



LIFE CHANGING

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH PARENTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Teachers and support staff in schools are often the only people a student will talk with about a parent and/or family member in the criminal justice system (police, court, prison, community corrections).

## WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

In 2008 approximately 67,700 dependent aged children had a parent at Criminal Court in Victoria with 2,689 children experiencing the incarceration of their parent.<sup>1</sup> This number is likely to increase in line with growing prison populations.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of this trauma upon a student's wellbeing and learning outcomes is well-documented, as is the increased likelihood of these children and young people later entering the criminal justice system as adults.<sup>3</sup> Despite this, there is no coordinated effort to address the issue.

## HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY STUDENT IS IMPACTED?

The impact this has on children and young people is similar to grief, and can be understood as a form of trauma.<sup>4</sup> The types of behaviours you might notice will vary, but include:<sup>5</sup>

- Withdrawal from peers and adults
- Anxiety
- Falling behind in class work
- Difficulty focusing and poor recall
- Secrecy
- Violent or aggressive behaviours
- Low self-confidence
- Self-harming
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Negative attitudes towards authority

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Strategies to support students with a parent in the criminal justice system should focus on a culture of prevention, as much as is possible, and once the cause of trauma has been identified, intervention:<sup>6</sup>

### Primary Prevention

**Raise awareness** by displaying information about the issue somewhere students and parents will see it. (VACRO has posters, factsheets and booklets)

### Early Intervention

- **Consult** with wellbeing staff and VACRO
- **Refer** to community services such as family respite, youth services and health.

### THE FOUR LEVELS OF ACTIVITY

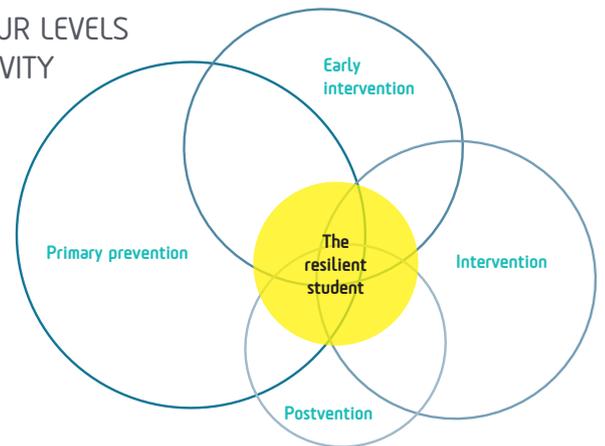


Figure 1: Framework for Student Support Services

### Intervention

**Draw upon available resources** to help students adjust to trauma and changed living conditions.

### Postvention

- **Acknowledge the ongoing role of the imprisoned parent**, by keeping them informed of their child's schooling via reports and letters, and considering a video link
- **Monitor** your student's learning and social behaviours, in consultation with wellbeing staff and community services
- **Be aware** of ongoing contact with the criminal justice system, and ongoing remand or parole arrangements.

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP?

VACRO is a not for profit organisation with experienced staff committed to supporting children and young people with parents involved in the adult criminal justice system, and can provide you with information relevant to your student's needs.

Please visit our website to download resources, or call our Information and Referral Worker on (03) 9605 1900, for more information. [www.vacro.org.au](http://www.vacro.org.au)

### References

- <sup>1</sup>Ward, L. (2009). Court Based Family Support. VACRO
- <sup>2</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2015). 4715.0 – Prisoners in Australia, 2014. Accessed online at [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4517.0Main+Features12014?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4517.0Main+Features12014?OpenDocument)
- <sup>3</sup>Murray, J. & Farrington, D. (2008). The Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children. In Tonry, M. (Ed.). Crime and justice: A review of research (Volume 37). University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- <sup>4</sup>Roberts, S. (2012). The Role of Schools in Supporting Families Affected by Imprisonment. Accessed online at [www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2012/09/The-Role-of-Schools-in-Supporting-Families-Affected-by-Imprisonment-FINAL.pdf](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2012/09/The-Role-of-Schools-in-Supporting-Families-Affected-by-Imprisonment-FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup>Australian Childhood Foundation. (2010). Making SPACE for learning: Trauma informed practice in schools. Australian Childhood Foundation: Ringwood.
- <sup>6</sup>Department of Education, Victoria. (1999). Framework for Student Support Services. Community Information Service: Melbourne.