

COACHING PACKET

Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry

One in a series of Coaching Packets designed
to assist jurisdictions in the implementation
of effective practices that will support
successful offender outcomes

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2010



Coaching Packet Series 1: Creating a Blueprint for an Effective Offender Reentry System

- A Framework for Offender Reentry
- Establishing a Rational Planning Process
- Engaging in Collaborative Partnerships to Support Reentry

Coaching Packet Series 2: Delivering Evidence-Based Services

- Implementing Evidence-Based Practices
- Effective Case Management
- Shaping Offender Behavior
- Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry
- Building Offenders' Community Assets through Mentoring
- Reentry Considerations for Women Offenders

Coaching Packet Series 3: Ensuring Meaningful Outcomes

- Measuring the Impact of Reentry Efforts
- Continuous Quality Improvement



This project was supported by grant number 2008-RE-CX-K001, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Introduction to the Coaching Packet Series

The Center for Effective Public Policy (the Center) and its partners, The Urban Institute and The Carey Group, were selected by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance to serve as the training and technical assistance providers to the Fiscal Year 2007 Prisoner Reentry Initiative grantees (hereafter “PRI grantees”). The project team served in this capacity from April 2008 to June 2010.

The Center is a nonprofit criminal justice consulting organization based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Since the early 1980s, the Center has provided training and technical assistance to the criminal justice field on a wide array of topics, including transition and reentry, and has administered a number of national projects of this kind. The Urban Institute was established as a private, nonprofit corporation in Washington, D.C. in 1968 and is a leader in prisoner reentry research, focusing on making best practice information accessible to practitioners and policymakers. The Carey Group is a justice consulting firm with extensive practitioner experience in evidence-based practices, strategic planning, community and restorative justice and corrections.

As a part of its technical assistance delivery to the PRI grantees, the Center developed a series of tools to assist grantees in specific areas of their reentry work. The final products of this work include eleven Coaching Packets in three series. These Coaching Packets offer practical value beyond the jurisdictions involved in this initiative and are available to criminal justice professionals and their partners interested in enhancing their strategies for reducing recidivism and improving offender outcomes.

Each Coaching Packet provides an overview of a specific topic as it relates to successful offender reentry, and offers tools and resources for those interested in exploring the topic in greater depth.

- *Series 1* provides a blueprint for an effective offender reentry system. This series provides a conceptual framework for addressing prisoner reentry at the policy level; outlines a strategic planning process to support implementation efforts; and explores the establishment of successful collaborative partnerships at the policy and case management levels.
- *Series 2* addresses key issues related to the delivery of evidence-based services to offenders. This series summarizes the key literature with regard to implementing evidence-based practices; explores advances in approaches to case management; addresses the important role of staff in changing offender behavior; and summarizes research and practice as it relates to working with women offenders, engaging families, and mentoring.
- *Series 3* provides guidance and tools to ensure that reentry efforts achieve their intended outcomes. This series describes methods to assess the effectiveness of reentry efforts and offers strategies for achieving continuous quality improvement.

FY 2007 Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) Grantees

The Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) – intended to support the development and implementation of institutional and community corrections-based reentry programs to help returning offenders find employment and provide other critical services – is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Grants were awarded to state and local corrections agencies by DOJ to provide pre-release and transition services to offenders and were “matched” by DOL grants to faith- and community-based organizations (FBCOs) to provide post-release services, focusing on employment assistance and mentoring.

Thirty-five states received grants in three cycles of the Initiative during Fiscal Years 2006, 2007, and 2008.¹ Of these, 23 FY 2007 PRI grantees received assistance under this project. FY 2007 grants were awarded in the fall of 2007 and implemented from 2008 to 2010; however, some grantees will not complete their activities until 2011. The FY 2007 grantees provided technical assistance under this project included:

- ✓ ALASKA, Native Justice Center
- ✓ ARIZONA, Criminal Justice Commission/ Yuma County Sheriff’s Office
- ✓ CALIFORNIA, Department of Community Services and Development
- ✓ COLORADO, Division of Criminal Justice Services/City of Denver
- ✓ DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, Government
- ✓ FLORIDA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ HAWAII, Department of Public Safety
- ✓ INDIANA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ IOWA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ KANSAS, Department of Corrections
- ✓ MAINE, Department of Corrections
- ✓ MICHIGAN, Department of Corrections
- ✓ MINNESOTA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ NEVADA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ NEW JERSEY, Department of Corrections
- ✓ NORTH CAROLINA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ OHIO, Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
- ✓ PENNSYLVANIA, Department of Corrections
- ✓ RHODE ISLAND, Department of Corrections
- ✓ TENNESSEE, Department of Corrections
- ✓ VIRGINIA, Department of Criminal Justice Services
- ✓ WISCONSIN, Department of Corrections
- ✓ WYOMING, Department of Corrections

¹ The PRI program will end when the FY 2008 grantees complete their activities.

Acknowledgments

Becki Ney, Principal, Center for Effective Public Policy, served as the PRI Training and Technical Assistance Program Project Director. Ms. Ney conceptualized and oversaw the development of the Coaching Packet series.

Madeline M. Carter, Principal, and Rachelle Giguere, Program Associate, Center for Effective Public Policy, served as the key editors for the Coaching Packet series. Ms. Giguere also provided extensive research support to the development of the series.

Introduction to the Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry Coaching Packet

The Contents of this Packet

This Coaching Packet provides:

- An introduction to a strength-based, family-focused approach to offender management;
- A review of key literature on the families of offenders, and their experiences and roles in the reentry process;
- Some brief examples drawn from agencies implementing strength-based, family-focused practices;
- A tool to determine your jurisdiction's strengths and gaps in implementing strength-based, family-focused practices;
- An aid to developing plans to address identified gap areas; and
- References to additional resources on this topic.

The Intended Audience for this Packet

This Coaching Packet was originally developed to assist grant teams that were established to manage local PRI initiatives. The teams were composed of representatives from institutional and community corrections and faith-based or community organizations involved in the delivery of pre- and post-release services to offenders transitioning from prison to the community. The content of these Coaching Packets has much broader application, however; the information and tools contained within this Coaching Packet can also be used by teams of criminal justice professionals and their partners to assess the status of their efforts in implementing evidence-based practices and effective reentry services to offenders.

This Coaching Packet may also serve as a resource for professionals at all levels who are interested in learning more about this topic.

How to Use this Packet

SECTION I: READ THE OVERVIEW ON ENGAGING OFFENDERS' FAMILIES IN REENTRY.

This section of the Coaching Packet provides an overview of using a strength-based, family-focused approach to offender management and transition. Review its content and, if the information it contains is applicable to your grant work and addresses an area in which you feel you need to focus your efforts, use the tool in Section II to assess your jurisdiction's strengths and gaps with regard to implementing a strength-based, family-focused approach.

SECTION II: COMPLETE THE ENGAGING OFFENDERS' FAMILIES IN REENTRY COACHING PACKET CHECKLIST.

As a team, complete the Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry Coaching Packet Checklist. (Based upon the information you read in Section I, consider who may need to be involved so

that you are able to answer the questions thoroughly.) Complete the checklist as a group and discuss your responses along the way.

- Rate each item listed in the checklist (yes, no, not clear).
- For items where your response is “not clear,” make note of the additional information the team needs to collect in order to be able to rate this item.
- Add additional items that may relate to your jurisdiction’s implementation of a strength-based, family-focused approach to offender management and transition that are not already included on the checklist.
- Develop a consensus-based response for each item on the checklist.
- Once the checklist is completed, consider your jurisdictions’ strengths in implementing such an approach. Make note of these.
- Next, consider your most significant gaps. Make note of these as well.

SECTION III: DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN.

If, after completing the checklist in Section II, your team determines that further work on this topic is necessary or would be helpful, follow the steps below to identify your goals, objectives, and action items, and identify any additional assistance or expertise needed.

Working as a team, review your findings from the Engaging Offenders’ Families in Reentry Coaching Packet Checklist. Specifically:

1. Determine whether, based upon what you have read and discussed, you desire to advance your jurisdiction’s work with regard to engaging offenders’ families in reentry.
2. If you determine you have a desire to improve in this area, write a goal statement that reflects where you want to be with regard to improving your current efforts. Your goal might be to “Establish or revise policies to support and encourage family visiting for offenders who are in institutional or residential facilities,” “Refine our current intake process to include an assessment of offenders’ family relationships,” “Develop a new training curriculum to ensure that parole officers are equipped to work closely with families as part of the supervision process,” or another goal. Using the Action Planning Worksheet in Section III, note your goal in the area of engaging families in reentry.
3. Identify your three most significant strengths in this area and discuss how you might build on those to overcome some of your gaps.
4. Identify your three most significant gaps. For each gap, write an objective. Your objectives might be, “To conduct a survey of incarcerated persons’ family members to determine ways to improve their experiences while visiting the facility,” or “To create an informational leaflet for families of incarcerated persons on the visitation process,” or something else. Note your three objectives on the Action Planning Worksheet.
5. Add the following on the Action Planning Worksheet for each objective:
 - a. The specific sequential steps that must be taken to meet the objective.
 - b. The individual who will assume lead responsibility for this action item.
 - c. The completion date for this action item.

6. Discuss whether additional assistance or outside expertise is needed to successfully achieve any of your action items. For instance, explore whether additional literature, guidance from another practitioner over the telephone, examples of work products from other jurisdictions, or on-site technical assistance would be helpful options.
 - a. For each action item, identify those for which assistance/expertise is needed.
 - b. Identify the type of assistance/expertise needed.
 - c. Prioritize each of these need areas. If assistance/expertise will be limited, for which action items is assistance most needed?
 - d. Begin exploring ways to secure the needed assistance/expertise.

How to Seek Additional Information

To download copies of the Coaching Packets, please visit the Center's website at <http://www.cepp.com/coaching.htm>. To obtain further information on the use or content of this or any of the Coaching Packets, or on the 2007 PRI Training and Technical Assistance Program, please contact:

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Section I: Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry

New research is emerging that demonstrates that strategies targeting stronger relationships between offenders and their families correlate with better offender outcomes. For this reason, corrections agencies and their partners are becoming increasingly interested in the role families can play in promoting successful reentry. This Coaching Packet addresses a key area in the formula for offender success: identifying and building upon offenders' pro-social supports from families and other social networks.

In the traditional sense, **family** is defined as “a blood or legal relative, someone with whom an offender parents a child, or a partner or guardian an offender lived with prior to incarceration, or with whom an offender plans to live with following release.”

(Adapted from: Visher, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004, p. 107)

The term **family** can also be defined broadly to include a more expansive set of pro-social supports. For the purposes of this Coaching Packet, family is defined as immediate and extended family members, as well as neighbors, pastors, and other people within an offender's social network.

The Effects of Incarceration on Families

Incarceration and involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems have become an all too common experience for an increasing number of families in the United States. Nationwide, more than 2.3 million people are in prison or jail² and about 5.1 million people are on probation or parole.³ Every year, over 735,000 people are released from U.S. prisons,⁴ and more than 12 million are released from jails.⁵

These numbers, however, do not capture the full impact of incarceration on families and neighborhoods. Families experience significant losses during a family member's incarceration, such as the loss of wage-earning household members, parenting partners, sources of emotional support, etc. These losses extend beyond the period of incarceration; for example, an ex-offender returning to a neighborhood from prison may be stigmatized due to their criminal justice involvement, and regarded as someone community members distrust or fear, impacting the offender's family standing in the community, leading to exclusion from neighborhood associations or economic activity. This type of stigma and ostracism can be imposed on a family by the neighborhood, and on an entire neighborhood or community by the larger society. As

² Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009.

³ Glaze & Bonczar, 2009.

⁴ Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009.

⁵ Beck, 2006.

the rate of incarceration increases in a community, businesses (i.e., potential employers) may choose to move somewhere else – as might families who feel that their neighborhood is no longer safe for their children.⁶ These have obvious impacts on the fabric of neighborhoods and communities.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

The impact on children of parental involvement in the criminal justice system is also of great concern. More than 1.7 million American children have at least one incarcerated parent,⁷ and it is estimated that more than 5 million children have a parent on probation or parole.⁸ Children of offenders often grow up in difficult environments (e.g., poverty, drug abuse, family violence); having a parent in prison is yet one more challenge to overcome.⁹ Mothers and fathers who are confined are greatly impaired and limited in their ability to effectively fill their roles as caregivers, providers, teachers, supporters, and role models.

Research on child development and the few studies that examine the effects of parental incarceration on children demonstrate that these children may suffer from trauma, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, and fear among other conditions.¹⁰ However, these conditions may manifest themselves in different ways depending on the child's age. While younger children might withdraw emotionally or exhibit hostility toward their caregivers, school-aged children and adolescents may have difficulties in school or problems with peer relationships, or may act out in other negative ways (e.g., sexual misconduct, truancy, or substance abuse).¹¹

DIFFICULTIES STAYING IN TOUCH WITH INCARCERATED FAMILY MEMBERS

Supportive family relationships may be strained by the challenges of staying in touch with offenders during incarceration.¹² For example, in some jurisdictions, family members must travel significant distances, perhaps during work or school hours, to visit incarcerated offenders. Oftentimes security requirements are confusing and burdensome to families, especially those with small children. Additionally, visits take place in crowded areas and in conditions not conducive to positive parent-child interactions (e.g., no privacy, no physical touch allowed). Personal searches, waiting times, restricted visiting hours, and other aspects of visitation may serve as barriers to ongoing connections between offenders and their families. Another significant barrier is the expense of phone calls; family members accepting collect calls must accept higher-than-market rates per minute, even when their incarcerated family member is dialing locally, rather than long distance.¹³ The impact of these challenges can be significant: studies have shown that 54% of mothers and 57% of fathers in state prisons were never visited by their children.¹⁴

⁶ Clear, Rose & Ryder, 2001.

⁷ Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; The Sentencing Project, 2009.

⁸ Mumola, 2006.

⁹ Hairston, 2007.

¹⁰ Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004; Hairston, 2007; Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003.

¹¹ Hairston, 2007; Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2003, pg. 3.

¹² Naser & Visher, 2006.

¹³ For example, until 2007 family members of New York State prisoners had to pay 630% above the average consumer for a collect call (Center for Constitutional Rights, 2007).

¹⁴ Mumola, 2000.

IMPACTS ON THE FAMILY DURING REENTRY

As difficult as the period of incarceration is on families, an offender's return home presents new challenges. Many families engaged in the transition process experience a sense of strain that results from the following conditions:

- ✓ Financial hardships from supporting an additional family member who may not be able to contribute to the household income.
- ✓ Relationship problems or interpersonal conflicts due to the offender's return to the household, such as dealing with the emotional concerns of a family member who may have been previously victimized by the offender, or strained relationships between the offender and children who may not understand why their parent was absent.
- ✓ Changes in the family dynamic upon the offender's return, such as new patterns of authority, or changes in the family composition since the offender went to prison.
- ✓ Feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration, disappointment, or resentment if the offender begins or returns to using drugs or alcohol, or to criminal behavior while living in the community.
- ✓ Taking on new responsibilities as a result of the offender's criminal justice status; for instance, family members may be expected to talk with parole officers, assist in monitoring whether the offender is following parole conditions, or install a home phone line for an electronic monitoring device.¹⁵

"In making the transition back into the community, former inmates turn to their spouses, parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members for assistance. These family members become the 'front line' of reentry, providing former inmates with critical material and emotional support including shelter, food, clothing, leads for jobs, and guidance in staying sober or avoiding criminal behavior."

Source: *Hawaii House of Representative Bill 1 (2007)*.

Families as a Natural Resource for Enhancing Reentry Efforts

Families of offenders can serve as critical partners to corrections and supervision agencies in a number of ways. Family members have an intimate knowledge and understanding of each other, and are frequently available to provide support or intervention at any hour, day or night. Family support does not cost money to access, unlike most programs and services. Also, family members usually share regional, ethnic, and family culture, which is not necessarily true of the agency or organizational staff that provide services or supervision.

INITIAL REENTRY OUTCOMES

The literature demonstrates that families and social networks provide significant support to incarcerated and reentering offenders. Studies indicate the following:

¹⁵ Adapted from Naser & Visher, 2006.

- ✓ Families are the major provider of housing for offenders upon release, which is the most critical and immediate concern of offenders leaving prison.¹⁶
- ✓ Aside from employment, families are the most common source of financial support for offenders after release.¹⁷
- ✓ Many offenders use family members, relatives, or friends in order to secure a job following release.¹⁸
- ✓ Offenders rely heavily on family members for their transportation needs once they are living in the community.¹⁹
- ✓ In the vast majority of cases, family members – such as the non-incarcerated parent, grandparents, or other relatives – take over responsibilities for child rearing in the absence of the incarcerated parent.²⁰
- ✓ Family members provide emotional support to offenders during a stressful transition in their lives.²¹
- ✓ Surveys of offenders in prison and in the community cite family support as important to keeping them from recidivating.²²

Adopting a “family-focused” approach is about changing policy and practice in ways that acknowledge that family members are key variables in the success or failure of offenders transitioning to the community from prison. To minimize the role offenders’ families play in reentry is a missed opportunity for increased public safety.

Research on Families and Family Support in Reentry Efforts

While the research examining the impact of family relationships on reentry outcomes is still in its infancy, studies indicate that families are indeed important to offenders successfully achieving their goals, including reduced recidivism.

INTERMEDIATE REENTRY OUTCOMES

Research demonstrates that family support can positively impact intermediate reentry outcomes, such as avoiding drug and alcohol abuse or finding employment.

¹⁶ La Vigne, Visher, and Castro (2004) found that on the first night in the community after leaving prison, 62% of offenders stay at a relative’s home. Other research studies similarly report that families often provide offenders with housing at some point following their release from prison: Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999; Sullivan et al., 2002; Naser & Visher, 2006.

¹⁷ Visher, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004.

¹⁸ More than 60% of respondents indicated that they talked to family members, relatives, and friends to find employment after release from prison (La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004).

¹⁹ Naser & Visher, 2006.

²⁰ 94% of children of incarcerated parents live with the other parent, a grandparent, or other relative; less than 3% live with a friend of the family, and 3% are cared for by foster parents or a government agency during their parent’s incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

²¹ Naser & Visher, 2006.

²² 58% of incarcerated respondents reported that family support was important in helping them avoid returning to prison, while 71% of respondents in the community noted family support as critical to recidivism (La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004).

- ✓ Substance-addicted offenders and ex-offenders have better outcomes when their families are involved in helping them overcome their addiction; however, these families need to be provided with a range of support services to increase their capacity to address the needs of their addicted family member. After 6 months, a significantly greater percentage of adult participants in a program using these techniques stopped using drugs (36%), as compared to non-participants (5%).²³
- ✓ In a survey of 400 males released from prison to communities in Chicago, Illinois, ex-offenders involved with an intimate partner (i.e., spouse or girlfriend) exhibited better post-incarceration employment outcomes: they were employed for more weeks on average than prisoners without a partner.²⁴
- ✓ The simple perception of support can be a powerful motivator. The literature shows that offenders who *perceive* that they have close family relationships or family support – that their family will assist them with housing or financial support, or that their family accepts them – exhibit better employment and substance abuse outcomes.²⁵

LONG-TERM REENTRY OUTCOMES

In addition to correlating with successful intermediate reentry outcomes, family relationships also play a role in keeping offenders from returning to crime. Research indicates that family support can positively influence young people under juvenile justice supervision as well as adults reentering their communities from prison.

- ✓ Perhaps the most consistent finding in the literature is that the more contact adult offenders have with their families while they are incarcerated (i.e., visitation, phone calls), the less likely they are to recidivate.²⁶
- ✓ A study of a multiple-family group-intervention (MFGI) program for first-time juvenile offenders found that juveniles who completed the program were 9.3 times less likely to reoffend as compared to juveniles placed on traditional probation.²⁷
- ✓ In a sample of returning prisoners to Chicago, positive family support (i.e., whether prisoners felt loved by, close to, and supported by family members) was associated with lower reconviction rates, while respondents who reported having negative family relationships were more likely to be reconvicted.²⁸

²³ Services included family case management, crisis intervention, employment search assistance, and support groups among others (Sullivan et al., 2002).

²⁴ La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004.

²⁵ See La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999; Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne & Travis, 2004.

²⁶ For reviews of this research, see Hairston, 2002; Naser & Visher, 2006.

²⁷ MFGI includes working with multiple families in a group context on dimensions such as communication, parental monitoring, and family cohesion in order for families to share and address their problems (Quinn & Van Dyke, 2004).

²⁸ Negative family relationships were defined as an ex-offender having a family member who had threatened or abused them prior to their incarceration (La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

While these studies provide evidence that families and pro-social supports matter to offenders' successful transition, the full picture of exactly *how* families facilitate the reentry process is not yet known. The current research is limited in a number of ways. First, the studies conducted to date do not isolate the effects of families from other interventions provided to offenders. Since offenders often receive multiple transition services (e.g., case management, employment/vocational services, etc.) simultaneously, the precise role families and pro-social supports play in recidivism reduction and other reentry outcomes remains somewhat unclear. Secondly, much of the existing research draws on self-reported data (i.e., collected from surveys and/or interviews with offenders and family members) and therefore may not include fully accurate measures of experiences and behaviors.²⁹ Finally, most research on offender recidivism focuses on how ties with the family *during incarceration* affect future recidivism, while little is known about the experiences of offenders and their families during and following the transition to the community.³⁰ Additional research is needed to determine what specific aspects of family involvement during the reentry phase – particularly once offenders return home – produce better recidivism outcomes.

Engaging Families as Part of an Evidence-Based Approach to Offender Reentry

In 2004, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), the Crime and Justice Institute, and others identified eight principles of evidence-based practice. Principle 6 explicitly addresses the engagement of families (as pro-social supports in offenders' "natural communities"). This principle supports the notion that positive outcomes – like reductions in violations and new crime behavior – are more likely to be achieved when offenders' significant others are engaged and when offenders have meaningful connections to the pro-social community. *Therefore, corrections professionals who develop skills in brokering the support of families are best equipped to support offenders' long-term behavioral change.*

²⁹ That is, the data collected from self-report surveys may provide new or contradictory information to official data (e.g., a respondent can self-report committing a crime he or she was not arrested for) and it is possible that respondents (intentionally or unintentionally) over or underreport the amount of crime and substance abuse in which they were engaged (for more information, see La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004, p. 2).

³⁰ See Naser & Visher, 2006.

The Eight Principles of Evidence-Based Practice

1. Assess actuarial risk/needs.
2. Enhance intrinsic motivation.
3. Target Interventions.
 - a. *Risk Principle*: Prioritize supervision and treatment resources for higher risk offenders.
 - b. *Need Principle*: Target interventions to criminogenic needs.
 - c. *Responsivity Principle*: Be responsive to temperament, learning style, motivation, culture, and gender when assigning offenders to programs.
 - d. *Dosage*: Structure 40-70% of high-risk offenders' time for 3-9 months.
 - e. *Treatment*: Integrate treatment into sentence/sanction requirements.
4. Skill train with directed practice (use cognitive behavioral treatment methods).
5. Increase positive reinforcement.
6. **Engage ongoing support in natural communities.**
7. Measure relevant processes/practices.
8. Provide measurement feedback.

Source: Bogue et al., 2004.

The 6th Principle of Evidence-Based Practice: Engage Ongoing Support in Natural Communities

Pro-social, community-based networks (including family members) provide opportunities for offenders to strengthen their own pro-social skills by engaging with others who possess the attitudes and behaviors—and participate in the activities—that offenders will hopefully emulate.

Furthermore, family members and significant others (including employers, teachers, mentors, spiritual leaders, etc.) can best support offenders when they are aware of the work offenders are undertaking and the skills they are developing, and can support offenders as they practice these new skills in their natural environments.

Source: Implementing Evidence-Based Practices Coaching Packet

Implementing a Strength-Based, Family-Focused Approach

As part of a strategy to engage family members in an overall evidence-based approach to reentry, a number of specific strength-based, family-focused policies and practices can be integrated into the offender management process by corrections and community supervision agencies and their partners.

INCARCERATION PHASE

Offender and Family Assessment

When offenders enter an institution, the assessment process should not only provide an opportunity for the agency to collect information on offenders' risk and criminogenic needs, but more comprehensive information about their families as well:

- ✓ Include assessment domains about family, pro-social supports, and offender strengths to develop an understanding of offenders' family lives (i.e., extent of likely parental support, identification of pro-social companions, etc.).
- ✓ Engage offenders through open-ended questioning techniques to gather more detailed information about their family life.

Offender Case Planning and Management

Once an assessment is complete, it is critical that information about offenders' families support feeds into the development of case plans:

- ✓ Ensure that offenders' risk level guides the level and type of supervision and programming, as well as the extent of efforts to engage pro-social family members (i.e., target efforts at engaging families for those offenders identified as medium to high risk so that valuable time and resources are used where they have the greatest impact on recidivism).
- ✓ Consider information about offenders' family strengths in the development of a case plan and determine how family support/strengths can address offenders' criminogenic needs (e.g., anti-social associations, family conflict, anti-social values).

The Family Justice Program at Vera Institute of Justice teaches facility and community supervision staff to use its **Relational Inquiry Tool**, which can serve as a supplement to standard risk and needs assessment tools used with people who are involved in the criminal justice system.

Developed and piloted in Oklahoma, as well as three other state corrections departments, the Relational Inquiry Tool consists of carefully-crafted questions designed to gather information for case management purposes and build rapport between staff and individuals involved in the criminal justice system. The tool helps to identify the strengths in offenders' social networks and family relationships, particularly as they prepare to return home from prison or jail.

*For more information on this tool and how to use it, please visit:
<http://www.vera.org/centers/family-justice-program>.*

Throughout their incarceration, facility staff can support increased family ties:

- ✓ Reinforce offenders' positive relationships with family members and other pro-social supports.
- ✓ Encourage offenders to call and/or write to family members and other members of their social network.
- ✓ Utilize letter-writing to family members as an exercise in literacy or other in-prison programming.

- ✓ Provide offenders with means to call their family members at rates that do not put an unnecessary financial burden on their families.

For offenders who are parents, case management staff might:

- ✓ Discuss with inmates their concerns regarding their children while they are incarcerated (e.g., how they might best deal with the separation from their children, how to make decisions regarding children's care and placement, how to maintain contact with them during incarceration).
- ✓ Provide offenders with legal services regarding child custody and/or the termination of parental rights proceedings (if applicable).³¹
- ✓ Inform inmates whose children are in foster care of the child welfare system's requirements (i.e., what must the parent do to cooperate with the system) and coordinate services for them (e.g., set up meetings between the incarcerated parent and child welfare professionals, arrange visits from their children).³²

The **genogram** and the **ecomap** are tools that can also be helpful in the assessment and case planning processes.

- A **genogram** is a tool that goes beyond the typical family tree, recording strengths and challenges such as education, employment, criminal justice involvement, substance abuse, mental health issues, and chronic illness. It can be used to facilitate engagement with the offender and to record the history and current status of a given family.
- An **ecomap** illustrates the relationships between family members and the key people and institutions in their lives, which may include schools, houses of worship, employers, child welfare, etc. It depicts the nature of the relationships and can be particularly helpful as case managers are identifying sources of support for reentering offenders.

*For more information about these tools and how to use them, please visit:
<http://www.vera.org/centers/family-justice-program>.*

Family Visitation in Prison

Allowing family visitation in prison is critical to maintaining family ties while offenders are incarcerated. Correctional facilities staff might assist offenders in maintaining contact with their families in the following ways:

Develop agency policy that recognizes and supports a family-focused approach:

- ✓ Build visitation into the incarcerated individual's regular routine.
- ✓ Refrain from using contact with families as leverage or consequences for misconduct.

³¹ In some states parental rights can be terminated if the parent is incarcerated or fails to keep in regular contact with their children (see Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003).

³² See Hairston & Hess, no date.

- ✓ Employ staff in the reception and visitation areas based on their skills in interacting with families.
- ✓ Offer visitation hours outside of regular working hours to facilitate family schedules.
- ✓ Allow and encourage inmates who are parents to visit with their children as frequently as possible (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly visits).³³
- ✓ Create a visiting environment that is welcoming to children and families (e.g., provide games and activities for children of different ages, allow inmates to have physical contact with children, when appropriate).³⁴

Keep family members informed of policies and events:

- ✓ Send information to families with the most up-to-date visitation policies and procedures.
- ✓ Maintain a staffed hotline or call center for families who have questions about the visitation process or family events.
- ✓ Assign case managers to be present to meet families during visitation and answer their questions.

Provide incentives for families to stay engaged in offenders' lives:

- ✓ Host formal and informal events to encourage families to visit the facility (e.g., graduations, holiday parties).
- ✓ Provide or help to assure that transportation is available for families.
- ✓ Offer the use of video-conferencing for long-distance visitation and parent-teacher conferences.

**Exhibit 1:
Challenges to Staying in Contact with Inmates**

The following are reported by family members as challenges they faced in staying in contact with a family member who was serving time in prison (N=247):

Facility was too far away	75%
Cost of making or receiving phone calls	52%
Cost of visiting	38%
Prison environment is unpleasant	36%
No transportation	34%
Could not miss work	32%
Visitation schedule	26%

Source: Naser & Visher, 2006.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

TRANSITION PHASE

As part of a sound case management process, prison and community supervision staff and their partners should share important information about offenders before they are released into the community. To assist with the transition process while offenders are still incarcerated:

- ✓ Develop partnerships to ensure that strategies for continuity-of-care are in place before offenders are released (e.g., ensure that all necessary partners receive timely and pertinent information about offenders and their families).
- ✓ Notify family members of the expected release date to allow them sufficient time to prepare.
- ✓ Meet with incarcerated individuals pre-release to conduct additional assessments that capture current family strengths and social supports.
- ✓ Begin release planning early in this phase, incorporating offenders' families into the planning process by inviting them to participate in case conferences or in creating offenders' parole release or transition plans.
- ✓ Offer classes or resources for the families of offenders (including the non-incarcerated caregiver to any children) to help prepare them for the changes that will occur when the offender returns to the community.
- ✓ Prepare offenders who are parents for reunifying with their children and taking over parental responsibilities once again (e.g., provide parenting classes to inmates prior to release, offer information on how to deal with court ordered child support payments when they return to the community).

Exhibit 2: Reported Needs of Families of Offenders

When surveyed about what services could help the family once an offender returns home from prison, family members report that simply providing more services to the offenders themselves is the best way to support the family.

Finding employment or job training	43%
Financial assistance	16%
Counseling for the offender and the family	11%
Finding appropriate housing	10%
Treatment for drugs or alcohol	9%
Healthcare services	9%

Source: Naser & Visher, 2006.

COMMUNITY PHASE

Once offenders are released to community supervision, staff can:

- ✓ Ensure that offenders' risk level guides the level and type of supervision and programming in the community, as well as the level of effort to engage pro-social family members (i.e., target efforts at engaging families for medium to high risk offenders).
- ✓ Review offender case plans and assessment domains about current family strengths and social supports (or conduct a reassessment if not current) to determine how family support/strengths might assist in addressing offenders' criminogenic needs (e.g., anti-social associations, family conflict, anti-social values).
- ✓ Use open-ended interviewing techniques with offenders and their families to gather more detailed information about their current family life.
- ✓ Identify sources of support (e.g., using mapping tools such as genograms and ecomaps) to strengthen offenders' case plans.
- ✓ Conduct orientation sessions for offenders and their families emphasizing the importance of family support to successful reentry, answer questions, and address any concerns (e.g., explain what it means for their family member to be under community supervision).
- ✓ Create strength-based goals with offenders and their family members noting how offenders – with their family's help – will achieve their goals.
- ✓ Reinforce offenders' positive relationships with family members and other pro-social supports.
- ✓ Encourage offenders to include supportive family members in meetings with parole officers, including during home visits.
- ✓ Offer to conduct reporting meetings at offenders' homes or in neutral public places (e.g., community center, park, café) to encourage family participation.
- ✓ Familiarize themselves with offenders' families' strengths and challenges in order to address conflicts and/or duplication of services, and to make appropriate referrals for offenders' family members to other human service agencies.

ADDITIONAL AGENCY-LEVEL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the recommendations specific to the three phases of reentry, correctional facilities, community supervision agencies, and their partners might consider implementing other policy changes to further their efforts in engaging families in the reentry process:

- ✓ Collaborate with community-based organizations and other agencies who offer services that might be of benefit to both offenders and their families (e.g., increase communication between corrections and child-support agencies to better support offender-child reunification).
- ✓ Design parole offices – and prison visitation rooms – to create the most family-friendly environment possible.
- ✓ Develop an informational pamphlet for families that explains how they are a partner in the reentry process.

- ✓ Codify in policy the desire for staff to interact with offenders in positive ways and encourage family relationships.³⁵
- ✓ Assure that training academy curricula and in-service training include skills training on how to implement a strength-based, family-focused approach (e.g., provide training on the assessment tools to be used).
- ✓ Assure that hiring decisions, promotions, and performance evaluations incorporate the skills needed for a strength-based, family-focused approach.
- ✓ Ensure that supervisors model positive behavior regarding family interactions.
- ✓ Track progress in implementing a family-focused approach by collecting data and measuring 1) family involvement over time (e.g., offenders receiving family visits during incarceration, extent of family involvement in home visits with offenders), and 2) implementation progress (e.g., staff use of family mapping tools, staff incorporation of social supports in case plans).

While changing policy and practice to a more family-focused approach might be challenging, incorporating families as part of an offender reentry strategy is one more step towards achieving family success and increased public safety.

³⁵ For more information on effective interactions with offenders, see the Coaching Packet on Shaping Offender Behavior.

Examples of Efforts to Engage Families in Reentry

In **Connecticut**, Families in Crisis offers families of incarcerated individuals a number of services including visitation assistance, counseling for families, and fatherhood classes and support services. The Family Ties program offers a range of services to children, their non-incarcerated caregivers and incarcerated parent including counseling, parent education, and case management services. Children are specifically engaged through weekly peer support groups focused on their emotional and social health, ongoing educational support, and organized recreational activities.

Sources: Correspondence with Susan Quinlan, Families in Crisis Executive Director, January 6, 2010, and <http://www.familiesincrisis.org/fic-services>.

At Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility, located outside of Grand Rapids, **Michigan**, staff conduct family reunification sessions before men leave prison. As part of these sessions, staff from both the correctional facility and community organizations talk with the offender and his family about the transition process. If the family is interested, these conversations can continue in the community with a partnering organization's staff person.

Source: Vera Institute of Justice. For more, see MPRI Action Brief available at: <http://www.michpri.com/uploads/Housing/HousingAction.pdf>.

In 2000, The **New York City** Administration for Children's Services (ACS) collaborated with The New York City Department of Correction to offer the ACS/Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPP). CHIPP was created to provide services and resources to children, families, and professionals in both the child welfare and criminal justice systems. One of the main objectives of CHIPP is to maintain and nurture the parent-child bond during the parent's incarceration. This is done by facilitating family visits and case conferences. One specific aspect of the program is the Rikers Island Visiting Program, which facilitates bi-weekly visits between mothers and fathers and their children to assist them in maintaining contact and planning for permanent custody.

Source: Correspondence with Paula Y. Fendall, CHIPP Director, January 6, 2010.

The **Ohio** Department of Rehabilitation and Correction instituted a program to support incarcerated fathers and children at three prisons. The fathers, parenting partners, and children are offered programming that includes educational and experiential activities, and allows families to spend time together. Transportation to the institution is provided at least twice a month to facilitate participation. During the pre-release program, community organizations assist families in identifying and accessing resources, and offer ongoing family-focused programming following release.

Source: Vera Institute of Justice.

Section II: Engaging Offenders' Families in Reentry Coaching Packet Checklist

Engaging Families	YES	NO	NOT CLEAR	NOTES
1. During the assessment process, are offenders' family strengths and other pro-social supports identified?				
2. Are efforts at engaging families targeted to offenders identified as medium to high risk?				
3. During case planning, are the ways in which family support/strengths might assist in addressing offenders' criminogenic needs considered?				
4. Are offenders' efforts to build or sustain relationships with family members – including their children if applicable – and other pro-social supports positively reinforced?				
5. Does agency policy on prison visitation recognize and support a family-focused approach?				
6. Are family members regularly informed of relevant agency policies and family events?				
7. Are incentives provided to families to encourage participation in offenders' lives while incarcerated?				
8. Do institutional and community supervision staff discuss with offenders who are parents their concerns about their children – and provide them with information where necessary?				
9. Do prison and community supervision staff share information about offenders and their families prior to release?				
10. Do prison and community supervision staff involve other human service agencies and community organizations in planning for release?				
11. Are the necessary family members involved in the creation of offenders' transition plans?				
12. Do community supervision staff see family members as partners in the reentry process (e.g., keep in regular touch with them, engage them in meetings with offenders)?				
13. Are community supervision staff knowledgeable about the families of offenders on their caseloads, particularly how their strengths might assist in addressing offenders' criminogenic needs?				
14. Are community supervision staff knowledgeable about the other social services that families are (or should be) receiving?				
15. Is policy designed to allow staff adequate time to interact with offenders in ways that encourage building staff-family rapport?				
16. Do academy and in-service trainings focus on the importance of families and pro-social supports to successful reentry?				
17. Do hiring decisions, promotions, and performance evaluations reflect the skills necessary to engage in a family-focused approach?				
18. Are data collected to determine the extent of family engagement (e.g., family visits, phone calls)?				
19. Are these outcome measures tracked to see if family engagement is increasing over time?				

Section III: Action Planning Worksheet

GOAL:			
Objective 1:			
Tasks	Lead Person	Completion Date	Assistance/Expertise Needed
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
Objective 2:			
Tasks	Lead Person	Completion Date	Assistance/Expertise Needed
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
Objective 3:			
Tasks	Lead Person	Completion Date	Assistance/Expertise Needed
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Section IV: References and Additional Resources

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