

The Role of Families and Social Support in Reentry



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Overview

1. How can drawing on families and other sources of support improve reentry outcomes?
2. What are strategies for tapping the strengths within often complicated families?
3. What are some tools to help put this into practice?
4. Learning from Shelby County Division of Corrections (Memphis, TN)

Family Justice Program

The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit that combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.

Vera's Family Justice Program provides extensive training and strategic support to government and community partners to help them effectively draw on the resources of families and communities. These systemic interventions are designed to benefit people at greatest risk of cycling in and out of the justice system.

How can drawing on families and other sources of support improve reentry outcomes?

Defining family broadly

Allow individuals to define their families.

- Traditional family members
- Extended family members
- Elected family members



Impact of incarceration and reentry on families

Prior to incarceration, individuals contribute to their families

Income

Parenting partner

Emotional support

Healthcare for elderly

During reentry, families manage other challenges

Relationship challenges

Strain on financial resources

Shifts in roles and responsibilities

Interactions with parole

Shifting to a family-focused lens

<p>Individual Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on incarcerated person or person under community supervision
<p>Family-Focused Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reinforce connections within social networks• Reminder that families have expertise in supporting each other

How can drawing on families and other sources of support improve reentry outcomes?

Impact of family and other social support on reentry outcomes

Family contact during incarceration can result in improved behavior in prison. (Holt, 1972)

Formerly incarcerated individuals who live with a family member are less likely to abscond. (Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999)

Family support identified by formerly incarcerated as “most important factor” in successful reentry. (Visher, et al, 2004)

Visitation by family members (defined broadly) can both reduce and delay recidivism, as visitation mobilizes the incarcerated individual’s social ties in supporting him or her upon reentry. (Bales and Mears, 2008)

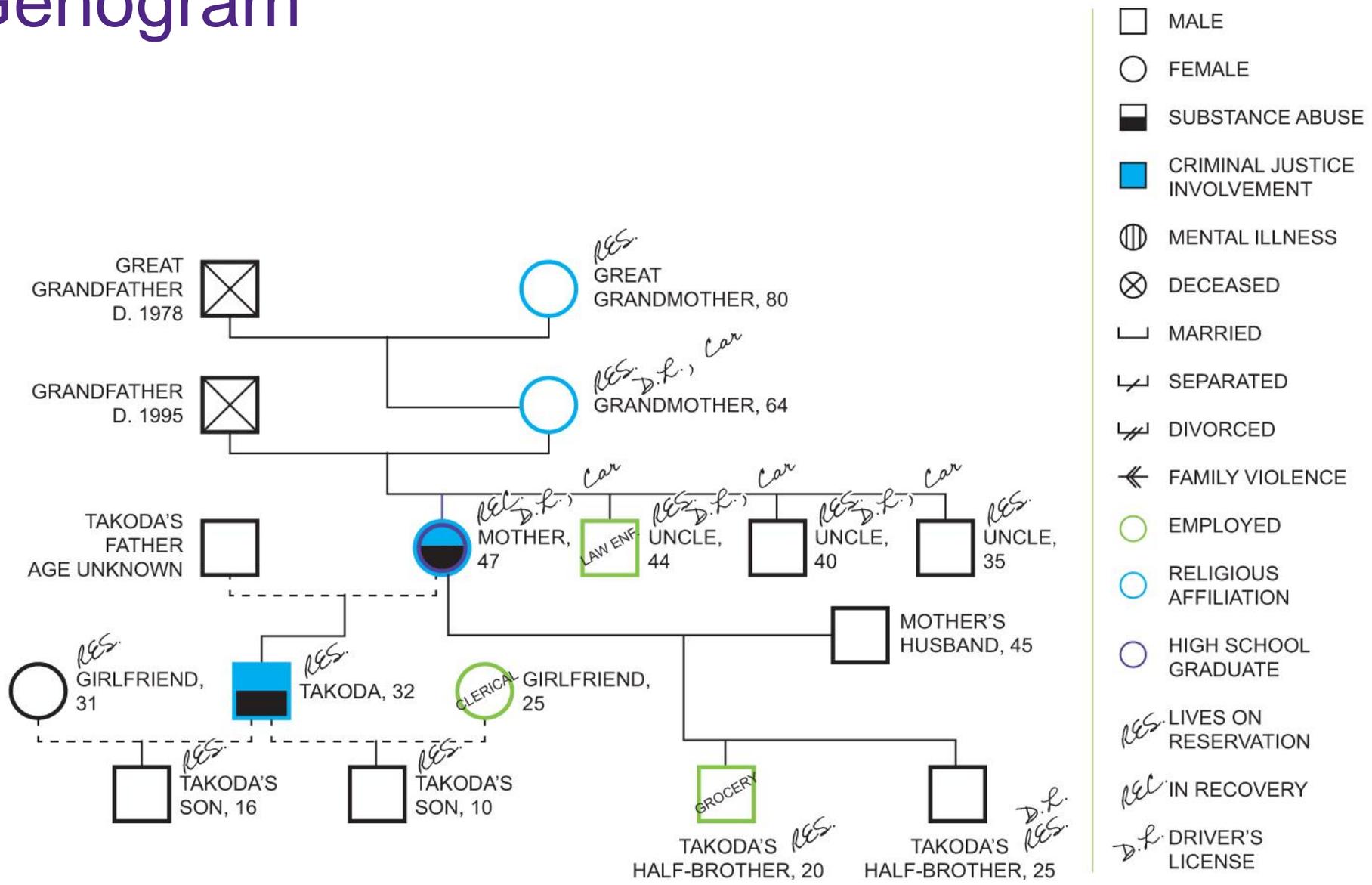
Children of Incarcerated Parents

Most people who are incarcerated are parents

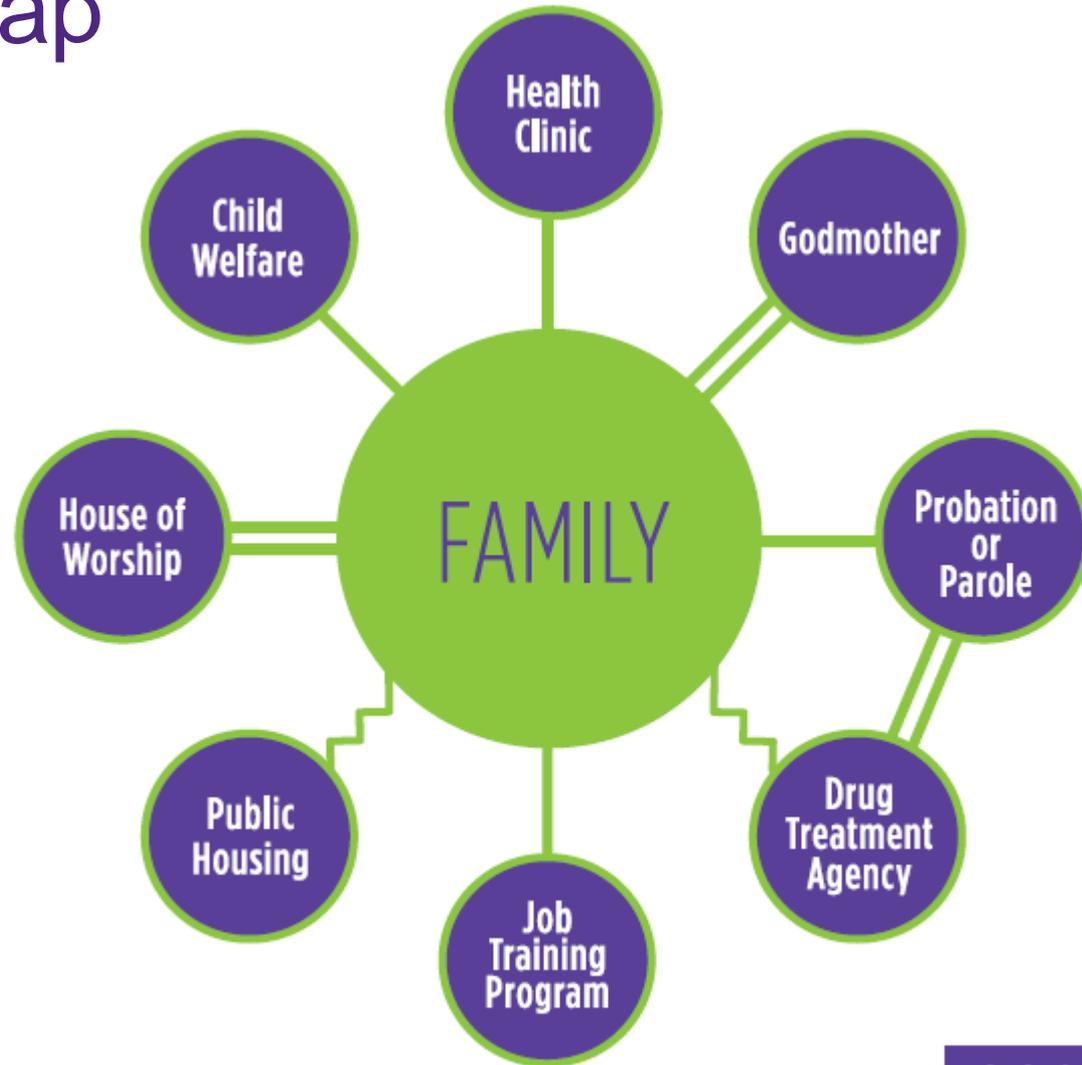
- Children of incarcerated parents experience serious emotional issues (Bocknek, Sanderson, et al, 2009; Gabel and Johnston, 1995)
- They are at greater risk for:
 - Educational failure
 - Future delinquent and criminal behavior and justice involvement (Cho, 2009; Gabel and Johnston, 1995)
- Ability to adjust dependent on:
 - Consistency and closeness of caregiver arrangement
 - Maintaining contact with incarcerated parent (Parke and Stewart, 2001)

What are some tools to help implement a family-focused approach?

Genogram



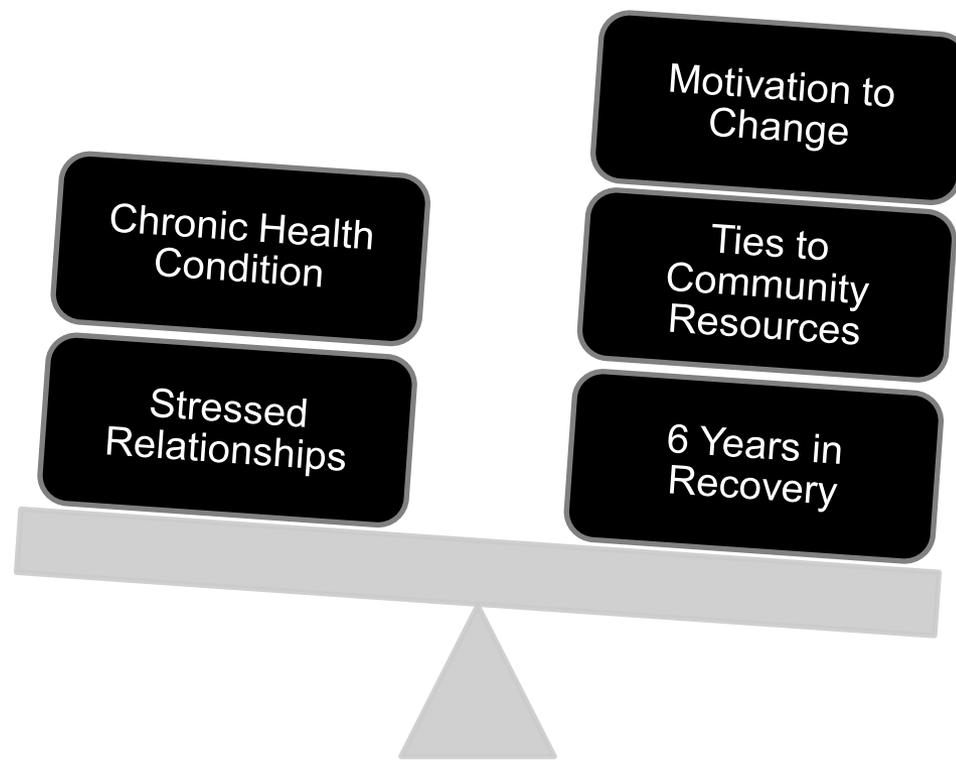
The Ecomap



Relational Inquiry Tool

- Designed for correctional case managers
- Complement to risk and needs assessments
- RIT goals
 - to provide staff with a user-friendly method of recognizing and reinforcing positive connections to family and social networks during and after incarceration
 - to build rapport between the professional using the tool and the incarcerated individual
- Men's prison (NM), women's prison (OK), jail settings (MD and WI), juvenile version (OH)

Benefits and challenges to working with families



What are strategies for tapping the strengths within families?

Strength-based approach

Recognizing that all people are motivated.

Operating with the belief that everyone possesses talent, abilities, capacities, and past successes.

Drawing on strengths to motivate behavior change.

Focus on strengths

Traditional Focus

- > What we cannot do
- > What we do not have
- > Where we fail
- > Problems

Strength Focus

- > What we can do
- > What we have
- > Where we succeed
- > Possibilities

Challenges of maintaining connections during incarceration

54% of mothers and 57% of fathers in state prison were never visited by their children. (Mumola, BJS 2000)

Distance to prisons, cost to travel

Shame of being seen in prison

Stressed relationships due to crime

Not wanting to subject family members to searches

Reflect on current practice

How does your reentry initiative reinforce family connections?

How does it draw on strengths?

How could it increase its focus on families and on strengths?

Shelby County Division of Corrections

You may already recognize the role of family

Do your intake, assessment, and case-management tools:

- Capture information on the strengths of family and other natural connections?
- Define family broadly?
- Obtain information on ways families are connected to community resources?
- Capture information on positive social networks and existing family connections?

You may already recognize the role of family

Do materials incorporate a family perspective?

Do you use motivational interviewing?

Do managers mirror strengths when working
with staff?

Does staff development address the role of
families?

Supporting family connections during and after incarceration

Assessment

- Family Justice's Relational Inquiry Tool

Visitation policies

- North Carolina's Family and Friends Handbook
- Michigan's Family Reunification Sessions
- Ohio's Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

Keeping prisoners close to home

- Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility, Michigan

Supporting family connections during and after incarceration

Email, letter-writing and phone calls

- Ohio providing laptops with webcams so juvenile parole officers can facilitate televisits
- New York reducing collect call rates

Staff development

- Train on tools for bringing family into case management or parole supervision while respecting staff/prisoner boundaries
- American Probation and Parole Association

Continuity of information from prison to community

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