

Research Digest

Visitation and Family Relationships

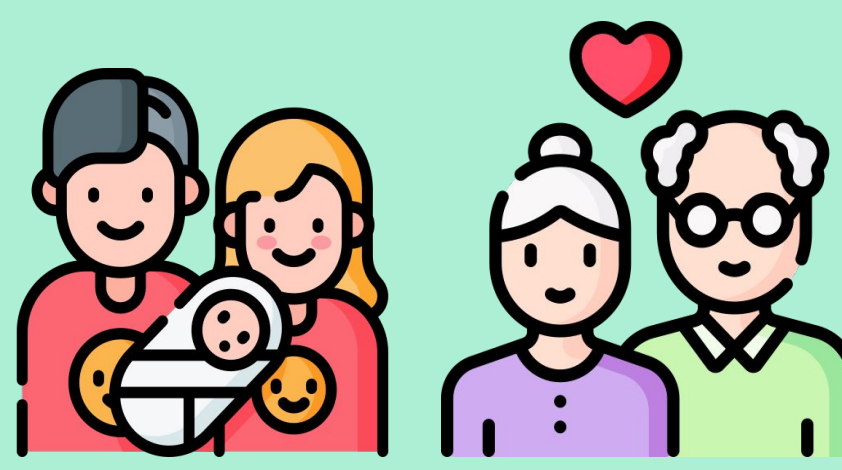
By Gwendaline Ng, Loh Eng Hao

Family visits are a lesser explored resource that help offenders build strong healthy relationships

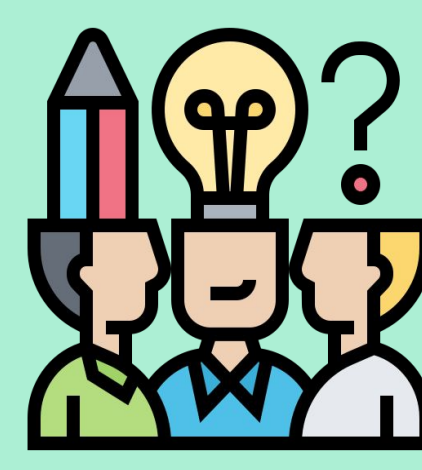
Healthy relationships foster a hope for the future and enhance social capital.



Feeling supported



Motivation to commit to prosocial roles



Exert positive influence on beliefs and values



Help with material needs

Fruitful visits can help offenders build **healthy relationships with family members.**

Family visits can positively impact offenders and prisons

1 Coping in Prison

Buffer offenders from depressive symptoms due to isolation and adjustment to prison life³.



2 Reduce Offender Misconduct

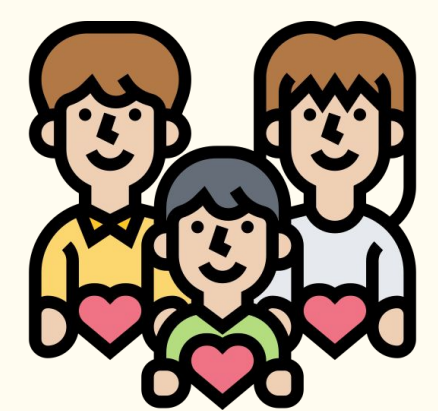
Consistent visits significantly reduce misconduct in general and major violent acts of misconduct^{4,5}.



3 Rebuild Support Networks

Allocated time for offenders to reconcile and improve relationships with family⁶.

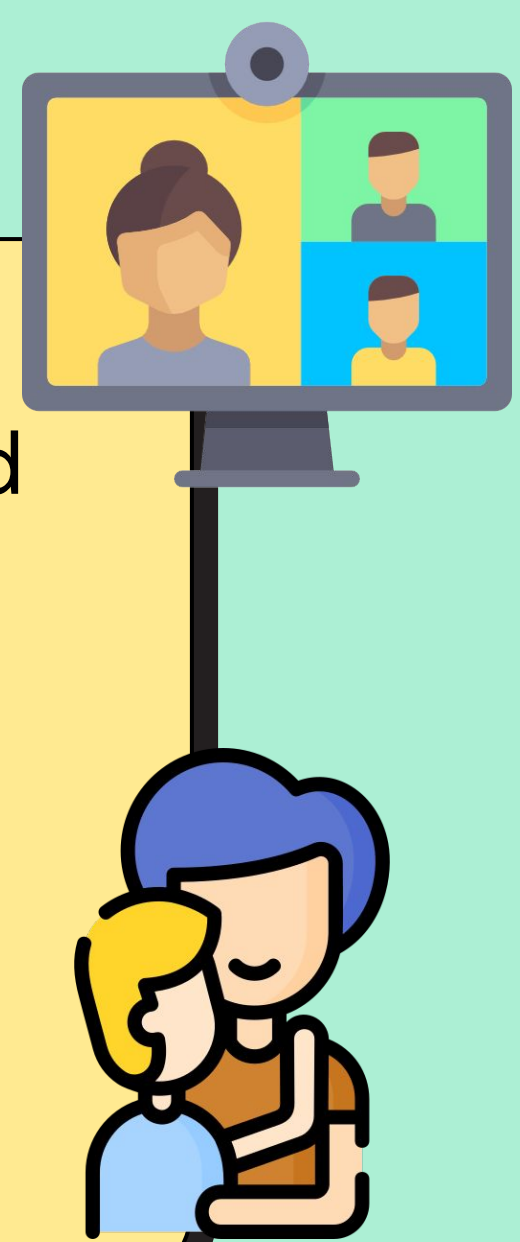
The quality of relationships between offender and family is an important consideration to rehabilitative outcomes.



A Case Study on Video Visits: Project Hope

Project Hope is an initiative in collaboration with MOE schools to **facilitate more meaningful conversations** between children and incarcerated parents with the help of school counsellors or teachers.

Guided communication by the counsellors/school teachers can help parents effectively establish more concrete prosocial roles and involve parents in their children's growth.



However, video visits should aim to complement in-person visits and not replace them^{7,8}.

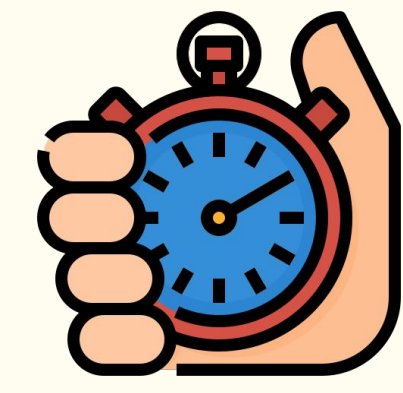
Some food for thought about family visits

Is family contact time sufficient?

Currently, inmates are allowed 1 hour of family visits per month.

Can we leverage technology to **increase family contact time**?

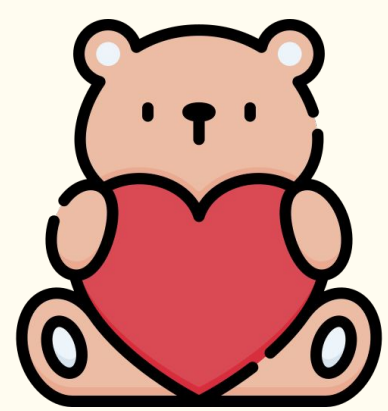
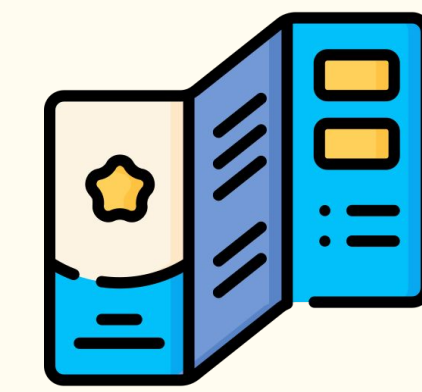
E.g. Voice recorded messages to children



How can we improve visitation experience?

Provide guidance to **facilitate reconciliatory conversations and interactions** between family visitors and offenders.

E.g. Informational brochures, daily conversations



Provide a **child-friendly environment** and prepare children for **what to expect when interacting with parents** during visits.

E.g. Informational videos on what to expect during visits

¹ Gust, L. V. (2012). Can policy reduce the collateral damage caused by the criminal justice system?: Strengthening social capital in families and communities. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(2), 174-180.
² Fasah, S. (2018). Pat-Downs But No Hugs: Why Prison Visitation Protocol Should be Changed to Help Keep Familial Structures Intact. *Family Court Review*, 56, 135-149.
³ Cochran, J. C., Mears, D. P., Bales, W. D., & Stewart, E. A. (2016). Spatial Distance, Community Disadvantage, and Racial and Ethnic Variation in Prison Inmate Access to Social Ties. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(2), 220-254.
⁴ Cochran, J. C. (2012). The ties that bind or the ties that break: Examining the relationship between visitation and prisoner misconduct. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(5), 433-440.

⁵ Reidy, T., & Sorenson, J. (2020). Visitation and Misconduct Among Maximum-Security Inmates. *The Prison Journal*, 100(4), 447-467.
⁶ McCarthy, D., & Adams, M. (2019). Can Family-Prisoner Relationships Ever Improve During Incarceration? Examining the Primary Caregivers of Incarcerated Young Men. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 59(2), 378-395.
⁷ Murdoch, D. J., & King, L. L. (2020). 'Not feeling like a caged animal': prisoner perceptions of a remote video visitation system. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 43(2), 212-227.
⁸ Duwe, G., & McNealey, S. (2021). Just as good as the real thing? the effects of prison video visitation on recidivism. *Crime and Delinquency*, 67(4), 475-497.