

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/why-kids-in-detention-deserve-access-to-their-siblings>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Last week, in celebration of National Siblings Day, every social media channel was flooded with beautiful pictures of users with their brothers and sisters.

People credited their siblings with their personal successes, thanking them for all the support and fun over the years, and for sticking with them through thick and thin. This week, representatives at Veras Center on Youth Justice [presented at the Annie E. Casey Foundations Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative \(JDAI\)'s annual conference](#). We were there with one mission: to encourage facilities that detain kids (the juvenile versions of jail and prison) to [give kids access to their families](#), particularly their siblings.

We shared lessons we learned from our work in Sedgwick County, Kansas, where 149 visits that would have been denied to kids have been approved since the beginning of 2017. This is due to the countys new definition of family and a revised visitation policy. Unfortunately, Kansas is an outlier. During our presentation, we heard people who ran detention facilities say they dont allow siblings under 12 because they just cant understand what is going on anyway, and others who dont allow siblings *over* 12, because they are probably also involved in crime.

But a stint in jail is arguably one of the toughest times young people can go through, which means they need all the support they can get. Even if a detention stay is short (the average time kids stay in detention is about three days), its still a scary and stressful experience. Being able to hug their brothers and sisters or get their advice is crucial to reducing the trauma of being ripped out of their homes. Reflecting on National Siblings Day, in a juvenile justice context, reminds us that if we had ever been caught doing the delinquent acts we may have done as kids, we would be denied the support of some of the closest people to us.

Denying youth opportunities to connect and spend time with their siblings goes against the research that says [kids who get more visits do better](#). Visits improve the likelihood that youth will behave more responsibly while detained, which improves the safety of others they are locked up with, and reduces the possibility of recidivism when they return home. The example of Sedgwick County proves that giving kids access to their siblings can only help, not hinder, their progress while detained.

Hopefully, the presentation at JDAI will give other agencies the confidence that they, too, can change. With additional help from Vera, these facilities can follow in the footsteps of Kansas and give kids in detention the support, and familial love, that they deserve.

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