

## DEVELOPMENTALLY-SOUND VISITING WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

### • **The needs of the child guide the visit**

- Children need to talk with and feel close to their parents.
  - Family visit rooms designed to make children comfortable are best
  - Visit areas where children touch and play with parents are second best
  - Videoconferencing from home or community is only a supplement to visits where children touch and play with parents (not a replacement)
  - Non-contact visits must be avoided for children
- Children need to have time with their parents to be reassured of their love, feel a sense of belonging to their family, feel their parent values them, hear from their parent that incarceration is not the child's fault, and see that their parent is okay
- If a child has not had a relationship with their incarcerated parent, unique supports that fit the child must be provided to prepare for, during and after visiting

### • **Incarcerated parents require support to meet the needs of their child**

- Before visiting, parents learn about their child's needs
- Before visiting, parents hear about their child's interests
- Before visiting, parents have help preparing answers to difficult questions that will fit their child developmentally
- Before visiting, parents learn what to do with their sadness and anger so their feelings do not get in the way of giving their full attention to their child
- After visiting, parents talk about their feelings and how to meet their child's needs in future contact
- Parent support groups/parent classes help incarcerated parents strive to meet their child's needs in visits, phone calls and letters

### • **Children require support in visiting their incarcerated parent**

- Before visiting, a child needs to know what to expect about their time with their parent and what going into the prison or jail and the visit room will be like, including that their parent cannot leave with them at the end of the visit
- If the only visit possible is through glass, a child needs help to understand not being able to touch their parent and to plan what they can enjoy doing with their parent despite the glass
- After visiting, a child needs to talk about their feelings, help to cope with their grieving, think about their next phone call, videoconference, letter or visit with their parent and have answers to their questions

### • **A child's caregiver requires support to understand the child's needs before, during and after visiting their incarcerated parent**

- Children need to feel a loving connection to their parent, supported by their caregiver's positive view of their parent, despite the challenges of visiting in a jail or prison
- Caregivers require support to help the child through normal reactions to visits, including sadness, withdrawal, acting out, and anger: these are attachment responses, not a sign of negative visiting experiences
- Caregivers can maintain child-parent attachment between visits through photos, sending letters, drawings and report cards, and saying positive things about their parent