

Project home: A pilot evaluation of an emotion-focused intervention for mothers reuniting with children after prison

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Abstract

Nearly 2 million children in the United States have a parent in prison. The circumstances related to this situation place them at increased risk for behavioral and emotional disorders. The process of reunification between mother and child after release is a stressful and emotional one. A pilot study was conducted to develop and test a new program, Emotions: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Child When You Go Home. The objective of the Emotions Program was to teach emotion regulation and emotion coaching skills to incarcerated mothers so as to assist mothers and their children to cope better with the stress associated with incarceration and the transition home from prison. Pilot participants (N = 47) had previously participated in Parenting Inside Out, an evidence-based parenting program for incarcerated parents. The participants were then assigned to the Emotions Program (n = 29) or the comparison condition of no additional treatment (n = 18). All mothers were assessed before (T1) and after the program (T2), and again 6 months after release from prison (T3). Intervention effects of the Emotions Program on mothers' emotion regulation, emotion socialization, and adjustment were examined using repeated-measures analysis of variance with a between-subjects factor of group (Emotions Program vs. comparison) and a within-subjects factor of time (T1 vs. T2 vs. T3). Moderate time by group interaction effects were observed for aspects of emotion regulation, emotion socialization behavior, and criminal behavior in mothers, with participants in the Emotions condition showing improvement relative to those in the comparison condition.