



What the Young People Say

During a two-day Listening Session with youth affected by parental incarceration which was held in Washington DC, the group helped develop a Tip Sheet for Service Providers Working with Children and Families of the incarcerated. The Listening Session brought together 19 youth, ages 15 to 23, with a diverse range of experiences to discuss the challenges they had during their parent's incarceration and their ideas for how the government could better support them and their families. Two former Seedling mentees were included.

The information shared on this tip sheet both validates the work that we do as mentors to children who face the challenges of having a parent who is incarcerated, but also serves as a reminder to keep doing what we do and how we do it. Here are some excerpts from that sheet.

From the youth: What you should know:

- *We rely on our own inner strength.*
- *We often grow up too soon taking on responsibilities.*
- *We love our parents, even though they have made mistakes. We miss them during:*
 - *Big events like having the parent there for holidays and graduation*
 - *Small activities like having the parent there to help with homework and going to our sporting event*
 - *Everyday opportunities for having parent as a role model*
- *We are misjudged by many and negatively judged because of our parent(s) or our parent's actions.*
- *We are sometimes told we will turn out like our parent(s), and we are constantly fighting against and running from that judgment.*
- *We have different experiences than other youth whose parent is absent for another reason like divorce:*
 - *Not being able to pick up the phone and talk to our parent any time we want*
 - *Not being able to hug our parent during a visit*
 - *Being judged differently and feeling shame and stigma because of those judgments*
- *We have different experiences even from each other.*
- *We are not different from other youth in that we are young people, too, with the same needs and wants:*
 - *To be loved*
 - *To have support*
 - *To be successful*
 - *To have friends*
- *We do not have control over the situation, which is difficult.*

It is a powerful message that reminds us of the enormous gift we give to our mentees when we provide them that time each week when they have our undivided attention and just get to be a kid, for being their sounding board, for believing in and supporting them, and most of all, just being crazy about them and letting them see their value and worth reflected in our eyes.