

Children Who Have a Family Member in Prison

Briefing Note

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NOTTINGHAM CITY
Safeguarding
Children BOARD

Introduction

It is estimated that in the UK 160,000 children each year have a parent or close family member i.e. sibling, step parent or family friend in prison. Despite this there are no definitive statistics of the number of children who have a parent in prison; who they are; what their needs are; what happens to them when their parents are imprisoned; who takes over their care; or what support they receive.

Many professionals only discover that a child they are working with has a parent in prison through the local paper, from other parents or children, or from gossip. In some cases no-one may find out at all. This lack of identification could mean that children with critical support needs may slip, unnoticed, through the net.

Aims of this Briefing Note

- To raise awareness and understanding of the needs of children who have a family member in prison and the issues which they may be facing
- To provide information and guidance for those working with children who have a 'family' member in prison
- To provide information of support available for children who have a parent or family member in prison

What are the risks to children of prisoners not achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes?

Be Healthy

- Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems compared to their peers.
- The sudden removal of a parent from the family creates feelings of separation and loss and may affect the emotional health of the child.

Stay Safe

- Parental imprisonment can lead children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing
- Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment, and children are often subject to unstable care arrangements
- During the consultation with parents in prison bullying of their children was the greatest concern. Several parents also voiced their concerns that their own children had bullied other children
- Discrimination from members of the local community can have major implications for the children of parents in prison
- Children of parents in prison may be exposed to substance misuse by family members and their peers

Enjoy & Achieve

- Children of prisoners may experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers
- Some families choose not to inform schools that a pupil has a parent in prison. Yet, having a parent in prison can lead to poor attendance, lack of support and isolation for the young person
- Children of prisoners may have to take on more responsibility in the household or take on a caring role
- Children of prisoners may have higher levels of anxiety or worry that prevent them from participating fully in learning

Make a Positive Contribution

- Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers
- 65% of boys with a convicted parent, go on to offend

Achieve Economic Wellbeing

- Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption
- 72% of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison
- Costs of visiting the parent in prison may prevent the child from visiting their parent

Guidance for Agencies and Professionals Working with Children with Imprisoned Parents.

Recognising the Impact

Children of prisoners can potentially face significant and recurring disruptions to their home and family life at various stages throughout the parent's involvement with the criminal justice system. These disruptions are likely to trigger changes in a child's behaviour and self-esteem.

Manifestations can include:

- Bedwetting
- Nightmares
- Temper tantrums
- Aggressive behaviour
- Withdrawal
- Refusing to go to school

These changes may begin or become more apparent in relation to any one of a number of stages relating to imprisonment such as:-

- The arrest of a 'family' member
- Finding out about the imprisonment of a 'family' member
- A visit to a 'family' member in prison
- Special events involving their 'family' member in prison, for example their birthday, mother's day or father's day
- A home visit by a 'family' member from prison
- The release of a 'family' member from prison.

In particular, teachers report that changes in behaviour and performance become more acute around the time of a prison visit.

Designated Person/ Named Lead

In the interests of best practice it may be useful for agencies to identify a designated person/ named lead with responsibility for this group of children. It may be helpful if the named person for Safeguarding undertakes this role as they should have received training in dealing with sensitive issues and be experienced in working in multi-agency environments.

The Designated Person/ Named Lead would:

- Liaise with other relevant staff from statutory & voluntary agencies on a 'need to know' basis
- Provide a point of contact agencies in order to share information
- Liaise with the family and seek their consent to provide additional support for the child as necessary
- Promote the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to identify the needs of the child and call a Team Around the Child Meeting where necessary

- Arrange for copies of reports and other information for parents to be sent to the parent in prison if the agency has been informed that a child has a parent in prison
- Monitor the health, development, achievements and behaviour of the child with a parent in prison
- Keep appropriate and current records with reference to information sharing guidance

Organisations which can offer support to the families of Prisoners

- **Action for Prisoners' Families** www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk – Action for Prisoners' Families works for the benefit of prisoners' and offenders' families by representing the views of families and those who work with them.
- **AFFECT** – AFFECT provides services for the families of serious offenders and offers support groups to families in the south of England. www.affect.org.uk
- **First time in Prison** – www.firsttimeinprison.co.uk this website was written by lawyers for individuals (and families) who are facing a first prison sentence.
- **Inside Time** – www.insidetime.org.uk – this website gives visiting and other information about every UK prison.
- **Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust)** – www.prisonadvice.org.uk provides useful information on visiting and how visitors' centres can help families.
- **Prisoners' Family Voices** is a web-based community which gives family members the opportunity to talk to each other. <http://prisonersfamiliesvoices.blogspot.com>
- **Offenders' Families Helpline 0808 808 2003** info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk
www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk
- **Prisoners' Families and Friends Service 0808 808 3444** info@pffs.org.uk
www.pffs.org.uk
- **SHARP (Support Help and Advice for Relatives of Prisoners) 01743 245365** for free help, advice and support.