposures are thought to be particularly stressful or traumatic experiences for children whose parents will later go on to be incarcerated.

**HOW MANY CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE AN INCARCERATED PARENT?**

"You may see a number of different estimates of the number of youth with an incarcerated parent pop up in different places depending on the methods that were used to collect those estimates. Sometimes we see variation both in terms of whether kids are asked, retrospectively, have you ever had a parent go to jail or prison? And other times, we see data that are collected as a point-in-time estimate, meaning parents are asked as they are currently incarcerated, do you have children? So, we see depending on who is asked and when they're asked explains the variation in these data."

"Recent data from the National Survey of Children's Health estimates that approximately 5 million children have experienced the incarceration of a parent that they lived with."

**WHAT EFFECT DOES AN INCARCERATION EXPERIENCE HAVE ON A YOUTH AND WHAT DEVELOPMENTAL SIGNS SHOULD CAREGIVERS LOOK FOR THAT MAY FLAG AN AREA OF CONCERN?**

"Children's age and their developmental capacity" influence the impact of experiencing a traumatic event and are important when thinking about opportunities for intervention. In considering stages of child development, we think in terms of emotional development, cognitive and language development, social development and physical development.

Parents and teachers should be looking out for things that are really out of the ordinary. This doesn't look like this child's typical behavior. For example, behaviors related to sleeping, toileting, refusing to do schoolwork, changes in peer relationships and interactions with adults, all could be red flags that the youth may need help, assistance, or an intervention.

**WHAT ARE SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE ARREST OF THEIR PARENT?**

"Thinking about approaching schools and teachers and having that be one source of support for kids who've experienced their parent's arrest is really important because many of these youth are spending substantial portions of their days at school. And [the effect] of arrest could bleed over or impact their functioning and their experiences at school."

## Youth:

### **WHAT DID SAVANNAH SAY ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE WITNESSING HER FATHER'S ARREST?**

"[It would have helped] if they [police] would have let me out of the house when my mom was trying to get me out [prior to my father's arrest] ...My mom was explaining to me what was going on... I really wish the police would have been nicer to me or not held me back from hugging my dad [before the police removed him from the house] ... Hugging my dad would have helped."\*

\*At the time of Savannah's experience, the police force was not implementing the IACP Model Arrest Policy.

### **WHAT WAS THE EFFECT ON SAVANNAH OF HER PARENT'S ARREST?**

"I felt this impact for probably the whole time [he was incarcerated]. It was hard dealing with it too. I remember I would be in school thinking about it, but when I was home it would just pop into my head and make me upset. I hated seeing how rude the police were to my dad."

### **WHAT HELPED SAVANNAH COPE WITH THE EXPERIENCE?**

[After the arrest] I would talk to my therapist about my feelings [about my father being arrested]. Having people there for me whenever I needed to, like my mentor. Talking to my dad every day so I knew he was okay.

Having a mentor really helped. Someone to talk to and go out with and do things in the community. Someone who really cares about you. My mother reached out to a local organization to find me a mentor.

Being involved with a local organization really helped, too. Doing arts and crafts is really cool. And having someone who has the same backstory as me. We do a girl's group and we pretty much talk about anything. Any troubles or even if you want to pull them aside and just have your one-on-one talks; they're always great.

## — *The Albany Story* —

### **HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IMPLEMENTING THE IACP MODEL ARREST POLICY (MAP)?**

## Former Police Chief:

[If you would like to have MAP implemented in your community] a first step would be to identify a champion of the policy or someone in the [police] department with whom you have a good relationship. This person may be a beat officer or a community officer or even the chief of police. If you do not know anyone in the police department, call the main number. Simply tell them about the program and ask whom you should speak with to discuss whether it is something the department can adopt.

When talking about the MAP, my elevator speech (i.e., 30-second pitch to sell them on the idea) was that police on the force need the tools to protect vulnerable people, especially children. The MAP model provides the necessary tools enabling police to do an even better job.

[For police departments implementing MAP] involving the community is important. You may want to hold a news conference to announce the new policy and what it entails including describing the partnership between the police department and the school system. Speaking about it openly so residents are made aware contributes to buy-in and acceptance.

Another critical component was officer involvement in the development of the training. Officers were involved in developing the policy for allowing us to implement MAP. They also participated in training videos and peer-to-peer training. This peer-to-peer involvement was important for trying to shift the culture of the department and get buy-in for the initiative. The training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; see sidebar) and trauma-informed policing had a positive impact on the acceptance of the MAP.

Exposure to multiple ACEs significantly increases the likelihood of long-term negative behavioral and physical health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Adding to the trauma, many of these children have witnessed their parent's arrest. Although it is not always the case, trauma often affects a child's physiological and emotional responses; ability to think, learn, and concentrate; impulse control; self-image; and relationships with others.

### Anti-Violence Coordinator/Social Worker:

In an effort to fully implement the policy, the police department partnered with the school system. This partnership included implementation of the Handle With Care program under which the school provided support to students who have experienced trauma of any kind (e.g., a parent's arrest, death, divorce, or disease in the family). The police department gives notifications to the school to let them know a child has experienced trauma. The notification simply gives the student's name and the three words, "Handle with Care;" no other information is shared. This information is only to be used if the child is not acting like themselves so an intervention can be considered. An intervention may be as simple as allowing the child to rest in the nurse's office or providing an opportunity for the child to talk with a trusted adult in the school building. In some cases, more extensive counselling or treatment may be needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Felitti, V. J., et al. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.