



Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents

DID YOU KNOW?

- **2.7 million American children have incarcerated parents.¹**
 - **In the absence of police protocols, 70% of children present at the time of arrest watch their parent being handcuffed and 30% are confronted with drawn weapons.²**
- In one California study:**
- **only 13% of officers asked about dependent children when making an arrest; and³**
 - **two thirds of police departments did not have written policies outlining officer responsibilities to protect children.⁴**



Law enforcement officers are working across the United States to build and enhance trust with the communities they serve. Officers are first and foremost guardians of those who are most vulnerable. Safeguarding children who are directly impacted when a parent is arrested communicates respect and makes a significant difference for children during one of the difficult moments in their lives. Helping to prevent or minimize a child's exposure to potentially traumatic events is an operationally sound law enforcement strategy to promote public safety and reduce the likelihood of future misconduct, criminal behavior, and victimization.

How Can Law Enforcement Help?

- ⇒ The kindness of law enforcement officers can make a significant difference in the life of a child when a parent is arrested
- ⇒ Understand the critical role law enforcement officers play in minimizing trauma to children
- ⇒ Consider arrest timing when possible (e.g., when children are not present)
- ⇒ Connect children and families to needed services

What Can Officers Do On-scene?

- ⇒ Avoid arresting in front of, or in earshot of, children
- ⇒ Calm the arrested parent
- ⇒ Support the parent in calming their children
- ⇒ Re-establish order
- ⇒ Help children regain control
- ⇒ Explain to children what is going to happen next
- ⇒ Ensure children are left with a caregiver that is known to them; avoid state custody, if at all possible
- ⇒ Answer children's questions calmly and truthfully
- ⇒ Ensure follow-up if children are not home during the arrest

Resources

Visit the IACP Children of Arrested Parents Project website at <http://www.theiacp.org/cap> for resources from the IACP and partner agencies such as:

- Model policy
- Sample departmental general orders
- Roll-call training video and tools
- Pre-arrest/arrest checklist
- Sample departmental resources (e.g., pocket card, brochures, booking room poster)
- Self-paced, online training and archived webinar series

The IACP's Model Policy, *Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents*, serves as a guide for implementing policy and procedures to safeguard children when a parent is arrested. Recommended protocols aim to reduce immediate harms and long-term negative consequences for children and communities. Download the policy at <http://www.theiacp.org/childrenofarrestedparents>.



Contact us at:

International Association of
Chiefs of Police

1-800-THE-IACP x 831

<http://www.theiacp.org/cap>

Bureau of Justice Assistance

<http://www.bja.gov>

Notes

1 The Pew Charitable Trusts: Pew Center on the States, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility* (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010), http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1.pdf.pdf (accessed November 10, 2015).

2 Nell Bernstein, *All Alone in the World* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

3 Marcus Nieto, *In Danger of Falling Through the Cracks: Children of Arrested Parents* (Sacramento, CA: California Research Bureau, 2002), <https://www.library.ca.gov/crb/02/09/02-009.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2014).

4 Ibid.

This project is supported by Cooperative Agreement #2010-DJ-BX-K002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.