

Parenting Inside Out (PIO-24): An Evaluation of a Jail-Based Parenting Program

Study Overview

PROBLEM & APPROACH

Millions of parents cycle in and out of U.S. jails each year, with profound consequences for children's health, development, and well-being. Despite high rates of parental incarceration in jails, research and evidence about jail-based parenting programs that support parent-child relationships and family functioning remains limited.

This evaluation examined outcomes associated with Parenting Inside Out (PIO-24), a 24-hour cognitive-behavioral parent management training program designed for incarcerated parents in correctional settings.



KEY FINDINGS

From baseline to follow-up, parents had **greater odds** of reporting:¹

- **More frequent communication** with their children (phone calls and letters).
- **Higher levels of affection and responsiveness** toward their children.
- **Stronger relationships** with caregivers.
- **More support** for caregivers' use of positive parenting practices.

At follow-up, parents also reported **high levels of satisfaction** with PIO-24 and perceived the program as **helpful for strengthening the relationships they had with their children**.

SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS

- PIO-24 demonstrates measurable benefits in 1) parent-child contact, 2) parenting skills, and 3) parent-caregiver relationships.
- High participant satisfaction indicates strong program acceptability and perceived usefulness.
- Evidence supports the value of jail-based parenting programs in strengthening family connections during parental incarceration.

STUDY AT A GLANCE

Intervention	Parenting Inside Out (PIO-24)
Setting	Three county jails (WI and MN)
Participants	195 incarcerated parents
Design	One-group pretest-posttest
Key Findings	Greater odds of improvements in parent-child contact, parenting skills, and parent-caregiver relationships ¹

¹Results are based on adjusted statistical models that accounted for participant characteristics and compared responses at baseline and follow-up.

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Why Supporting Parents in Jail Matters

Family connections remain important during incarceration and parenting programs that are brief and adaptable are suitable for jail settings.



PARENTING CONTINUES DURING INCARCERATION

While incarcerated, parents continue to navigate how to communicate with their children, support them from a distance, and work with the people caring for them. Strong parent-child relationships and family connections can help buffer children from some risks associated with parental incarceration. Yet restricted communication, limited visiting opportunities, costs, institutional policies, and strained family relationships can make continued involvement difficult.

JAIL SETTINGS CALL FOR FLEXIBILITY

Compared with prisons, jails generally hold people for shorter and less predictable periods of time and experience frequent admissions, releases, transfers, and disruptions to facility schedules.

Jail programs for parents should therefore be brief, adaptable, and feasible because of the dynamic environment and unique needs of parents with children.

PIO-24 IS TAILORED FOR JAIL STAYS

- PIO-24 is a brief and structured parenting program adapted from PIO-90, originally designed for prisons.
- Its 12 two-hour lessons address communication, problem-solving, parent-child connections, child development, family routines, positive guidance, and preparation for leaving the jail.
- Its adaptable schedule allows the 24 hours of instruction to be delivered in ways that fit the setting; e.g., weekly over 12 weeks, twice weekly over six weeks.

PIO-24 CURRICULUM AT A GLANCE

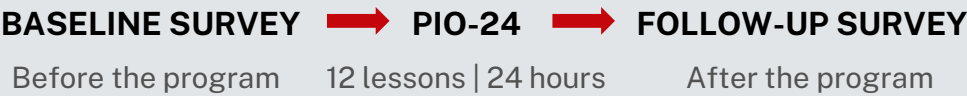
FOUNDATIONS & COMMUNICATION	1. Getting Acquainted 2. Effective Speaking Skills 3. Effective Listening Skills 4. Effective Problem-Solving Skills
CONNECTION & DEVELOPMENT	5. Bonding Through Play & Reading 6. The Child’s Job & the Parent’s Job 7. Nurturing Your Child’s Temperament
STRUCTURE & POSITIVE GUIDANCE	8. Structure Through Family Routine 9. Directions & Encouragement 10. Rules, Rewards, & Consequences 11. Timeout and Privilege Removal
PREPARING TO RETURN HOME	12. Going Home: Your Children & You

Note. Lesson topics are grouped for ease of presentation; grouping labels are not official PIO curriculum categories. *Source:* Parenting Inside Out curriculum materials and www.parentinginsideout.org.

How the Evaluation Was Conducted

The evaluation compared parents’ responses before and after completing PIO-24.

ONE-GROUP PRETEST–POSTTEST DESIGN



SURVEYS BEFORE AND AFTER PIO-24

- The baseline survey measured participants’ family background, parent–child contact, parenting practices, and parents’ relationships with children’s caregivers.
- The follow-up survey repeated the outcome questions and gathered feedback about participants’ experiences with PIO-24.

SAMPLE NOTE: In addition to the 195 parents who completed surveys before and after PIO-24, another 236 participants completed a baseline survey but not a follow-up survey. Of 266 participants with matched surveys, 71 were excluded because they completed a different program, did not have a child under age 18, or lacked cohort information.

195
parents and caregivers
completed baseline and follow-up surveys and met study inclusion requirements.

Average age: 33 years | 94% men | 69% lived with a child before incarceration | 82% played an active parenting role before incarceration.

WHERE AND HOW PIO-24 WAS DELIVERED

- Three county jails: one in Wisconsin and two in Minnesota.
- Data collected from 2019–2024 in Wisconsin and 2021–2024 in Minnesota.
- Delivered in cohorts by trained corrections officers and social workers employed by the jails.
- 39 cohorts participated across the three sites.

WHAT THE EVALUATION EXAMINED

PARENT–CHILD CONTACT Letters, phone calls, and visits
PARENTING PRACTICES Affection, responsiveness to children’s feelings, and praise
PARENT–CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIPS Collaboration around rules, routines, encouragement, and relationship quality
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK Program satisfaction, helpfulness, and anticipated parenting changes after release

HOW RESPONSES WERE ANALYZED

Researchers compared participants’ baseline and follow-up responses while accounting for differences in state, age, number of children, gender, race and ethnicity, education, prior residence with children, prior parenting role, and the cohort in which participants completed PIO-24.

TECHNICAL NOTE: Analyses used cumulative link mixed models to estimate the odds of reporting a higher response category at follow-up than at baseline. For example, an odds ratio of 1.68 for letter contact means that participants had 68% greater odds of reporting a higher frequency category at follow-up than at baseline; it does not mean that letter contact increased by 68%.

WHAT THIS DESIGN CAN TELL US

The evaluation identifies changes reported by participants from before to after PIO-24. Because the study did not include a comparison group, the findings cannot establish whether PIO-24 alone caused the changes.

What the Evaluation Found

From baseline to follow-up, adjusted models showed greater odds of higher response categories for six of the ten outcomes examined.

OUTCOME	SCALE	FINDINGS ¹
Parent-Child Contact frequency of letters, phone calls, & visits	Never Sometimes Regularly	✓ Letters ✓ Phone calls X Visits
Parenting Practices affection, responsiveness to children’s feelings, and praise	Not at all true Somewhat true Very true	✓ Showing affection ✓ Listening to & validating children’s feelings X Praise
Parent–Caregiver Relationships collaboration around rules, routines, encouragement, & overall relationship quality	Not at all true Somewhat true Very true	✓ Encouraging routines & structure ✓ Overall caregiver relationship quality X Helping set & enforce rules X Showing appreciation for caregivers

✓ **EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT** = greater odds of a higher response category at follow-up.

Example: Parents were more likely to report more frequent contact using letters at follow-up than baseline.

X **NO EVIDENCE OF CHANGE** = models did not provide evidence of movement to a higher category.

HOW PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCED PIO-24 AT FOLLOW-UP

87% very satisfied with the parenting information	79% found PIO-24 very helpful when asked about the program	77% anticipated parenting change after release
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¹Results are based on cumulative link mixed models adjusted for participant and study characteristics that compared responses before and after participation in PIO-24. The graphic indicates whether the models provided evidence of movement toward higher response categories; it does not represent changes in mean scores.

What the Findings Mean for Practice and Research

The evaluation suggests that PIO-24 may strengthen parenting practices and family connections among parents incarcerated in jails.

BOTTOM LINE: The study offers promising initial evidence for PIO-24 as a brief parenting education program in jail settings. More rigorous outcome research and process evaluation in the future could build on these findings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE	WHAT THE FINDINGS DO AND DO NOT ESTABLISH
DESIGN PARENTING PROGRAMS FOR JAIL REALITIES Use flexible, frequent class scheduling that accommodates short stays and facility disruptions; create opportunities for program continuation in the community or in other facilities when feasible.	THE EVIDENCE SUPPORTS - Promising participant-reported improvement in 6 of 10 outcomes based on matched pre- and post-program survey responses. - Strong acceptability among participants based on post-program responses. - Successful delivery across three county jails and 39 cohorts with 195 parents.
BUILD THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY Earmark resources for adequate staffing and training; allocate space and time for program implementation; use clear screening and referral processes.	THE STUDY DOES NOT ESTABLISH - That PIO-24 alone caused the changes. - Whether improvements persist after release. - Effects for all enrollees, children, caregivers, or other jail settings. - Which delivery conditions produce the strongest outcomes.
PRESERVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY CONNECTION Reduce barriers to calls, letters, and especially visits— which are more challenging to offer — so parents have opportunities to apply communication and parenting skills with their children.	
SUPPORT FULL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION, NOT ONLY CURRICULUM Treat parenting support as a core, family-focused jail service that includes PIO-24 and interaction with children and caregivers when possible.	

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION		
1 IMPLEMENTATION Document program operations and assess model fidelity.	2 ATTRITION Track which parents leave, why, and at what point in the program.	3 CONTEXT Examine contextual factors that could influence outcomes, e.g., class frequency, cohort size, coach characteristics.
4 STUDY DESIGN Use comparison groups and larger, more diverse jail samples.	5 FOLLOW-UP Assess whether changes persist over time including in prison if transferred or in the community if released.	6 DATA SOURCES Include caregivers, coaches, and administrative records.

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