

# Parenting Connection

Volume 7 Issue 1

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## Help Offenders Become Better Parents - Attend this CEA-W Sponsored Workshop

The Parenting Special Interest Group of the Correctional Education Association is pleased to announce that we have contracted with Deborah McNelis to present a one-day training workshop entitled **“It Takes Attention to Change the Brain: Helping Offenders Become Better Parents.”**

Some of you may have attended one of Deborah’s breakout sessions at the Wisconsin GED/HSED & Adult Literacy Conference or the Region III & IV CEA Conference. Here is your chance to participate in an upbeat, engrossing and valuable workshop for an entire day.

With a BS Degree in Early Childhood Education and a Masters degree in Adult Education, Deborah is an award winning author, professional speaker, and educator. Of all the work she has done, Deborah is most overjoyed with the development of braininsights®. The founding of this company has given Deborah the opportunity to have an even greater impact on increasing the awareness of the importance of the early years. Her goal through braininsights® is for *everyone* to gain an understanding of brain development, its impact, and the ways we can all make a difference.

**“It Takes Attention to Change the Brain: Helping Offenders Become Better Parents”** will be held on Monday, September 27, 2010 at Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The workshop begins at 9:00 and ends around 3:30. Continental breakfast will be available from 8:00 to 9:00. Lunch and break refreshments will be furnished.

Early registration before September 1, 2010 is \$25 for CEA members and \$50 for non-CEA members. After September 1, 2010, late registration is \$50 for CEA members and \$75 for non-CEA members. Those wishing to arrive the night before may reserve a room at the historic Ramada Plaza at by phoning 920-923-3000.

The workshop will be limited to a maximum of 30 participants, so register early. For more information contact: Jerry Bednarowski at [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) or 920-734-5902.

**Turn to pages 2 and 3 for detailed information about the workshop and a registration form**

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The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association.

Send articles and comments to:

Cheri Wontor

Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility

1015 N. 10th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233

[Cherlyn.Wontor@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Cherlyn.Wontor@Wisconsin.gov)

Phone: 414-225-5699

Co-Editors : Barbara E. Rasmussen, Racine Correctional Institution

Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger, Chippewa Valley Literacy Volunteers



# It Takes Attention to Change the Brain: Helping Offenders Become Better Parents

**Presenter:** Deborah McNelis, braininsights®  
**Location:** Moraine Park Technical College, Fond du Lac, WI  
**Date:** Monday, September 27, 2010

Most offenders did not develop their brain with secure attachments to their parents. As a result, they have issues that prevent them from being effective parents themselves. Attachment helps a baby learn trust, develop self regulation, and affects relationships throughout life. Did you know it also affects learning? This presentation stresses the critical role secure attachment to a primary caregiver plays on the overall development of an individual and their resulting behaviors. The impact of trauma, stress, and neglect on the brain are also presented.

This workshop is beneficial for gaining insights into ways to reach the parents you work with in a way to ultimately benefit the children in these families. Positive ideas, perspectives, and activities for reaching this unique population are emphasized in this one day seminar.

## Topics:

- Basic Brain Development ~ “It Isn’t Complicated”
- Understanding the Impact of Attachment ~ “Relationships Matter”
- The Effects of Trauma, Stress, Abuse, and Neglect ~ “Which Brain Area Is Getting Wired?”
- There is Hope ~ “It Takes Attention to Change the Brain”
- What the Brain Needs ~ “The Brain and Behavior”
- Activity Ideas ~ “Creating Fun and Loving Interactions”

***“This workshop was Fabulous! This was different from other brain development workshops. It was so much more engrossing, fun and interesting. The presenter was very knowledgeable and upbeat and obviously loves what she teaches. I learned a lot.”***

--- Educator

***“Deborah is one of the most innovative educators in the early learning space I know. She works passionately to achieve the best possible outcome for all children because she believes that EVERY child has potential!! As the founder of braininsights she is the resident guru on how a child’s brain develops. She has devoted her life to providing programs and materials to help spread awareness among parents and educators!”***

--- CEO/Founder, Cedar Valley Publishing

***“The staff from our program were really impressed with this training. We are going to be telling everyone about you!”***

--- Family Literacy Coordinator



# It Takes Attention to Change the Brain: Helping Offenders Become Better Parents

Sponsored by: Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin  
Moraine Park Technical College

Fond du Lac, WI

September 27, 2010

Registration Information	
Name:	Organization:
Street Address:	Worksite:
City/State/Zip:	Position/Title:
Phone:	E-Mail:

## Registration Fees

**Early Registration – Before September 1, 2010**

CEA Members \$25

Non-CEA Members \$50

**Late Registration – After September 1, 2008**

CEA Members \$50

Non-CEA Members \$75

Registration includes continental breakfast, lunch, and break

If you would like to request vegetarian meals, please check here: \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment Options:**

**Purchase Order: Purchase Order Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Make check payable to CEA-Wisconsin**

Non-CEA members who would like to join CEA and pay the CEA member rate may join CEA on the [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org) website or at the workshop on September 27, 2010. If joining at the workshop, a check payable to CEA for \$60 must be submitted with a completed CEA membership form at the workshop registration table.

**Mail completed form with payment to:**

**Jerry Bednarowski  
CEA-Wisconsin  
W6443 Old Highway Road  
Menasha, WI 54952**

**For more information contact: Jerry Bednarowski at 920-734-5902 or [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com)**

**Cancellations:** A \$10.00 administrative fee will be charged for any cancellations. Cancellations must be received by September 20, 2010. **No refunds will be issued after September 20, 2010.**

**Lodging Information:** The deadline for room reservations at the workshop rate is September 12, 2010. To reserve a room at the rate of \$69/single or \$79/double, call the Ramada Plaza at 920-923-3000. Tell the agent that you are attending the CEA-Wisconsin Parenting Workshop. The hotel accommodations include a restaurant, coffee shop, fitness center/indoor pool, and complimentary wireless internet.



# ParentLink Provides Parenting Corners in Missouri Prisons

ParentLink is a service provided by the College of Education at the University of Missouri. ParentLink's goal is to support Missouri families in making the best choices possible for their families.

ParentLink offers a wide variety of services for parents and families throughout Missouri and specifically reaches out to incarcerated parents through Parenting Corners. Parenting Corners are displays of parenting materials that target specific audiences.

Parenting Corners offer research-based information to parents in prison. Parenting Corners will be placed in the visiting areas of 21 prisons throughout the state of Missouri.

The program aims to help offenders remain or become re-connected to their children and families throughout their time in prison. It's about rehabilitating offenders, not just as citizens, but as parents.

The corners are to be stocked with research based pamphlets that cover nine different topics that can relate to both the parent and child. The themes include basic child development, legal, education, substance abuse prevention, mental health, exercise and nutrition, safety, and special populations. These themes will be rotated every 6-8 weeks.

The program hopes to help parents transition as they come into the prison system, and as they are released. "Just because I'm in prison doesn't mean I'm not still a father or not still a mother," Carol Mertensmeyer, ParentLink Director, said. "They still take that role very seriously."

Children whose parents are imprisoned are seven times more likely to enter into the prison system. They often suffer emotionally and physically as children mourn the loss of their parent. "We know how important it is to have those adults in our lives, and then just poof, you know, just coldly ... they're gone and it's traumatic," Mertensmeyer said.

ParentLink believes the corners will ease the trauma of losing a parent and end the cycle of generational incarceration. "It's important for any child to know that their parent is thinking of them, and caring about them, and establishing that relationship ... even if it's for the first time," said Meg Roodhouse, activity coordinator.

And with more than 95 percent of offenders released from prison, it's important to prepare parents for re-entry into their community and a reunion with their family.

"Maybe parents made some mistakes, and hopefully that parent has figured out what those mistakes were while incarcerated, so they can go out and give their child a happy life," said Veronica Stovall, HIV/AIDS Awareness Project Manager.

There are currently three prisons with parenting corners. These include two men's and one women's correctional facility. The programs were met with warm welcomes and great appreciation from inmates and officers. After such a success, the Director of the Missouri Department of Corrections, George Lombardi, and ParentLink worked together to expand the program to all Missouri prisons.

The Missouri Department of Corrections hopes to see parenting corners in every correctional and parole facility in the state.



One item located at each Corner is the "Ways to Stay in Touch With Your Child" brochure, created by ParentLink, with information for incarcerated parents about staying connected with their children while in prison. The brochure has a tear-off card that incarcerated parents can fill out with a parenting question or concern and mail the card to ParentLink. ParentLink WarmLine Specialists are then able to customize responses, sending back research-based information to the parent.

ParentLink is affiliated with the University of Missouri, but receives funding from grants. The Parenting Corner is also funded by grants and is being built by inmates through a Restorative Justice Program out of the Northeast Correctional Center in Bowling Green. Funding for materials was provided by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

To see all of the services provided by ParentLink, visit [parentlink.missouri.edu](http://parentlink.missouri.edu), call ParentLink at 800-552-8522 (573-882-7323), or send an email to [ParentLink@missouri.edu](mailto:ParentLink@missouri.edu).



## Tell Us About Your Program

One of the goals of the Parenting Special Interest Group is to provide a vehicle for communication among educators who are teaching or developing parenting programs in correctional facilities. You are invited to share your ideas by contributing an article for a future issue of this newsletter.

Here are some suggestions for articles:

- Share a creative lesson plan that you use in your Parenting class
- Compile a list of books and videos you use in your Parenting class
- Describe how your parent/child book project works
- Share advice on establishing a Fathers' or Mothers' Fair
- Describe a training workshop that you found useful
- Describe how you involve community organizations in your program
- Describe how you have made your institution more family-friendly

Email your articles to [Cherlyn.Wontor@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Cherlyn.Wontor@Wisconsin.gov).



# New Editors Assume Duties

As is the procedure for this newsletter, each July a new editor for the Parenting Connection assumes her/his duties. Beginning with this issue, Cheri Wontor will be the new editor. Cheri Wontor who teaches at Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility will replace Mary Pohlman.

Volunteering to be the new co-editor is Barb Rasmussen who teaches at Racine Correctional Institution. She will replace Cheri as editor when her term expires in July 2011.

Cheri Wontor is the fifth person to act as editor of the Parenting Connection. Diane Birch, a teacher at Stanley Correctional Institution, was the newsletter's first editor. She was followed by Mary Dahl, a teacher at Green Bay Correctional Institution; Mary Knox, a teacher at Wisconsin Resource Center; and Mary Pohlman, a teacher at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution.

If you would like to submit an article for inclusion in the next issue of the *Parenting Connection*, you may send it to Cheri at [cherlyn.wontor@wisconsin.gov](mailto:cherlyn.wontor@wisconsin.gov) or Barb at [barbara.rasmussen@wisconsin.gov](mailto:barbara.rasmussen@wisconsin.gov).

## Cherlyn Wontor

Cheri Wontor teaches Adult Basic Education at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility. Her keen interest in Parenting is to share with the inmates her life and educational experiences in that area. As an Adult Instructor, the main goal of Cheri's program is to give the inmate students transitional tools to become effective as both a parent and as well a good citizen upon their release.

Cheri's background includes teaching in the Mequon-Thiensville School District as a special education teacher on the elementary level as well as an instructor for over ten years at Milwaukee Area Technical College and Concordia University in the Business Divisions. Presently, Cheri is completing her Master's Degree in Reading at Concordia University.

## Barbara Rasmussen

Barb Rasmussen has been teaching parenting classes at Racine Correctional Institution for over 17 years. Her belief that dads play a vital role in the lives of their children, but may not always have the tools to provide the best practices to do so, motivates her to keep Parenting a priority.

In addition to parenting classes, Barb teaches English as Second Language, the reading and writing components of the 5.09 HSED option, and a reentry class that covers four areas of reentry modules and is conducted in Spanish. She also supervises the Father Read Program.

Barb's background includes experience as an elementary school secretary, office manager at an art museum, and over 18 years as a teacher at RCI.

Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group Discussion Forum at [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)



# Spotlight: What Will Happen to Me?

*What Will Happen to Me* is a remarkable photo-textual book about children of the incarcerated and their caregivers, with portraits by Howard Zehr and interviews with children by Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz.



Howard Zehr and Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, professors at Eastern Mennonite University, have created a remarkable photo-textual book of children of the incarcerated and their caregivers. Howard Zehr ('grandfather of restorative justice' and an internationally renowned photographer) provided the beautiful portraits, and Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz (social worker and restorative justice mediator) provided the text from interviews she conducted with the children.

With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Howard and Lorraine traveled the nation, photographing the children and caregivers, interviewing the children, and now giving us an opportunity to know these families in a direct and wonderful way. Additionally, they have written on the role of restorative justice and reconciliation processes in the pursuit of family justice in a compelling and gentle way that can guide us all.

The publisher, Good Books', goal is to place this book in the hands of families, parents inside, providers, policy makers, and funders, with the hopes of making all of us more aware of these children and families among us, and how they must cope with stigma, shame, and loss of contact.

If you wish to order the book, or have questions, please contact Dee Ann Newell at 501-366-3647 or [deeannlr@yahoo.com](mailto:deeannlr@yahoo.com).



# Listen With Your Heart

Think back to when you were a child, and all the times when you felt self-doubt, confusion, and frustration. It is tough growing up! You can help your children get through the bumps and bruises of childhood by simply being there for them. Children need to know that when the whole world feels like it's crashing down around them, they have one safe, secure place to go, and one bottomless source of unconditional love.

Listening is as much a skill as giving a speech is. It's not just a matter of picking up sounds. Active listening involves an array of behaviors that express your attention, empathy, and respect. Listening to your children in this way will go far toward convincing them of your unconditional love. Keep these guidelines in mind when your child has something important to say to you:

1. **Put down your paper or dishtowel.** Shut off the TV. Maintain as much eye contact as your child seems comfortable with. Make body contact, such as a hand to the shoulder, if that seems appropriate. Often, when children are trying to express a problem, thought or concern, their parents say they are listening — but half of their attention is somewhere else. You can't con a child this way. Typically, a few minutes of sincere, attentive listening is worth more than an hour of letting your child talk while you carry on with another activity.
2. **Don't rush to jump in with solutions, ideas or lectures.** Often, children just need a sounding board. They need another person listening to give them an opportunity to figure out exactly what they want to do. Solving your child's problem may give you the relief of ending his or her discomfort — but in the long term, it's worth far more to them to get the support they need to formulate solutions on their own.
3. **Demonstrate that you're listening** by asking appropriate questions and making “listening” sounds such as, “Hmmm,” “Oh,” “Really?” “Darn!” or “Wow!”
4. **Validate your child's fears and feelings.** When our children come to us with negative emotions, it's far too tempting to minimize them: “Oh, don't worry about it,” or “There's nothing to be afraid of.” These comments do much more harm than good. It's important for children to learn to trust their own feelings. By brushing them off, you're giving your child the message that his or her feelings are wrong or unimportant. You can validate your child's feelings instead with such comments as, “That sounds embarrassing.” Or, “It can hurt to feel left out.” Or, “That must be frustrating.”
5. **Help your child to focus on possible solutions,** rather than getting mired in the problem. If the situation isn't one that can be solved — if it's a condition rather than a problem — encourage your child to express his or her feelings fully, and then move on. Help your child use forward-thinking phrases like, “I bet you wish...” or “Wouldn't it be nice if...” or “What do you think you'll do now?”

Elizabeth Pantley is the author of several books, including *Kid Cooperation*, *Perfect Parenting*, *The Dictionary of 1,000 Parenting Tips*, and *Hidden Messages*, her most recent book. Introductions in all three books have been written by William Sears, MD.

Elizabeth is also President of Better Beginnings, Inc. A regular radio show guest, she has been quoted in *Parents*, *Parenting*, *Redbook*, *Good Housekeeping*, *American Baby*, *Working Mother*, and *Woman's Day* magazines.

This article was excerpted with permission by New Harbinger Publications, Inc. (<http://www.newharbinger.com/>) from *Kid Cooperation: How to Stop Yelling, Nagging and Pleading and Get Kids to Cooperate* by Elizabeth Pantley (<http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth>, copyright 1996).



# Pennsylvania Prison Society's In-Prison Parenting Classes

Founded in 1787, the Pennsylvania Prison Society is an organization that advocates on behalf of prisoners, formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. The Prison Society offers a variety of services, including re-entry programs for former prisoners, virtual visitation for family members and S.K.I.P. (Support for Kids with Incarcerated Parents).

The Prison Society has placed a special focus on the development of programs that address the specific needs of incarcerated individuals and their families. Research has shown that maintaining family relationships and parenting programs that teach individuals how to cope with incarceration result in dramatically lower recidivism rates. To encourage positive family relations and give incarcerated parents the opportunity to discuss and learn about the needs of their children, the Prison Society has established a cognitive-therapy based program that fosters parenting skills and strengthens their commitment to positive family values.

The Prison Society provides parenting classes in state and county prisons, facilitates support groups for children of incarcerated men and women and operates a family resource center in a state prison. The twelve-session parenting program uses an interactive curriculum that focuses on the following objectives:

- to increase parents' knowledge about what constitutes child abuse and neglect
- to increase parents' ability to handle their feelings and manage their anger
- to increase parents' understanding of various stages of child development
- to increase parents' understanding of positive parenting; to increase parents' ability to interact in responsive and nurturing ways
- to increase parents' awareness of community resources for themselves and their families

The program addresses each objective through role-play exercises, outside readings, interactive activities, discussion and hands-on skill development.

For several years the Prison Society has been providing a six-week version of the parenting curriculum to mothers and fathers incarcerated in the Philadelphia Prison System. Results have shown an increased understanding of the issues facing their children, and a better awareness of appropriate parenting strategies.

The Prison Society brings a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding incarceration and its impact to the parenting classes. In fact, our experience and knowledge base is so strong that we are often called upon to provide "train the trainer" sessions to staff from other non-profits who work with prisoners and former offenders. We at the Prison Society are proud to have been providing important services to the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia, for hundreds of years.

For further information about our parenting, or other programs, please contact Betty-Ann Izenman, Program Director, at [baizenman@prisonsociety.org](mailto:baizenman@prisonsociety.org) or 215-564-6005 x114.

by: Betty-Ann Izenman, Program Director  
Pennsylvania Prison Society



**Dear Reader:**

I want to take this opportunity to thank Mary Pohlman for her contributions to the Parenting Connection this past year. Your work has not gone without notice and I want to personally say --" Thanks for a job well done!"

As your editor, I want to share my experiences as a parenting instructor and realize the work we do each and every day to assist our inmate students to become better parents. The task seems unending but the need is ever present as we see what work was unfinished in their personal lives which we are asked to complete – "How do we become better fathers and mothers for our children?"

My focus will be a bit different from the past editors as I want to focus on putting books in our inmate children's hands which will spark their interest in reading and school. My parenting classes include the Father Read Program, video taping fathers reading to their child and sending the book and video to their children. As part of this program, I will be working with First Book, an organization putting books in the hands of low income children as well.

Illiteracy and crime are closely related. The Department of Justice states, "The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence and crime is welded to reading failure." Over 70% of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level. Simply -- literacy is learned. Illiteracy is passed along by parents who cannot read or write. It is my goal to share with my students the love of learning so as to curb this trend.

It is my pleasure to be your editor. I am happy to share the articles which will contribute to your Parenting Program in the months ahead.

**Cheri Wontor**

**Cheri Wontor, Teacher  
Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility  
1015 North 10th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53233**

