



# YOUTH LISTENING SESSION FOR EDUCATORS

Recommendations for Supporting Children with Incarcerated Parents

*“I would tell children, ‘You are not alone even though you feel like you are. You are amazing and never stop believing in yourself.’” -Ava L., Youth Panelist*



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## Recommendations for Supporting Children with Incarcerated Parents

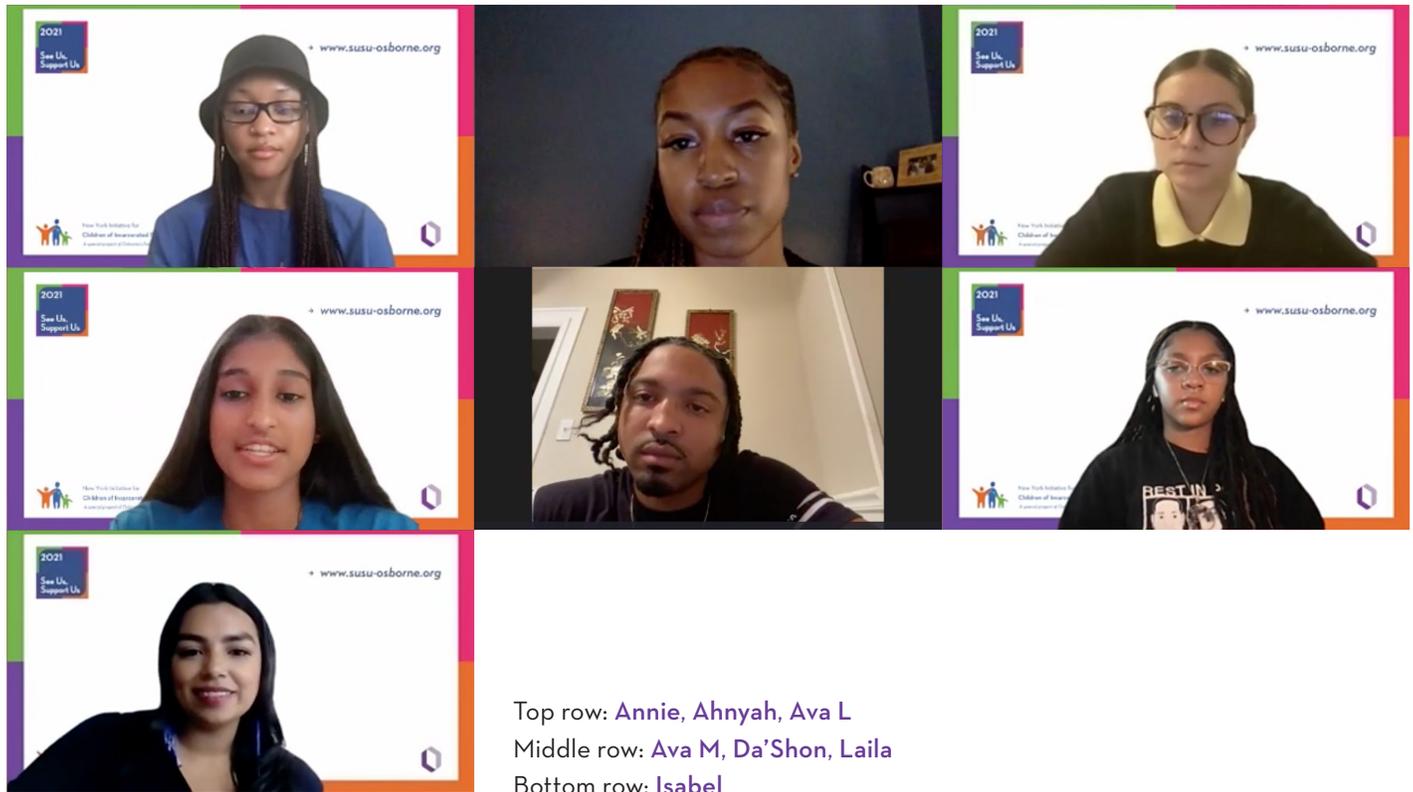
As part of the 7th annual [See Us, Support Us](#) (SUSU) month during October 2021, Osborne Association<sup>1</sup> convened a two-part virtual Youth Listening Session for Educators (YLS) where youth who experienced parental incarceration and educators shared strategies for supporting children with incarcerated parents' educational success and wellbeing in school and afterschool settings. This document summarizes the recommendations which are applicable in educational settings and beyond.

During the first session, youth ranging in ages from 14 to 23 years old shared their common, yet diverse, experiences and recommendations for how to SEE and SUPPORT children from the moment of a parent's arrest through reentry. The second session highlighted promising best practices, policies, and programs. Panelists included a young adult whose father was incarcerated, a formerly incarcerated mother, and educators, many of whom experienced parental incarceration as children.

Panelists who experienced parental incarceration shared that they overwhelmingly felt isolated, and judged, by most people in their life and called for more support and affirming spaces in and after school. All panelists emphasized that building individual relationships and creating community are key. Educators underscored the importance of self-reflection, acknowledging that one's personal experiences and trauma show up when working with young people; as Diane Wallace Booker of U.S. Dream Academy put it, "youth work is self work."

<sup>1</sup>See Us, Support Us (SUSU) raises awareness about and increases support for children of incarcerated parents. SUSU was launched in 2015 by the Osborne Association and is now a national initiative that culminates during SUSU month every October.

## 2021 Youth Listening Session Panelists



Top row: Annie, Ahnyah, Ava L  
Middle row: Ava M, Da'Shon, Laila  
Bottom row: Isabel

### Panel One

**Annie Clachar**, Project What! alumni

**Ahnyah Phillips**, ScholarCHIPS recipient and Clark Atlanta University graduate

**Ava Lantiere**, See Us, Support Us Youth Fellow

**Ava Martoma**, KidsMates Co-founder

**Da'Shon Allen**, Early Childhood Educator

**Laila Butcher**, Project What! and Project Avary alumni

#### **Moderator:**

**Isabel Coronado**, Next 100 Policy Entrepreneur

### Panel Two

**Assia Serrano**, Parent Advocate and parent

**C. Diane Wallace Booker**, Executive Director & Vice President at U.S. Dream Academy

**Mia Barksdale**, See Us, Support Us Youth Fellow and Osborne Youth Action Council alumni

**Shannon Ellis**, Director for Climate Implementation & Innovation at Philadelphia Unified School District

**Brandon Cardet-Hernandez**, Executive Director at Ivy Street School

#### **Moderator:**

**Olivia Elder**, Criminal Justice Reform Associate at Fwd.Us

# ASK, “HOW CAN I SUPPORT YOU?”

*“We all deserve to be asked what we want, how we want to be treated, and how much we want to talk about or share at any given moment.”*

-Brandon, School Administrator

## 1 Respect Youth and Families

- ▶ Let youth lead conversations which should be held outside the presence of others and don't ask why a parent is incarcerated.
- ▶ Ask about incarceration within the context of offering resources: “If incarceration affects your family, we have supportive resources.”
- ▶ Recognize that parental incarceration may not be a student's most pressing challenge.

*“Don't assume that you have to protect a child from a parent. Take what the child wants into consideration and recognize it is often necessary to have their parent in their life.”*

-Assia, Parent Advocate and mother

## 2 Provide Non-Judgmental Support

- ▶ Train all staff to ensure they have language to talk about incarceration without judgment.
- ▶ Examine implicit biases you may hold about incarcerated people and their families.
- ▶ Little gestures, flexibility, and understanding are helpful.

*“We must help people understand that those who are incarcerated are still people, should be valued, and in many cases they should be a part of their kids' lives.”*

-Diane, Educator

## 3 Offer Support After a Parent Has Returned to the Community

- ▶ Understand that reentry is stressful and it takes time to reestablish a relationship with a parent.
- ▶ Know that systemic barriers make it difficult for parents with a criminal record to succeed, limiting housing, employment options, and more.

*“With multiple re-entries it was different each time. You just don't know what to expect and it's hard to manage, especially at a young age.”*

-Da'Shon, Youth Panelist



# CREATE AFFIRMING SPACES

1

## Create a Supportive Environment

- ▶ Build trusting relationships with youth before a crisis occurs.
- ▶ Increase access to social workers and counselors.
- ▶ Assess possible trauma triggers, such as metal detectors, and understand that police and authority figures may trigger memories associated with a past trauma.
- ▶ Include supporting children with incarcerated parents in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and school climate initiatives.
- ▶ Make books about and for children of incarcerated parents available.
- ▶ Post the [Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights](#) to convey that you see and support children of incarcerated parents.

*"I didn't feel like school was a safe space because when I visited my father, I was seeing the same things-officers and metal detectors. It felt more like control rather than safety."*

-Da'Shon, Youth Panelist

2

## Learn How the Criminal Justice System Affects Communities

- ▶ Train staff and teach students how communities of color are disproportionately affected by over policing and incarceration.
- ▶ Understand that even if you are not directly affected by incarceration, over incarceration impacts all communities.
- ▶ Provide staff with [resources](#), including information about organizations that support people with criminal justice involvement.



## CREATE AFFIRMING SPACES

3

### Counter Stigma and Correct False Narratives

- ▶ Do not lower expectations or assume children are more likely to become incarcerated.
- ▶ Nurture compassion among peers and redirect away from talking negatively about a child's parent.
- ▶ Use [humanizing language](#) such as, "incarcerated people." Words such as inmate, criminal, or ex-offender are hurtful.

*"We don't want you to pity us, we want you to listen. Don't judge us because of our parents' mistakes and be mindful of how words affect our confidence"*

-Mia, Youth Panelist

4

### Expand the Definition of Family

- ▶ Broaden the definition of "parent" to include any supportive figure in a child's life.
- ▶ Acknowledge different family compositions and reflect this in curricula, celebrations, posters, etc.
- ▶ Offer a range of ways to acknowledge and celebrate birthdays, holidays, and milestones and understand these can be emotional times.

*"The definition of a family goes beyond biological bonds. It's really more about the emotional and the spiritual bonds that you share."*

-Ava M., Youth Panelist



# PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

1

## Include Students in Decisions That Affect Them

- ▶ Actively include and consult youth when creating policies, practices, and programs to support children of incarcerated parents.
- ▶ Create mechanisms to identify students' concerns and needs such as organizing community meetings and distributing anonymous surveys.

*"We regularly ask students how they're feeling about their relationships with the adults in their schools, with peers, and how they feel they are managing their own emotions."*

-Shannon, School Climate Administrator

2

## Build Community Among Children of Incarcerated Parents

- ▶ Create a support group for children of incarcerated parents and use a non-stigmatizing name like Project WHAT! or POPS the Club.
- ▶ Fund creative arts and leadership programs specifically for children affected by a parent's arrest and/or incarceration.
- ▶ Encourage everyone to visit the [See Us, Support Us](#) website to connect with resources, and view art, writing, and videos created by youth.
- ▶ With their permission, connect youth who have experienced parental incarceration with each other.

*"Foster a sense of community among people who are experiencing the same things and can relate personally. I used to hide in shame until I met youth like myself."*

-Mia, Youth Panelist



NYC SUSU Youth Listening Session, 2019

# PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

3

## Include Incarcerated Parents in Educational Planning

- ▶ Speak with the family about including the incarcerated parent in educational planning meetings and sharing progress reports.
- ▶ Know that relationships may be strained, and the family may not initially support including the incarcerated parent. Reassess over time.
- ▶ Understand that some parents have a right to be involved in their child’s educational planning even when the family does not want this.
- ▶ Contact the counseling/guidance department at the correctional facility and ask to set up a phone conference with the parent.
- ▶ Encourage children to include an incarcerated parent in relevant assignments (celebrate a parent’s achievements, highlight a parent’s job at the facility).
- ▶ Issue guidelines for including incarcerated parents in educational planning.

*“We need educators who are willing to have difficult conversations with custodial parents on why the engagement of an incarcerated parent is a sum total win.”*

**-Brandon, School Administrator**

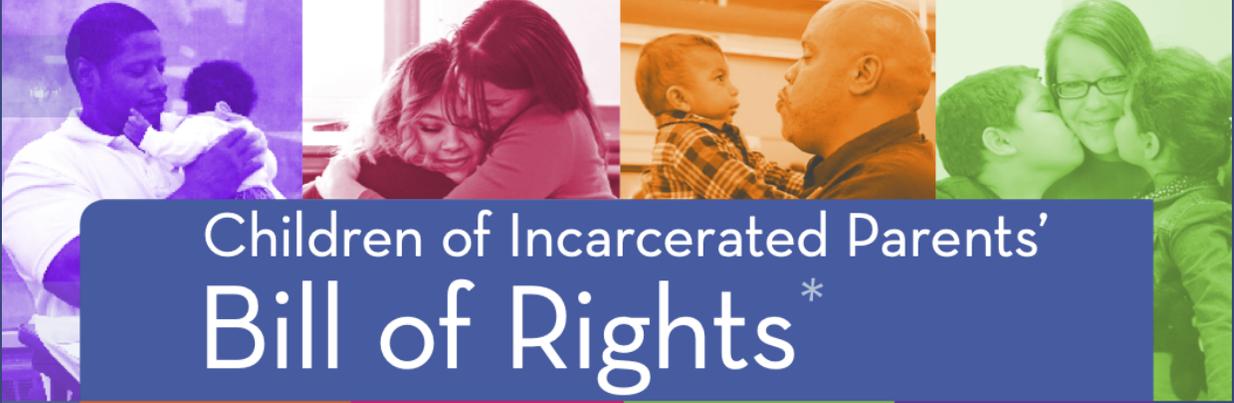
▶▶▶ Visit [www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org) to view the sessions and learn more about how to SEE and SUPPORT children of incarcerated parents.

Contact us at [nyinitiative@osborneny.org](mailto:nyinitiative@osborneny.org)

Join the network to SEE and SUPPORT children of incarcerated parents TODAY

▶▶▶ [www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org)

#SeeUsSupportUs



# Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights\*

- 1.** I have the right **to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.**
- 2.** I have the right **to be heard when decisions are made about me.**
- 3.** I have the right **to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.**
- 4.** I have the right **to be well cared for in my parent's absence.**
- 5.** I have the right **to speak with, see, and touch my parent.**
- 6.** I have the right **to support as I face my parent's incarceration.**
- 7.** I have the right **not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.**
- 8.** I have the right **to a lifelong relationship with my parent.**

\* Developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005: [www.sfcipp.org](http://www.sfcipp.org)



New York Initiative for  
Children of Incarcerated Parents  
*A special project of Osborne's Policy Center*

