Residential Parenting Program
Teaching Parenting, Infant-child bonding to Incarcerated Mothers

About
The Residential Parenting Program (RPP) allows pregnant, minimum security incarcerated individuals with sentences 30 months at the time of birth or less the opportunity to keep their babies with them after giving birth. The mothers and babies live together in J-unit and receive support and education from experienced early childhood educators. It gives mothers the chance to bond with their children and learn parenting skills to enhance their child’s development and their successful reentry into society.

History
The RPP began in August 1999 through a partnership with the Puget Sound Education Service District Early Head Start (PSESD). Early Head Start provides infant and toddler care while mothers fulfill required institution care such as work, education, and training. The program is made possible through a $1.2 million grant from PSESD for low-income infants, toddlers, and their families in Pierce County.

Eligibility & Mandatory Requirements
Only women who are pregnant upon arrival at Washington Corrections Center for Women may be eligible for the RPP. Incarcerated Individuals are screened carefully, and participation criteria include the type of offense committed, sentence structure, judgment and sentence conditions, behavior, previous interactions with child protective service agents, and overall institution judgment.

The major emphasis of the program is to get the child ready for transition with the mother into the community with no separation. Incarcerated Individuals must be eligible for release into the community before their child reaches 30 months of age.

Participants Are Required To:
→ Get involved in pre-and-postnatal programs, such as parenting skills, child development, self-care and self-esteem, positive discipline, nutrition and family life skills
→ Structure their various commitments to accommodate the needs of their children, and to utilize the child development center and approved incarcerated caregivers.
→ Work with facility staff to develop a case plan to address their programming needs to include program requirements
→ Participate in educational components that teach positive and effective parenting skills, give children care that focuses on their developmental and educational needs
Frequently Asked Questions

How long can a mother live with her child while she is incarcerated? Where does the child go after this period?

Only pregnant women who have 30 months or fewer left on their sentences at the time of birth can participate in RPP. The goal is to have the child leave prison with their mother as she reenters the community.

Why is Washington one of the only states in the country with a program like this?

The DOC has made the RPP part of its strategy to reduce recidivism and break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration. As a group, children of incarcerated parents experience a lack of quality care and support, thus putting them at higher risk for emotional and relationship problems, academic difficulties, and incarceration later in life.

What Incarcerated Mothers Say About the Program

“When I found out I was pregnant, it didn’t really dawn on me that I was going to be able to be a parent. This program has been life-changing. I guarantee you that if you would have met me a year and a half ago, the person I am today and the person I was then are two different people.”

—Kathryn H., an inmate mother in the Residential Parenting Program

What the Research Says

Source: Women’s Prison Association Institute on Women and Criminal Justice, 2009

→ Keeping mothers and children together is the best possible scenario. When adequate resources are available, women who participate show lower rates of recidivism, and their children show no adverse effects as a result of their participation. By keeping mothers and infants together, these programs prevent foster care placement and allow the formation of maternal/child bonds during a critical period of development.

→ Mothers in a prison nursery setting can raise infants who are securely attached to them at rates comparable to healthy community children.

Source: Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment for Infants Raised in a Prison Nursery 2011 study by Mary W Pyrne, Ph.D., Columbia School of Nursing

For More Information

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