

Voicing the needs of families affected by imprisonment

families  
outside



# Supporting Prisoners' Families

**What can schools do?**

**“No-one explained anything. I knew he was getting kept in but I don’t know where. Who can I ask?”**

**Jason, 12**

**“I want my dad to come out and I really miss him”**

**Gemma, 8**

**“Some people at my school found out, people my own age, they would keep away from me”**

**Mark, 14**

**“I felt sad when my mum was in jail and I cried”**

**Jennifer, 9**

# Introduction



## **Do you know a child who has a parent or close relative in prison?**

In every community and school there will, at some point, be a child or young person with a parent in prison. Imprisonment affects an estimated 27,000 children in Scotland annually and, in many cases, the school and other organisations concerned with the child may not even know that a parent is in prison. Schools play a key role in ensuring that children reach their full potential and that the outcomes for Getting It Right For Every Child are met. This leaflet offers information and help to schools and teachers so they can better support prisoners' families and children.

**7% of children live through the imprisonment of a parent during their time at school.**

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**There are 2½ times as many children of prisoners as there are children in care.**

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**More children in Scotland each year experience a parent's imprisonment than a parent's divorce.**

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**60% of all women in prison have children.**

Children affected by imprisonment often experience high levels of trauma and stigma which in turn can have a negative impact on their learning. They are a vulnerable group of children who will benefit from support in reaching their academic potential.

## Key Facts



### **Be aware of the issues facing prisoners' families:**

Imprisonment can be a traumatic experience for families, and its impact is often significant and enduring. Children may have been witness to a parent's arrest, there may be significant changes in who is caring for them and, in some cases, children themselves take on a caring role at home. It is also important to be aware that children may not have been told their parent or relative is in prison even though the school has been informed.

Children need to feel that they are listened to and understood.

Listening to a child, offering reassurance and trying to understand things from their point of view can help them cope with the situation. Be non-judgmental and respect confidentiality where appropriate, but follow your school's information sharing protocols.

## **Children who have a relative in prison may feel:**

**WORRY** that other family members may be taken away too

**SHAME** about why their relative is in prison

**ANGER** with their relative for leaving them, or with the authorities for taking him away

**EMBARRASSMENT** by what their friends will think or say

**CONFUSION** about what will happen next

**FEAR** of asking questions or talking about their relative

**SADNESS** that the family has changed

**GRIEF** because they are missing their relative and all they did for and with them

**RELIEF** if there had been a lot of rows or arguments

**GUILT** if they feel they are somehow to blame

**BURDEN** if they feel they have to keep the imprisonment a secret

**WORTHLESSNESS** – low self-esteem often follows on from these other feelings and children of prisoners are more likely to develop mental health problems

# Schools and Teachers

## **Schools and teachers can:**

- ensure that all staff are aware and trained in how to deal with issues around imprisonment;
- be a community that is aware and supportive of children affected by imprisonment – a ‘safe space’ where children and their carers can share what is going on;
- actively build positive relationships with families affected by imprisonment and help carers to access additional forms of support;
- provide information for children and families affected (posters, leaflets, helpline numbers);
- liaise with partner agencies (sharing information appropriately and sensitively whilst bearing in mind the family’s right to confidentiality);

**“I liked visiting mum with my teacher; it helped me, and it was good for mum ‘cause she knew what was happening.” (Child of prisoner)**

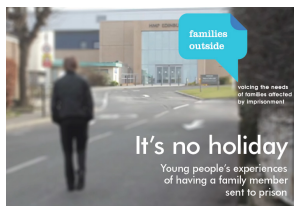
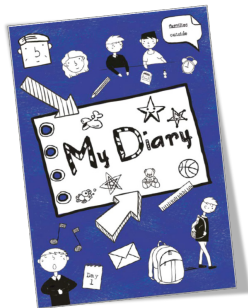


- keep the parent in prison informed (copies of school reports, newsletters, phone calls, visits if possible etc.) in liaison with outside carers and prison staff (e.g. Family Contact Officers);
- actively seek to reduce bullying by incorporating issues around prison, crime, blame and punishment into the curriculum (e.g. Personal & Social Education, Modern Studies, Citizenship);
- authorise visits to prison on school days and offer support to children following these visits;
- encourage on going contact (copies of work, pictures, photos from trips etc.) between the child and the parent in prison; and
- consider in-school support groups in areas where there are concentrated numbers of affected families.

**“I like being able to speak with my son’s  
teacher and be able to help with his education.”  
(Imprisoned mother)**

# Further information

Families Outside has produced a range of resources aimed at supporting children and young people, helping explain what happens when a relative is sent to prison.



For more information visit [www.familiesoutside.org.uk/research-publications](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/research-publications) and [www.familiesoutside.org.uk/families-stories](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/families-stories)

You can also phone our Support & information Helpline on **0800 254 0088**



Families Outside can provide access to a wide range of reports and documents which address the impact of imprisonment on children and families. These can be downloaded from our website: **[www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)**

**Teachers might find the following publications of use:**

- Perspectives of Children and Young People with a Parent in Prison (March 2010)
- The Role of Schools in Supporting Families Affected by Imprisonment (September 2012)
- In Brief publication: The Role of Schools in Supporting Families Affected by Imprisonment (October 2012)

We can also provide CPD training to school staff. Contact 0131 557 9800 for further details.

## National Support:

Families Outside Support & Information Helpline .....	0800 254 0088
Parentline Scotland .....	0800 028 2233
Childline .....	0800 11 11
Scottish Child Law Centre Advice Line .....	0131 667 6333
Child Law Centre Under 18s Helpline .....	0800 328 8970
Scottish Commissioner for Children & Young People (SCYPP) .....	0800 019 1179
NSPCC 24-hr Child Protection Confidential Helpline .....	0808 800 5000
Assisted Prison Visits Unit (for financial assistance with travel to prisons) .....	0300 063 2100

## Local Contacts:

Local Children & Families Social Work Departments

– contact details can be found online or in the telephone Directory



**Families Outside Support & Information Helpline**

**0800 254 0088**

**Email: [support@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:support@familiesoutside.org.uk)**

**Text service: text **Famout** followed by your message to 60777**

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