



**CFCN**  
Canadian Families and  
Corrections Network

**RCAFD**  
Regroupement canadien d'aide  
aux familles des détenu(e)s

# COPING OVER TIME

Canadian Families and Corrections Network  
Box 35040 Kingston ON K7L 5S5  
Toll free information and referral line: 1-888-371-2326  
Email: [national@cfcn-rcafd.org](mailto:national@cfcn-rcafd.org)  
Web site: [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org)

Louise Leonardi  
Executive Director  
Margaret Holland  
Ontario Coordinator  
Canadian Families and Corrections Network  
Dr. Stacey Hannem  
Associate Professor, Department of Criminology  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford ON

# COPING OVER TIME - INTRODUCTION

*I feel that I'm like Alice in Wonderland, I've fallen down into a place where I don't know about, where the words are all different, where I don't know what's true, what's not true, who to trust, who to not trust. I'm trying to figure out did I not know my son, or do I know my son. I'm just confused about everything. I feel completely heartbroken. I feel in despair about the loss of life of his victim. I just feel like...nobody in our family has ever hurt anyone before and now suddenly somebody's dead. So absolutely gobsmacked.*

**Is this how you feel? That you've been dropped down the rabbit hole into a world that is new, different and hard to understand? That you feel shocked, stunned and gobsmacked?**

**The Canadian Justice system is very challenging, very complex and can be intimidating. The correctional wording, the different courts with their own rules and procedures, the provincial and federal correctional systems can all be new and overwhelming. How do you manage? How can you cope day-to-day and who can you turn to as you face new issues?**

*We're feeling the pains of imprisonment, just without the bars.*

*And it's hard, it's not something you sit and talk to Joe Blow about because there's a stigmatism, you know? I feel, even all the court dates and everything, I feel like I'm guilty by association.*

*All of a sudden you are alone. All of a sudden you're having to try to find enough money to live on. All of a sudden, everything about what has happened...you're totally excommunicated by everyone.*

*I feel that I can't move forward with my life. I'm always waiting...I'm waiting to find out what's going to happen with her and that kind of...the result of that lets me know the next step in my life, whether I move to wherever she's going to be incarcerated, whether I go for custody of my grandkids, my career...whether I move forward with my career goals that I had originally planned or whether I have to change them...and just not knowing. As far as my mental state, it's hard. I try not to think of it as a whole because it's too much because... we don't know anything...in limbo. My whole life is in limbo, right now.*

**Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) completed research on the 'Mental Health Effects of Crime on the Family' which was an opportunity to learn how families across Canada are coping with having a family member in the criminal justice system. Families demonstrated outstanding personal strength as they shared their coping strategies and how they managed their unique circumstances. This booklet gives suggestions and thoughts, outlined in *italic print*, from those families. Perhaps these experiences will offer some comfort, hope and ideas that may help you as you follow your journey.**

## COPING OVER TIME - RESILENCY

*Well, I mean, it's very, very, difficult. Just because someone does something wrong, you don't stop loving them. You can't make yourself stop loving a person, no matter what they do, whether it's good or whether it's bad. So, as their journey escalates, you're taken along on their journey too. And no matter how bad it is or how good it is, you are part of it. So it affects every facet of your life. It affects you in every way.*

**In our research on families and how they are coping with the effects of crime, one thing stands out clearly. Family members who have a loved one inside are resilient! They have to learn so much, deal with many new things, cope with fear, worry and disappointments and yet, are still moving forward in their lives. How are they doing this? By trying to handle every day as it comes, and thinking of the things that they need to do, that are right for them.**

*He's about 700 kilometers away from me and because, at first, the work that I had to do and now that it's winter time, I can't trust my vehicle to get me that far. We both discussed it a lot and we felt that emotionally we didn't think that a short visit was going to benefit us. Right now we are in a space and place...being able to talk to each other every day, that we felt if I travel 5, 6 hours to get there, and spend just an hour, and spend 5 or 6 hours to come back, we thought that would be too stressful, on both of us actually.*

*Well, first of all, I realized I can't fix this, I can't make it better. It's a situation where she's not a small child any longer where Dad can fix whatever problems come along. That's been a bit on the difficult side for me because I've always been someone that was there for her.*



*Not waiting - not waiting for him to get out, not waiting for things to change. At first that is what I was doing. I was just waiting, I was living in limbo. I was not knowing how things were going to go. Once I decided that, "Wait a minute this is my life, and I'm not willing to wait because I am not getting any younger, I only have one life to live, that is as far as I know and I am going to live it. I am going to stay in this relationship, but I am going to live and not wait." And once I did that it started going better for me.*

*I was not able to function, not able to care for myself and therefore my baby. And because I was in the first trimester, it was basically, if I can't get help, then I'm hurting this baby. So I had to do it, so I did it. I often think about how bad it would have been, had I not been pregnant. Because I don't think I would have been able to ask for help, I would have probably just spiraled out...my little guy saved my life.*

What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*I've contemplated suicide so many times, but then I say to myself, "What would my husband do if I was gone? He would have no one." But sometimes the pain, the mental pain is so great. It's not like a broken arm where you can take a pill and make it go away.*

*We stay positive and don't let him down. He is our son and we will be here for him no matter what.*

*On the phone, I don't react, like cry or get upset or anything like that. It's usually after the phone call's done. If it's something that was really tough to talk about, that's when I will usually cry, or be upset, or angry, or whatever. But I don't do that with her on the phone.*

*Any relationship, I always say, is like a bank account, a joint bank account. You both put in deposits and sometimes one half of the couple, or the friend, will have to withdraw more than the other has to. But it balances out in the end.*

Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before. You can fight it, you can do nothing but scream about what you've lost, or you can accept that and try to put together something that's good.

- Elizabeth Edwards

*Our society can be so judgemental, they don't understand that people can make very bad choices, but it does not mean they are horrible people. We hate what our son did, but we love our son and it is not the whole of who he is as a person. But there is no acknowledgement of that right now, that people can turn their lives around - and historically - most do!*

## COPING OVER TIME – SUPPORT GROUPS

*I think the biggest difficulty that I have faced is the feeling that I was all alone; feeling that nobody would understand. Believing I guess is the word. Believing that there was nobody there quite in my situation, and that nobody would really genuinely understand why I made the decision that I made.*

*They were absolutely the lifesavers for me because I met other women who were from 'normal families, good families' who were going through the exact same thing as I was. And they were all at different stages, some were like me, their son was just entering the process, some their sons were currently in prison, and some had sons who were on parole.*

*So the first few meetings I went to, hearing all the horror stories of what had happened to some of their sons, I mean it was extremely hard to hear because there are some terrible stories. However, the...I don't know what the word is...the elation that I felt that I had somebody that I could talk to about this, and not continually have to hide it...and people who were empathetic and listened to my story. And also the people who could give me information about what to do next, and what resources I had to ... I mean that was, I have to say, was an absolute lifesaver.*

*Both my husband and I attend weekly peer support groups offered locally. We have had exceptionally positive experiences. It has been encouraging and immensely helpful to be able to share our stories, with all their challenges and joys, with people who will listen without judgement.*

*I founded a support group for myself, family, friends and others impacted because there was a lack of available supports and is a huge need.*

**41% of our family members say that Support Groups are a strong solution. Some people want to hear from those with a shared experience as knowing that you are not alone in your situation helps. Hearing other stories and having a non-judgmental place to tell yours; sharing problems, solutions, and making new friends with others affected by crime can make all the difference.**

**Canadian Families and Corrections Network realizes there are not enough Support Groups across Canada. All the groups we know about are listed on our website at [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org). If you know of others accepting new members, please let us know. Online groups and chat rooms may be an option too.**

**For those of you with no Support Group in your area, check out the 'Support Group Guide' on our website, a resource we created to assist an individual or community organization start such a group.**

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.

- Brené Brown

## COPING OVER TIME – FAMILY & FRIENDS

**Many people struggling with the effects of incarceration find that having their family members around to support them really helps. 37% of our family members say they feel very supported by the rest of their family and 48% reported they were somewhat supportive.**

*The impact...it's been devastating. It's consumed our whole family, our hearts, our family unit. You feel helpless because your family member's actions are out of your control. Yes, it's been very hard on the family unit but we've all stuck together.*

*I think its lots of frustration and lots of feeling of disappointment and certainly anger, at some points, as well. But I think in terms of coping with these, I would have to say other strong family relationships. Certainly my wife and have walked this journey together and, although we are at different points from time to time, we've worked very hard at being at the same point at any given time.*

*My babies' love's been a powerful fact to keep going with faith, love, hope and forgiveness.*

**What about friends with whom you can share your emotions and problems? 32% of family members report having very supportive friends and 56% say their friends are somewhat supportive. Unfortunately, some friends will let go as the journey continues.**

*Well, the social support in the community, I have to say, when this started happening there was a lot of media around it too, and I thought we were going to lose all of our customers, but it turned out to be the opposite. The community itself and the people here have been so fantastic and so supportive, and so understanding and compassionate. I've not ever experienced anything like it before.*

*Did not maintain all of my friends. "Cream rises to the top".*

**Your family member on the inside may be a great source of help too. Almost 80% of CFCN families tell us they have a lot of contact with their family member who is involved in criminal activity, 64% feel the relationship is very positive and 26% say it is somewhat positive. The majority thought their loved one understood the effects of his/her crime on their well-being.**

*We have a very solid ground of love in family. Not just between the whole family, but between the two of us. We've been through some tragedies, my son watched his father die. He's had tragedies in his life, things that he's shared...we've bonded through, not just as mother and son, but as people that are on this earth and we're survivors. He's not just my son, he's my best friend.*

*And how I've been able to cope with it is actually through my relationship with my husband. He's been excellent at helping, coaching me in terms of [...] how to leave things, just let it go. He's been really good on that. Being able to I guess actually coach me and working through some of these issues that I've had, that have come up.*

**Sometimes you have to take a chance in telling people about your journey.**

*I guess it was a New Year's resolution in 2011 to out myself, it is like I said secrets are bad, so I made a decision to seek out people I knew I could trust, who knew me, you know, as a person they knew me, and to tell them my situation. And when I started doing that, I started getting support.*

*I have got quite used to talking about it over the years now. The first year or two was harder, right, because I was so like, "How do I say this?" or "What can I...?" or, "How I explain this?" I would just say, "He's in jail, and he made the wrong choice", and I wouldn't get into it. Some people would ask, "Can I ask for what?", or something. But this is another thing that I found quite interesting, is that when I start opening up to people that way, it was amazing how many people would tell me something personal about somebody in their life or someone that they knew that, you know, so I thought, "Okay, there are other people dealing with this too."*

*The only thing that I have found in the last, I'm going to say maybe, 4 months or so is I've made another friend who visits her husband and he's also a lifer.*

**Even though it seems easier, family members tell us that keeping secrets about your loved one's incarceration can be incredibly isolating. Family and close friends offer a good support network, but some prefer to keep it from their more casual relationships.**

*I think the biggest difficulty is...having to be careful what I say to people because I don't want everyone that I know to know about it. The whole family knows about it and they're fine. They've accepted it, they know him and they've accepted it and they're supportive of him, but there are people, friends, that I have not told. I have one family member that's quite elderly and I haven't told her. So I have to be careful what I say, when I'm out and about and that's very difficult.*

*I live a double life. All my co-workers, because I moved in order to have anonymity, I live a double life. None of my co-workers or my friends or anyone know, really, the life I lead...that my husband is in jail. They all think that my husband works away, out west, in one of the oil fields or something. Everything is hidden.*

*You learn who to talk to and who not to talk to about issues in your family. Don't punish yourself by talking to people who aren't going to be helpful. What's the point?*



My family is my strength and my weakness.

- Aishwarya Rai Bachchan



## COPING OVER TIME - KNOWLEDGE

*One of the things they told me about the PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] component and constant flashes was because I didn't know the whole story. And the longer, little bits kind of wiggled and niggled at me and I tried to deal with them. They told me if I knew more information, it would actually help and they helped me gain that information. You know, like, there was actually a time where I had to ask for more information from the crown attorney than I actually needed for the case. But it helped me figure out, and once I knew, like, for example, where my husband was on a certain night, you know, for a series of events that now makes a lot of sense but did not at the time. When they could give me that information, I stopped fixating on those things. And being able to kind of break it down, it seemed counterproductive in a way, like finding out more information that is potentially hurtful is not necessarily the best thing for everyone, but they saw, for me, like I could not let it go. I was like, "Oh my God, why did that happen?" until I knew more information. So one of the biggest things for me was actually piecing that together, and doing so in a controlled, supportive way.*

*Generally, I cope with things very intellectually. My husband copes by withdrawing and I cope by starting to do as much research as I have time for. So I've read several criminology textbooks, I've read statements from mothers who have been through this. I have a list of more books like that I...that I want to read.*

*The most helpful thing for our family is educating ourselves. Having conversations about incarceration and what we are experiencing.*

**Sometimes, people feel stress because they do not know enough. They need answers to their questions to help them understand what has happened or is about to happen. If this is you, perhaps you need to know more about the crime committed and your loved one's participation in it. Or perhaps you need to know more about the process part – the court system, the criminal justice system, institutional rules and procedures or what you can do for your person inside.**

**Canadian Families and Corrections Network runs a toll-free bilingual telephone line at (888) 371-2326 where family members can call in to ask questions or get referrals to community resources.**

**We also offer many resources on our website and send out packages of information to families who have a loved one incarcerated. We offer information at the points of intake, incarceration and reintegration. We even have resources for children. Visit our website at [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org).**

**Other great organizations across Canada offer resources and help as well. Searching the internet or checking links on CFCN's website may help you find the information you need.**



## COPING OVER TIME – SELF CARE

*When you have someone and you lose him, it's like you lost part of your life. Whatever you do, it reminds you of him. Every person who looks like him, I think that's him. I got sick when he [my brother] went inside; I ended up in the hospital.*

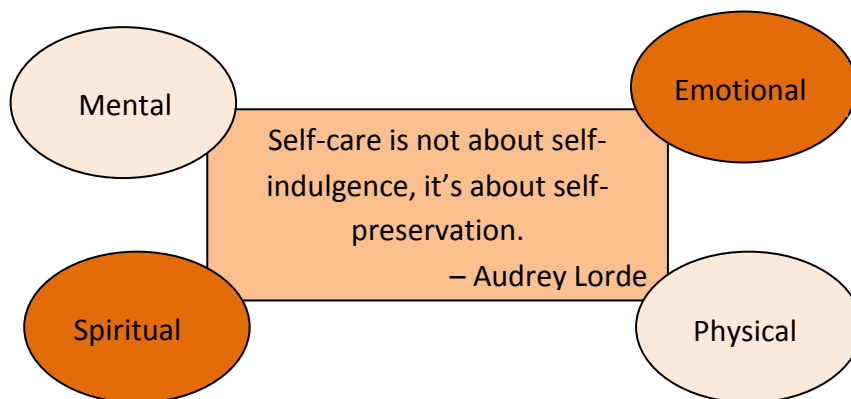
**Self-care is often one of the greatest challenges as we are consumed with the events of the justice system and the correctional journey. The following statements tell how some individuals look after themselves:**

*Well, you just try to cope the best way you can. I think a lot. For the most part, you just live one day a time, and sometimes that's even too great. Sometimes, in the night or things like that, I live minute to minute. I just try and get through one minute and then hope I can try and get through the next minute, and then the next minute, and then hopefully there has been enough time that's passed that I'll get tired enough or I'll go to sleep or something will happen, you know someone will call me or you know, something will snap me out of it. But coping is very, very difficult, extremely difficult.*

*Well...I cry, I have crying nights and try and get it out like that.*

*I actually went out and did things that would make me feel good and would make me happy. So I do a lot of hiking which helped a lot. I also ran, and I still do.*

*I have kind of got used to phoning and finding out what is out there to be help and things like that. I mean I have to, I just know I have to go on. I still have a daughter and I still have my son that I need to support while he is in prison and I knew that I would be of no use if I'm not healthy myself. That was kind of the driving force.*



**57% of our family members tell us they are worried about their incarcerated loved one. Contact with them, asking them how they are managing and learning more about corrections and their situation may help.**

**Family members are telling us self-care is important. Often, they feel there is nothing they can do to change the situation of their loved one and because of that stress is high. So you need to look after yourself to continue to work, live and emotionally be the best you can be. Family members have told us they use the following self-care techniques:**

Exercise – 47%

Religious practice / Prayer – 39%

Journaling / Writing – 40%

Meditation – 31%

*I bottled it all up. [...] And then I started writing again, kind of, you know, started getting all that emotion out, and all the feelings I had. The angst and the unhappiness and whatever, I was just letting it out.*

*I find that quiet reflection, prayer and sharing my feelings with supportive friends help me cope best when faced with overwhelming stress because of a loved one's incarceration. My faith and hope in God assure me that He is in charge of every part of my life and will bring my family together again one day.*

*I immediately quit using alcohol and drugs when this happened as they were the factors that led to the crime. I have since started walking the dog every day as this is something simple that I can do on my own and it gets me out of the house. In the last 6 months have started using a gym.*

*It is hard to keep thinking positively for us....considering our current situation but thinking positively has proved to be the best way to deal so far.*

*Spiritual beliefs which stress the essential goodness of all people, their capacity to change, and how all of us are broken at some level.*

**Try ideas that involve your senses (scented candle, hug your pet, listen to water, etc.) or:**

Breathe deeply for 5 minutes

Warm heating pad on neck / shoulders

Develop good eating habits

Watch a good movie

Listen to music / dance

Seek out humour

Stretch / Do yoga

Take a bubble bath

Read a good book

Be in nature / Stare at the stars

Relax with art / crafts

Give yourself a manicure

Socialize with family / friends

Volunteer / Help out a friend

Keep a gratitude journal

Positive thinking / Inner reflection

## COPING OVER TIME – PROFESSIONAL HELP

*So it's nothing you've ever prepared for. You prepare for things in your life for your children but when your son was little he never said, "When I grow up I want to be a criminal." That was never said, so you don't prepare for this, it's just a shock when it happens. And it shocks the whole family and before you can even...you know like when you know something's coming, you can prepare for the impact? But this you can't prepare for the impact, it just hits you.*

*I'm sad because this isn't something I would want for my daughter.*

*The biggest difficulty, I guess, from my own stand point, from a family perspective, not everyone saw it the same way, and in some ways I kind of blamed my husband for it, which for me, I had to sort of step back and just sort of act like a family unit and be supportive even though I have some feelings where perhaps we had given her more freedoms that she should have had, and I said, over the years, to my husband, we needed to curtail certain things and I wasn't necessarily getting the support. So I was a little bit angry.*

**Sometimes family members feel they need more than the help of their family, friends and a support group. They may find satisfaction from seeking professional assistance to handle issues such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical ailments, and money management to cope mentally and emotionally. Although they may not have the lived experience of having a loved one incarcerated, professionals are trained and can offer advice in their specific field.**

*The first counselor I saw was shortly after the crime happened. She was very good because they got me in very quickly. She had me do a few different exercises. One of them was writing down why I'm a good mother because that's one of the things I struggled with. I thought, "Oh, I failed as a mother because my son ended up in jail", which isn't the case, I mean I am not the perfect mother; I know that I wasn't a horrible mother. [...] Yes I think it helps.*

*I did a class about two years ago in cognitive behavior therapy and plus a couple of other classes that I took while I was on a list to get a counselor...anyway it is called cognitive behavior therapy and then the doctor who runs it, she does what is called a maintenance group. So I go to that twice a month and that really helps because it kind of connects you with other people who are struggling with mental health issues and you kind of get a reminder of the tools you can use. So I find that very helpful.*

*My husband and I sought the help and support of a marital counselor when our son was arrested and [held] in custody. He was a very caring therapist who understood how confused we were to be suddenly in this 'Alice in Wonderland' world. He helped us to support each other and listen to each other's concerns with love and respect.*

*Church pastor and elders were there for me. Could talk openly with them. They prayed for me a lot and gave counsel whenever I asked.*

*We engaged the services of a number of professionals in the counseling / therapy field, both individually and as a couple. We found their support and guidance invaluable as we dealt with the initial shock and trauma, as well as occasionally (as needed) in the months and years that followed as we moved through transitional times (release from incarceration, reunification of our family, etc.).*

**Ideas for professional help may include:**

Family Doctor	Counselor
Psychologist	Psychiatrist
Mental Health Clinic	Naturopath
Therapy Classes	Self-esteem Classes
Anger Management Classes	Grief Counseling
Financial Counseling	Social Worker
Parenting Classes	Marital Counseling

*Well, just limit the amount of money she gets and leave it at that. You set guidelines for yourself and don't go beyond those guidelines. Rather than every time she asks for money, being able to do it, now I've had to basically say, "Okay, this is the amount I'm going to give you over x period of time and that's all you're going to get." That way it doesn't impact me like it was before. It wasn't where she was putting me in financial ruins, mind you, but it still was a strain, you know, that there would be times that she was asking me for money and I shouldn't really give it to her but I did. And those kinds of times are no longer there. She only gets a certain amount and that's it. So I've set guidelines for myself which is how I've coped with it from a financial standpoint.*

*She's [the naturopath's] a very caring person. She knew right away how to treat my skin problem, with a simple remedy of coconut oil, and the whole thing is all cleared up. That was a worry. I'd had that before this issue, but it got worse with this issue, with the crime. Yes, so she got that on the mend and she's looking into other things that may be bothering me.*

*My counselor helped me address the issue of co-dependency in my relationship with my son and helped me to let go.*

*It was an enormous shock and it was beyond, oh, anything I thought could ever happen in our family. I was quite depressed from when I heard about it and my son stayed with us for a year while he was out on bail. So that was a very trying, a full year, to the date. And it resulted in my having to get some psychiatric counseling, just to get through it. And I'm still in shock about it. Every time I go to visit him, I'm in shock. And when I go there...every time I go there, I still say, "This can't be real", but I know it is real.*

## COPING OVER TIME – CHILDREN

*The affect it had on my family was pretty great. My kids were made targets at school, they were bullied, they were stigmatized, basically they were 'persona non grata' in the community, no one wanted anything to do with them. They felt alone, they felt isolated. No one seemed to want to help them. They were pretty bad off.*

*My son has been experimenting with self harm by biting himself; they have problems being bullied at school and on the bus. The kids in our neighbourhood are told to stay away. They hate their father for leaving us, they see a psychologist for behavioural problems and they are barely passing school. All 3 children have been pulled from afterschool activities they enjoy like hockey, dance, swimming and gymnastics. We cannot afford it and they feel as though they are being punished for something but they don't understand so their self esteem has been lost completely.*

*You don't even think about the impact of say, my brother's little girl. But my niece was [my ex-husband's] niece and she was a flower girl at our wedding, 3 weeks before this stuff happened. And she, you know, at 5, wasn't allowed to talk about her uncle in front of me because she knew that that would be upsetting.*

**It is quite a challenge to help children understand and cope with having a parent or loved one who is inside. No matter what the age, they struggle to understand what is happening, how their loved one is coping inside, and if things have changed for them in the parent-child relationship. Families are trying to help their children in many ways.**

*I'm sure there's ways that she feels, that she doesn't necessarily divulge to me, cause, you know, I'm Mom. But I know she sees a counselor at school, so I'm sure anything that I don't get, she gets out there.*

*[We] keep a picture of Dad and the family and we light a candle every time we come into the house. To my children, when the candle goes, Dad's home.*

*The kids...trying to not be a grieving mother when I had a one month old child and transfer that misery to her, you know? [...] So I tried to keep the family life in some semblance of normal.*

*Speaking as someone who was a child at the time of this offence, I felt a lot of shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Now that I am older and have spent time researching this field, and using inner-reflection and open communication with my uncle, these feelings have subsided. However, other members of my family (siblings/cousins) who were also children have not dealt with the experience much if at all, and it has certainly had a negative life-long effect on some.*

*We do phone calls, every day, where he sometimes gets to talk to the kids. He kind of writes letters to the kids, but not so much, he more so, the younger one, colours her pictures. He sends her pictures and stuff and she's got them all hanging on her wall. She's got a big collage of pictures that he's coloured her.*

*Two children are actually young adults in university - both have sought counseling through their respective universities. With fairly good outcomes.*

*Our 13 year old [...] She's not really big on sharing her emotions. I obviously don't hide anything from her because, she's 13. She's not stupid. She knows what happened, what goes on and, you know, I kind of keep an open approach to that with her and when things go wrong inside, I kind of explain 'well, this happened and that happened' and she kind of [...] we kind of talk about it more.*

*My son has insisted her last name be changed to her mother[']s maiden name to avoid further consequences to her.*

*What we do, prior to incarceration...we are a First Nations family and we pulled together and called a family meeting which is a circle we had in our home, with Aunties and Uncles and Grandparents and Dad and myself, my children, Aunts and Uncles. And we went around the circle, the children we included in this, just to say what we are feeling and what our wishes were for our loved one, you know, and how we were going to cope and so on and so forth. And that's how we're coping, on a family level. I actually go with my children, once a week, so we sit down, just the five of us, even our 3 year old and you know, how we're feeling, how our week went. We include Dad in this, so we bring a picture of him and he sits in his spot and we have a candle going, symbolic to us that he is present.*

*I also believe that my children have seen firsthand what it means to work through challenges as a family, and to respond with grace and patience and forgiveness.*

**Some of the comments families tell us their children say include:**

*She thinks he's in a corner with no food. It was his birthday yesterday. She said, "Can he come out to celebrate?" I said, "No they don't allow that."*

*She's asking me "Is there bars? Does she have her own bed? How does she go to the bathroom?"*

*Daddy you make the sun shine brite in the morning and when will you snuggle me?*

**Children yearn for their parents to return home, do not understand what prison is like and look to adults for answers. CFCN's resource 'Telling the Children - How to Talk to Children about a Loved One's Incarceration and Strengthen Parent-Child Relationships', available on our website at [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org), is meant to provide assistance to parents, caregivers and teachers around open, honest incarceration conversations with children.**

**You can also contact us to obtain a copy of our storybook; 'Jeffrey Goes to Jail', recognized by the United Nations, about the correctional visiting process and drug strategy.**

*Love is the best support.*



## COPING OVER TIME – OTHER IDEAS

**Here are some other suggestions from our family members as to what they have found helpful over time:**

*We, I, I should say, write letters. He has a hard time sitting down concentrating to write a letter, just being in that situation. But yes, I think that maybe that's part of my coping, you know? I write to him every night. Every night before I go to bed, I kind of write down my day, just 'what I did today' or 'this is how things went', or 'these are things that are bothering me'. So maybe that is my coping, that's how I get things out, you know? Put them on paper and then they don't fester.*

*Keeping in touch with like-minded and empathetic individuals, including staff and personnel in the prison.*

*Advocacy for improvement of services and programs for inmates, and speaking out about the negative impacts of incarceration and punitive laws and removal of funding from remedial and rehabilitative programs.*

*I'm grateful that I was able to help any people. And I would be more than happy if anyone else called me and told me, "Oh my goodness, my son or my daughter or my husband is going to the penitentiary", you know, "What can I expect?", "I know you're son's been there, can you help me?" My goodness, yes, I can save you an awful lot of, you know, time and energy, and try to demean that stress a little bit, bring it down, because you're so full of anxiety as it is.*

**Family members often ask CFCN about correctional processes, visiting and the ion scanner. They feel that when they want to express their feelings, ask questions or explain what happened, it is important to write a letter, to attach to their loved one's file in prison. They say it allows them to clearly and concisely present their thoughts in their own words, and would be better than expressing it on a phone call, which may or may not be documented.**

*There was a woman who called me from my area - her son was inside the institution too. I told her to travel with us and go visit him as much as you can. I said, "Hopefully your influence will change it around. Try to be there as much as you can. It might change their attitude - take them away from crime and try to turn them around."*

Draw in wisdom from others through inspirational books?

*This experience has taught me to value others more than I did before, appreciate the good moments and has helped me realize what matters and that through helping others I can find healing.*



## COPING OVER TIME – HOW TO HELP FAMILIES

**If you are reading this and want to help a family member or friend affected by crime, what can you do? If you are the person whose loved one is inside and you want to encourage your support network to help you, what can you say? We've outlined some ideas that friends and family members can help with, from taking an active role in the support of the incarcerated person, to just being there, to educating yourself, to watching what you post on the internet.**

*Like I said before, my church, and my friends, my family, I have a huge support group. I actually send out...it's funny I call all of them Team George. And I send out regular emails, at least a couple of times a month. It's probably a good list of at least 50 people on my e-mail list who have agreed to support George and I. So I send out these regular e-mails updating them on how George is doing, how they can be encouraging him, reminding like if his birthday is coming up, send him cards. So, yes, I keep them really in the loop of what is going on with George so I think that helps. [George's name has been changed.]*

*Encourage me to detach but remain supportive.*

*In terms of social support, I had a running partner, at the time, who got me out. She would just call and say are you ready to go, and so we would go. I had no job, no nothing. I mean everything was crumbling around me but I could count on my running partner to call me and say it is time to go running, and by the way there is a hike organized next weekend, can you come? She really, really helped me. I don't know, she was being very nice, and she was just being friendly, and stuff, I don't know if she realized the impact she had on my mental health. I really was able to keep going, knowing that I had at least that steady thing to do because otherwise I was lost.*

*A prayer for Dad.*

*We also have a circle once per month with extended family so that we can all write words of encouragement to our loved one and support one another on this journey*

*My children have been given the opportunity to watch us support a family member in need. They have had a relatively positive experience regarding their uncle. They understand that [their] uncle did wrong and that Mom and Dad don't like what he did but that we love him no matter what.*

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.

- Mother Teresa

**Family members don't want to be judged. They feel they are innocent and their loved one's involvement in crime is not something they chose to participate in or perhaps even knew about.**

*My small group from church has been extremely supportive and understanding of my experience with dealing with a loved one's incarceration. They allow me to vent at the injustices of the Correctional system; sympathize with the difficulties of being separated from him; and provide helpful guidance and assistance when dealing with the numerous issues and challenges of being involved with a federally incarcerated husband.*

*Their close friends. I feel ashamed to say that I was in such shock, panic and under such duress, that I did not see to the needs of my other children (young adults). They ended up fending for themselves. How awful for them. It is only years later that I have been able to say to them, "I am sorry I was not a parent for you during that time, it must have been horrible for you." They relied on good friends to get them through.*

*They prayed for me a lot.*

*Becoming engaged and proactive in the justice system.*

*It's just mostly how everything is presented in the media. And when there's all these blogs out there now where people can respond to what's presenting in the media, and it's terrible, you know, what people comment on and you don't even know the person and yet you are getting all of these things, like that person should be basically thrown in jail for life, or hurt, or you know, all sorts of very negatives. You still get some people that say, "Come on, you know, until they have their day in court, you know, you shouldn't be saying these negative things." But people we don't even know, just from what they read in the paper or heard on the news, are saying all these negatives and it stays on the internet. It's there for life. [...] Like, when I look my name up now, on the internet, what do I get? The newspaper article or the article whereby the day the SWAT team showed up and the court case. That's my name. I'm a Real Estate agent. So, you want to talk about an impact? If somebody in town is querying my name, what are they going to get? They're getting that this has happened to my family.*

*Felt like tough love lessons for me was what I was getting. Don't know what I wanted, but I just needed someone to understand how I felt not what I needed to do.*

*CFCN and other support groups need to keep reaching out and being there for us. I will do all I can to spread the word to other families dealing with incarceration.*

The human capacity for burden is like bamboo - far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance.

— Jodi Picoult

*I feel that I'm like Alice in Wonderland, I've fallen down into a place where I don't know about, where the words are all different, where I don't know what's true, what's not true, who to trust, who to not trust. I'm trying to figure out did I not know my son, or do I know my son. I'm just confused about everything. I feel completely heartbroken. I feel in despair about the loss of life of his victim. I just feel like...nobody in our family has ever hurt anyone before and now suddenly somebody's dead. So absolutely gobsmacked.*

*Well, I mean, it's very, very, difficult. Just because someone does something wrong, you don't stop loving them. You can't make yourself stop loving a person, no matter what they do, whether it's good or whether it's bad. So, as their journey escalates, you're taken along on their journey too. And no matter how bad it is or how good it is, you are part of it. So it affects every facet of your life. It affects you in every way.*

*So it's nothing you've ever prepared for. You prepare for things in your life for your children but when your son was little he never said, "When I grow up I want to be a criminal." That was never said, so you don't prepare for this, it's just a shock when it happens. And it shocks the whole family and before you can even...you know like when you know something's coming, you can prepare for the impact? But this you can't prepare for the impact, it just hits you.*

Canadian Families and Corrections Network  
Box 35040 Kingston ON K7L 5S5  
Toll free information and referral line: 1-888-371-2326  
Email: [national@cfcn-rcafd.org](mailto:national@cfcn-rcafd.org)  
Web site: [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org)



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