



## Effective Parenting for Convict Mothers

### Risk of Permanent Scarring among Children of Female Convicts

Of Israel's estimated 350,000 children and youth at risk, those whose mothers are in prison are at particularly high risk of being scarred permanently and following in their mother's criminal path. A mother's incarceration severely strains the mother-child bond. Children of imprisoned mothers live with family members or are placed in foster care or residential facilities; only some are able to live with their mothers in prison until age two. Furthermore, visitation is typically infrequent.

Female offenders – seventy percent of whom are mothers – are themselves prey to risk factors such as abuse, addiction, prostitution, mental health problems, employment difficulties and women's health issues. Their predicament is often a clear indicator of their own lack of a healthy maternal role model. Even after their release, most mothers are unable to meet their children's emotional, developmental and physical needs. Appropriate support is essential in order to stem their tendency toward maternal dysfunction and avoid further perpetuation in future generations.

### New Hope For Female Convicts and Their Children

In 1997, the Israeli government established a special hostel for released female mother prisoners to assist in their rehabilitation and reunite them with their children. Since 2000, JDC-Ashalim has been developing new approaches to nurture the mother-child relationship, from the mother's imprisonment to her release and reintegration in the community.

JDC-Ashalim's treatment approach is multi-dimensional and works with both mothers and children. It integrates social work, psychology and psychiatry and involves all services responsible for punishment and rehabilitation – the courts, the probation and prison system, the community care system, welfare services, mental health services and the Prisoner Rehabilitation Service. The program works to rebuild the mother-child bond, helping mothers and children learn to experience intimacy with each other. Mothers are trained to understand their children's needs and develop maternal competencies, all the while being able to recognize when they themselves require assistance.

Specific program components include: 1) Individual, couple and group therapy for mothers and children in jail and in the released mother prisoners' hostel; 2) a continuing therapeutic program in the community; and 3) guides for professionals and mothers on handling issues relevant to convicted mothers, such as mother-child separation or questions about the mother's past.

### Program Partners

JDC-Ashalim partners with the Ministry of Social Affairs' Prisoner Rehabilitation Service and the National Insurance Institute.

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