

# **Research and Reflections About Incarceration and Families: What Do We Know?**

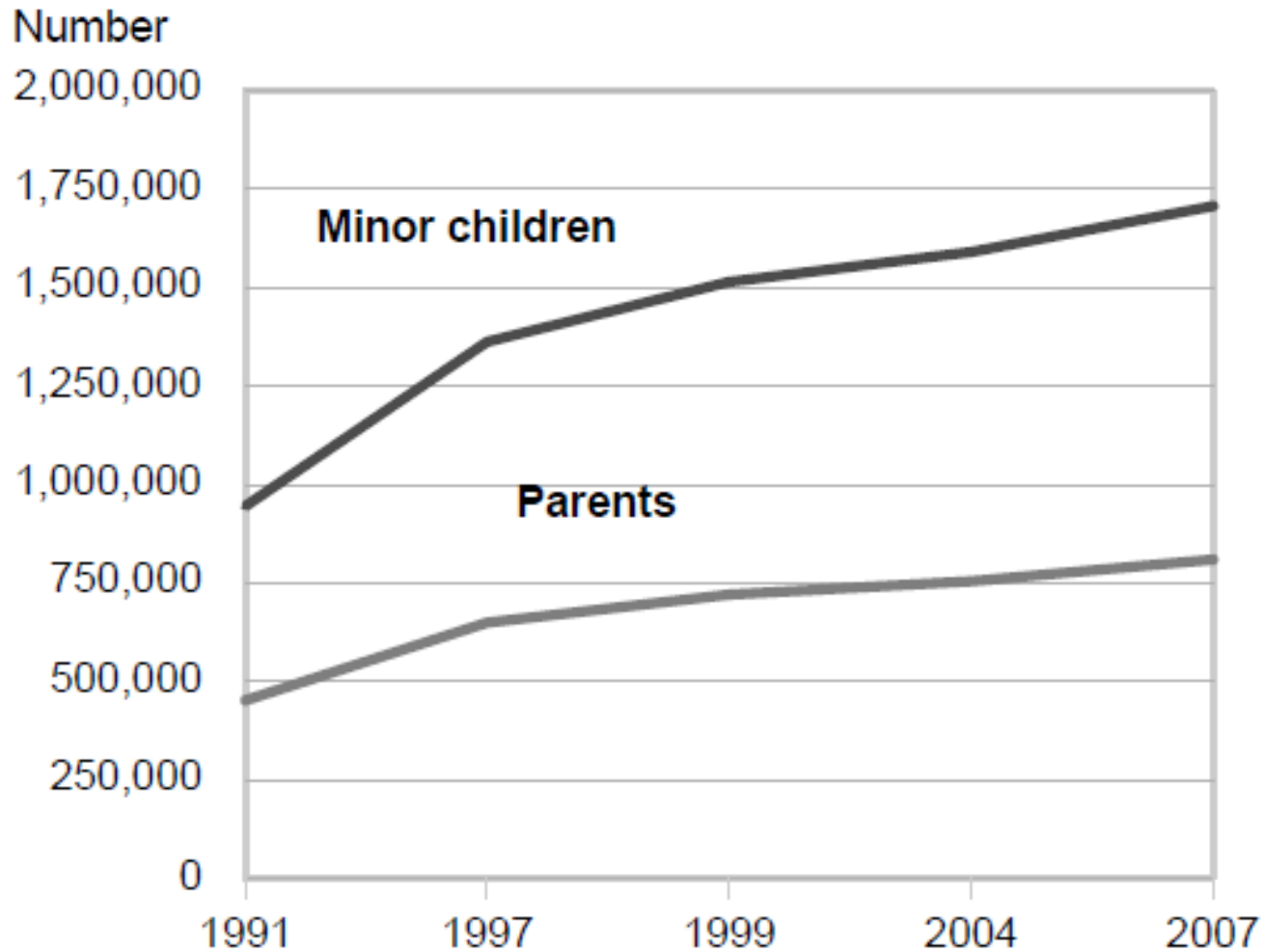
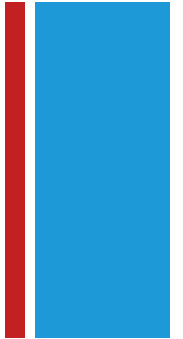
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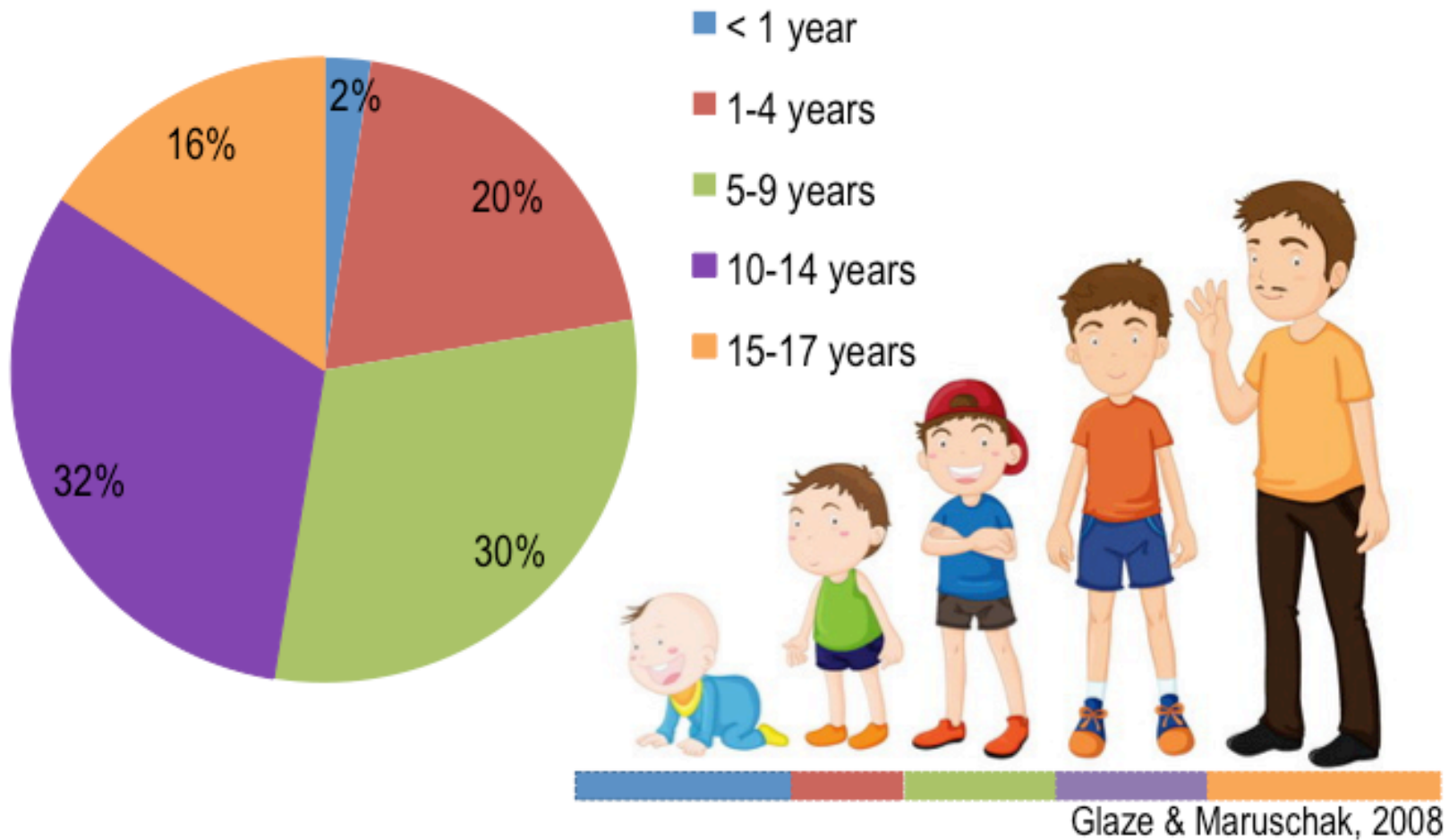
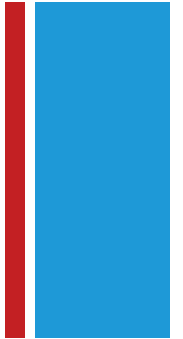
Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health – April 2014



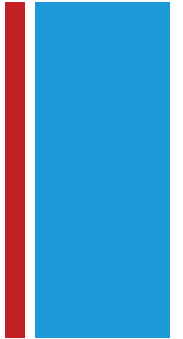
# Estimated Number of Parents in State and Federal Prison and their Minor Children



# + Developmental Considerations



# + Developmental Considerations for Outreach and Intervention

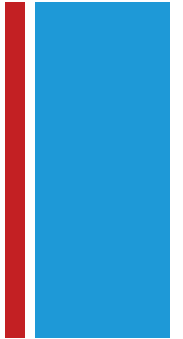


# + Prenatal and Infant Development

- 6-10% of women enter correctional facilities pregnant
- Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable
- Maternal incarceration may confer additional risks for children
- Incarceration may result in separation from attachment figure(s)



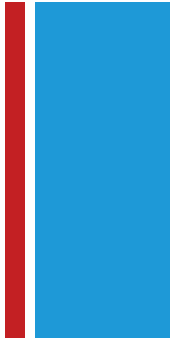
# + Isis Rising – A Prison Doula Project



- Program of Everyday Miracles
- Program Goals
- Program Components
  - Prenatal and Parenting Education
  - Doula Support



# + Program Evaluation



- At the 12-week follow-up
  - Women reported significantly fewer depressive symptoms
  - More confidence as parents
  - More support from other women at the prison
  - More support from prison staff

**What did you learn from group:**  
*“How to relieve stress, discipline my children, get support, ask for help, care for my children emotionally and physically.”*

# + Program Evaluation



- Birth Outcomes ( $n = 29$ )

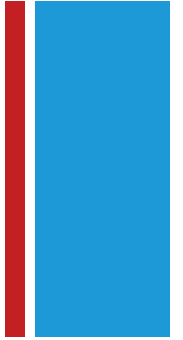
- Oct. 2011 - Oct. 2013
- 28 spontaneous, vaginal deliveries; 1 planned cesarean section (3%)
- None of the babies born preterm
- None of the babies born low birth weight

*Having a doula there made my experience a good one, it helped a lot!! You have to find something positive about your birth experience while you're in prison, my doula helped me achieve that.*



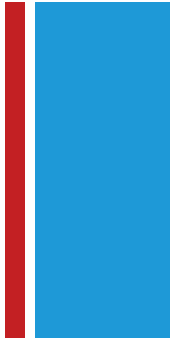


# Recommendations for Practitioners



1. Promote maternal mental health during the prenatal period
2. Support maternal-child bonding
3. Identify alternatives to mother-child separation
4. Provide mental health services during the postpartum period
5. Establish consistency and stability in infants' caregiving environments
6. Identify opportunities to maintain the maternal-infant relationship

# + Early Childhood Development



- Approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of COIP are between 5-9 years old
- Importance of consistency in caregiver-child relationship and residential stability
- Development of self- and emotion-regulation
- Language and literacy skills



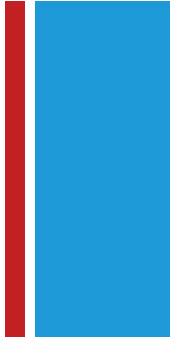
LITTLE **children**

**BIG challenges: incarceration**

- Multimedia Resource Kit
  - Sesame Street DVD
  - Guide for Parents and Caregivers
  - Children's Storybook
- Online toolkit for parents, caregivers, practitioners
- 1-page guide for incarcerated parents
- Sesame Street: Incarceration app



# Recommendations for Practitioners



1. Respond sensitively to children's emotional reactions
2. Support caregivers through difficult conversations with children
3. Identify ways to promote the caregiver-parent relationship
4. Guide caregivers in setting expectations for parent-child contact
5. Prepare for and process parent-child contact
6. Support incarcerated individuals in their roles as mothers and fathers

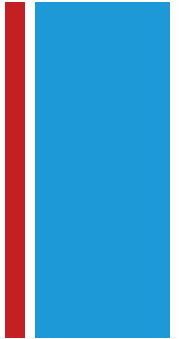
# + Adolescence

- ~ 50% of COIP are between 10-17 years old
- Renegotiation of the caregiver-child relationship
- Ability to think abstractly and hypothetically
- Development of complex emotions
- Risk-taking is normative





# Mentoring Children of Prisoners



## ■ Mentoring

- Importance of meaningful relationship with non-parental adults
- Characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy
- Unique considerations for COIP

Tonight I ask Congress and the American people to focus the spirit of service and the resources of government on the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens: boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad.

—George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address, January 28, 2003*

## ■ Amachi

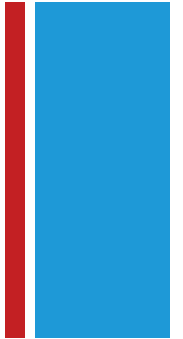
- Partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Program expansion



**Amachi**  
People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise

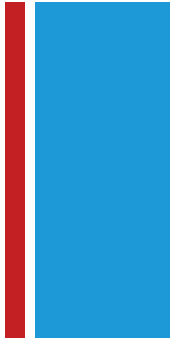


# Recommendations for Practitioners



1. The mentoring program has clear goals and protocols
2. Procedures are specified for volunteer recruitment, screening, and training
3. Procedures are specified to facilitate the creation of good matches
4. Mentors and youth meet weekly for at least 1 year
5. Mentors work with parents, and support and honor the parent-child relationship
6. Matches are monitored, supported, and reconsidered and changed if needed
7. The mentoring program partners with families and other agencies to best engage the children of incarcerated parents and their families
8. The mentoring program partners with other agencies and programs to connect children and their families with other needed services and supports

# + Summary



- **Developmentally appropriate** prevention and intervention efforts are sorely needed
- Providers should strive to take a **family perspective**, and consider caregivers', children's, and incarcerated parents' perspectives
- Services must recognize the heterogeneity in the population and identify ways to **tailor services to families' unique needs**

