

# What's the story?



**What happens when a relative  
is sent to prison**

**A booklet for young people aged 12-16**

families  
outside

voicing the needs  
of families affected  
by imprisonment

This booklet is for young people of high school age (12-16) who may have questions or are looking for a little more information on what happens when someone is arrested, appears at court or goes to prison.

Young people who experience the imprisonment of a parent or close relative may find it difficult to talk about, not only with the family group, but also with outsiders. You will want to understand what has happened, what is happening and what will happen, if you are to cope with being separated from that person.

However, very little information is available for young people in their own right. Families Outside produced a DVD, *It's No Holiday*, which discussed the impact that imprisonment had on some young people, in their own words. We then realised it would be helpful to put something similar in writing. Although everyone's experience is different, some common themes come out about how having someone close to you in prison can affect you.

This booklet tells the story of Jenny and how she feels when her brother goes to prison. We hope it will also answer some of the questions you may have and, where you have more questions, will guide you to additional sources of information.

## Contents

- Jenny's Journey
- Arrest
- Waiting (pre-trial period)
- In prison
- Coming Home (release)
- Where to go for help
- Acknowledgements

The booklet is divided into sections to allow you to dip into the parts most relevant to you. Lots of research has been carried out with families affected by imprisonment, with **facts** from this research noted throughout the text; **quotes** from young people themselves who have had a relative in prison; and **explanations** of some terms which may be new to you. The booklet also highlights some **feelings** you may have at different times of the process – although everyone is different. It also includes a section on other agencies that may be able to offer help and support.

## Jenny's Journey

Jenny's dad left the family early one morning and didn't come home. Her mother found it difficult to make ends meet, and things were really hard – there was very little money coming into the house although Jenny's older brother Mike helped when he could. Jenny's mum struggled to keep her job and look after the house.



Then Jenny's mum got sick and lost her job. Mike was becoming more frustrated and one night he went out of the house and didn't come back for days. Jenny had to look after her younger brother and sister but was very worried and didn't know what to do. When Mike did come back he had started to use drugs to hide from all their problems.

It wasn't long before things got even worse. Mike got involved with people who encouraged his drug use and, in an effort to get some money, he soon became involved with people that Jenny didn't like. She was also upset by her brother's strange moods, but at least there was some money coming into the house. Jenny knew that her brother loved her and her brother and sister, and thought everything would be okay.

But one day, when Jenny got home from school, the police were in the hall, and her mother was crying...

“...we were all upset...  
and we were just like,  
what's going on?  
And we never knew  
what was going  
to happen...”

## Arrest

Jenny didn't understand what was going on, except that her brother had been arrested and taken to the police station. Her mother was so upset that she wasn't able to answer any of Jenny's questions or even deal with her brother and sister.

You may be **upset** at having witnessed a relative being arrested; be **worried** about what to tell other people; **angry** that no-one is telling you anything; or even **relieved** at what has happened.

If there is enough evidence, the person will be charged and may be released on bail until the trial - or they may be remanded to prison.

The family may find this a difficult time.



There may have to be changes in where you live; perhaps you will move to be with a relative or family friend. For some young people there may not be anyone to look after them and they will have to be placed with a foster family. There may be changes about where you go to school, there could be interest from the local newspapers or there may be financial difficulties.



### ARREST

Arrest – this means being held by the police. When you are arrested your freedom is taken away and you become the responsibility of the police. It is a crime to resist arrest.

### EVIDENCE

Statement made by a witness about something the witness saw or heard that is used to prove or disprove a fact about a case in court - or an object that is presented as part of the statement, e.g. a knife, or fingerprint record.

“When it happened, we were asked to move. Now we live in the middle of nowhere”

## What you can do

- Talk to an adult you like and trust, such as a family friend, a doctor or your teacher.
- Confide in a friend; if they know you're having a tough time, they can support you and understand what you're going through.
- Try to understand that what is happening is not your fault.
- Look at the ChildLine website, as it has lots of practical advice and help, or call the free phone ChildLine 24 hour helpline (0800 11 11).

## Waiting (pre-trial period)

Mike was charged by the police and the closer he got to going to court, the more scared and worried Jenny was. She wanted him to know that everyone would be there to support him, even though no one really knew what was going to happen.

Jenny's Mum wasn't sure about the charge, and although Mike had been given bail, there was no one to ask about this. Everyone knew what had happened because it was in the local newspaper. Jenny told her closest friend, which turned out okay, and her teacher asked if there was anything he could do, but Jenny didn't feel ready to talk to anyone else.

Times just before and after release from prison can be traumatic for children and young people. It can be a period of uncertainty for everyone in the family, with no one answering questions because even adults may be unsure about what is happening.

**Mental health problems amongst children with a parent in prison are three times greater than for children in the rest of the population.**



“Some folk in my family were glad, obviously my step mum was upset and all that, but I was still a bit confused until I knew obviously all of it...”



Many young people may be unsure who to speak to and may feel out of sorts. For some they feel **ashamed** that a family member could be in this position; for others it may actually be almost like a badge of honour. Having someone in prison can bring other more practical problems – inability to make any plans for the next few weeks (or months), for example, or a drop in finances and changes in behaviour – for everyone in the family. It can be a time of uncertainty for everyone.

### CHARGE

Where someone is formally accused of a crime and has to go to court

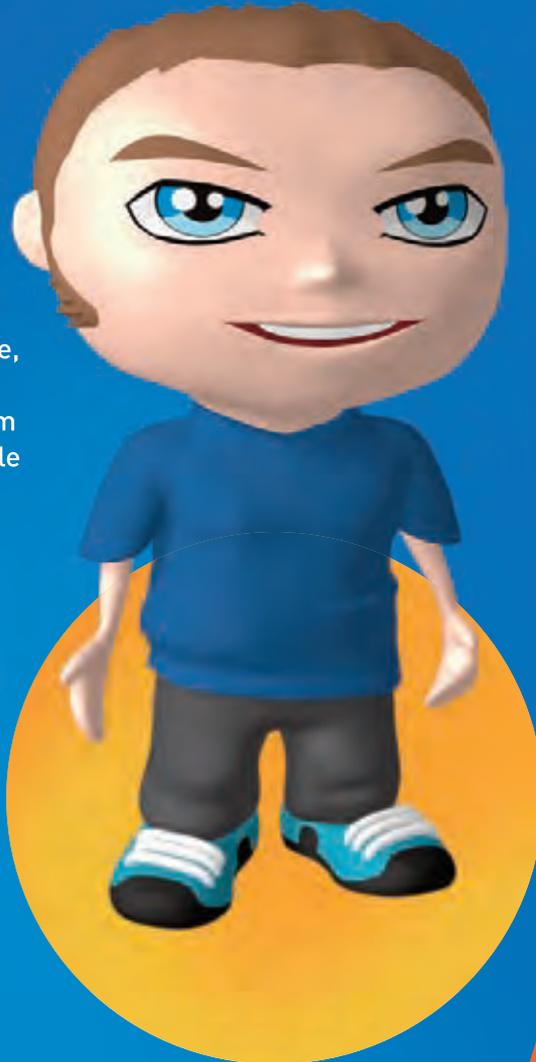
### REMAND

When an accused person is waiting to go to court for the trial - either locked up or out on bail

### BAIL

When someone charged with a crime is allowed to go home to wait for their trial instead of being locked up - often with conditions, e.g. staying in certain hours, or not going to certain places

“We always argue, so there was no arguments. Mum missed him while he was away, but I didn’t...”



## Sent to prison

There was a trial and the judge sent Mike to prison. He was given a sentence of 6 months. Jenny’s mum told her younger brother and sister that he had gone away to college for a while. They didn’t understand why he couldn’t come home at the week-ends though.

The main problem when someone is sent to prison can be what to tell people. Is it better to keep everything a secret? What will I tell my friends? Friends may be OK about knowing someone with a relative in prison, or they may act differently.

The impact of having a family member sent to prison can affect young people differently and some people might actually feel better that their relative is in prison:

About 16,500 children and young people in Scotland are affected each year by the loss of a family member to imprisonment.

This can be a difficult time for every member of the family, and you may be feeling some family splits or conflicts of loyalty. Outside your home you may also be having a hard time with people who don’t know the full facts, and you may be being bullied or pointed out and left alone at school.

Try and speak with someone.

### TRIAL

When a charge is discussed in court

### SENTENCE

A form of punishment ordered by a court

### JUDGE

The person in charge of the trial and in control of what happens in the courtroom (sometimes called a sheriff)

“I was 15 and my Dad got sent to prison. You’d think someone would’ve sat down and said to me ‘is something wrong’? Mad isn’t it.”

# In Prison

## What about keeping in touch?

Jenny and her mum visited Mike in prison. It was a long journey to the prison, and mum couldn't always get a babysitter for the little ones. Although they were always happy to see Mike, sometimes Jenny found it difficult. She didn't like being searched, or the noise, or the dogs, or even some of the officers – they scared her a little with their jangly keys and stern faces. Sometimes Jenny ran out of things to say to Mike and felt bad about this. And they were always sad to leave.

Keeping in touch with someone in prison can be difficult; prisons may be far away, they can be intimidating places where visitors are searched and have to follow rules and regulations before seeing their relative, they can be noisy and there is very little privacy, and it can be expensive to travel to the prison. There are also other things to consider – such as whether you want to keep in touch and how you can do this. You might be feeling okay about keeping in contact but don't actually want to visit, and that's okay too.

### WHAT HAPPENS AT VISITS?

A visit to the prison has to be booked by an adult. Young people under the age of 16 are not allowed to visit on their own.

ID with a photograph needs to be shown (something like a Young Scot card).

Everyone (including people like solicitors and doctors) has to co-operate with the prison's security procedures. Prisons must make sure that illegal items like drugs or alcohol and items that could be used in a dangerous way are not taken in to the prison. You may be searched, drug detection dogs may be used, and closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras will be in lots of areas within the prison.



You will have to leave any valuables in special lockers provided by the prison.

Visits are different at each prison but usually no less than half an hour. You will be allowed at least one visit a week, and certain prisons in Scotland may also have parent and child visit sessions (up to age 16). These visits are a little more relaxed with a better opportunity to speak about things without being too rushed. You will be able to buy snacks, usually from a machine or from a snack bar, but the person you are visiting will not be able to move about or purchase anything.

### SPEAKING ON THE TELEPHONE

Your relative or friend will be able to phone you. However, sometimes there can be difficulties because of the cost and the time available for the prisoner.

### YOU CAN WRITE

Even sending a funny postcard can help – both you and the person in prison.

You may be feeling angry or resentful because of past history and needing this resolved before you feel you can trust your relative again. For many young people they simply want to get on with their own life.

“The hard part for us is the visits. It's boring and there's nothing to do which usually gets me into trouble with my dad and mum”

“You feel the prison officers are watching you – they make it obvious. They're friendly when you go in (through to the visits area). If they got their batons out I'd be scared.”

Sometimes it may have been decided that it won't be good for you to stay in touch with your relative. This decision will have been made by an adult who is responsible for your safety. Talk to them about this decision, especially if you are unhappy about it.

Almost half of prisoners lose contact with their families when they enter prison.



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

“I wish someone could've explained how we would all still see each other and when we could visit and what it would be like”



“I used to stick in at school. I used to keep my head down and work. I just went off the rails. I had a wee milk run and one day I fell asleep in class. Instead of just waking me up the teacher slammed his fist down beside me. I was half asleep...”



## In Prison What about School?

Jenny worked hard at school and then would race home to help her mum. Sometimes, her friends wanted to know what had happened at the prison but Jenny felt awkward talking to them about it. She preferred to keep things to herself.

You may not even realise that having a family member in prison is affecting you.

- Behaviour at school – lack of concentration or simply disinterested
- Feeling tired because of additional responsibilities at home
- Trouble at school - being bullied or being the bully

- Poor health
- Sleep disturbance
- Thinking up excuses to not be at school because you don't want staff to know you are visiting the prison
- Unsure whether to tell teachers or support staff

It can be impossible to handle all of this by yourself. Talk to someone you can trust: your parent or grandparent, perhaps a guidance teacher or youth worker, or a friend.

“We keep it all inside the family, we don't tell anybody outside, and the police, the social workers, don't say anything, cos they're only there to either hurt you or do something terrible.”

## Coming home

... and then it was time for Mike to come home. He was being released from prison on a tag. Mum was relieved and excited, and the younger ones were just looking forward to seeing Mike again. However, Jenny wasn't too sure and wondered what would happen next....

There can be uncertainty about what will happen when someone comes home from prison, about changes in the household, about learning to live with a family member who has been away a long time.

Some young people look forward to having a relative home and the possibility of things improving (especially financially). However, it is probably fair to say that for many, it may be a time of mixed emotions.

For some young people, release of a family member from prison is not always easy.

“ Nah, I knew nothing had changed, I wasn't really pleased he was back, because I don't have a very good relationship with my dad. ”

### Tag

Home Detention Curfew (HDC) prisoners can serve the last part of their sentence at home. They will be on a curfew and not allowed out from their home address between certain times. They will wear an electronic tag on their ankle.

## Where to go for help

The young people who shared their experiences on *our* DVD highlighted how strains on the whole family impact on them, including not being given information in their own right.

Generally, young people are unsure where to go for support at any time throughout the process of having someone in prison and on release. Without acknowledgement and support, young people can end up expressing their stress through behavioural problems, deterioration of school

performance, substance misuse and poor mental health.

On the next page you will find the contact details of organisations that may be able to help.

If you would like to talk to someone and don't quite know how to get started, show this booklet to someone – and it doesn't have to be an adult, it could be a friend.



## Where to go for help

### Families Outside

Scottish Prisoners' Families Helpline  
Freephone: 0500 83 93 83

Information, support and signposting service for families affected by imprisonment.

Website: [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)

### Childline

Freephone: 0800 11 11

Helpline for children and young people looking for help & advice at any time for any problem.

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### Young Minds

Young Minds website offers information and support to children and young people about mental health and emotional well-being.

Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

### Young Scot

Young Scot Information Line:  
0808 801 0338

Scottish youth information for 11-26 year-olds.

Text: text 'call back' and your question to 87023

e-mail: [infoline@youngscot.org](mailto:infoline@youngscot.org)

Website: [www.youngscot.org](http://www.youngscot.org)

### Breathing Space

Freephone: 0800 83 85 87

Support for young men, and their families, aged 12-40 who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Website: [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

### Scottish Child Law Centre

Freephone for under 18s:  
0800 328 8970

Free legal advice for kids and help with any questions about the law.

Text: text 'SCLC' and your question to 80800

Website: [www.sclc.org.uk](http://www.sclc.org.uk)

### Anti-Bullying Network (Scotland)

The Anti-Bullying Network gives information on what can be done about bullying.

email: [info@antibullying.net](mailto:info@antibullying.net)

Website: [www.antibullying.org](http://www.antibullying.org)

### Stop Text Bullying

A website to support those being bullied by mobile phone, emails, chat rooms, or on the web.

Website: [www.stoptextbully.com](http://www.stoptextbully.com)

### Kidscape (UK wide)

Helpline: 08451 205 204

Kidscape works with children and young people under the age of 16, their parents/carers, and those who work with them.

Website: [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

### Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP)

Young Person's Freephone:

0800 019 1179

SCCYP promotes and safeguards the rights of children and young people living in Scotland.

email: [info@sccyp.org.uk](mailto:info@sccyp.org.uk)

Website: [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)

And finally, thank you to the young people who took the time to help us with this booklet – you know who you are!

References for quotes and statistics used throughout the booklet, are available from Families Outside on request.

“My dad was in prison for most of my childhood and if I could change anything it would be to ask both my parents to be honest about how things were. We all had to live a big secret – too much to ask any kid I think. I’d say honesty helps loads, keeps things in the open.”

Families Outside provides a free confidential Helpline for families affected by imprisonment in Scotland. We can help by giving you information and support to deal with a number of issues.

Support and Information

Freephone Number 0500 839383

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

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

Families Outside now offers information to young people about coping when a relative is sent to prison. Visit the website at [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk) and you will be directed to the Young Person’s page. There you can read about what other young people have experienced and what they did to get through it, and to find other sources of support.



Families Outside  
13 Great King Street  
Edinburgh EH3 6QW  
Tel: 0131 557 9800

[admin@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:admin@familiesoutside.org.uk)

website: [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)