

## Families Outside - Support & Information Helpline



call free on **0800 254 0088**



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



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



text **FAMOUT** then your message to **6077**



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## 5. Visiting someone in a Scottish prison

There is no standard procedure in Scottish prisons for visiting, and each prison can operate differently. This information sheet provides general guidance, and you will need to check any specific details with either the prison, the prison Visitors' Centre, Family Help Hubs, or Family Contact Officers (FCOs) who are based at the prison itself. FCOs are prison officers who have a special responsibility for ensuring that families have access to correct information.

- **How is a visit arranged?**

The Scottish Prison Service website <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Families/KeepinginContact/Visits.aspx> provides information around how to book a visit at the prison you wish to visit.

- **Visiting a person who is remanded/untried:**

In some Scottish prisons, the visitor telephones a dedicated booking line to book a visit. In order to book a visit, the visitor's name must be on a visit sheet completed by the person in prison. Remand visits will normally take place at a different time from convicted visits.

- **Visiting a person who is convicted:**

In almost every Scottish prison it is the responsibility of the person who has been convicted to book your visit and to let you know what day and time you can visit. The person in prison will be informed how to do this. Most prisons have a list of visit times for visitors.

- **Questions you may have:**

### How soon can I visit?

Most visits need to be booked 24-48 hours in advance (depending on the prison), so there is usually a day or two delay before you can make your first visit.

### How many visits is someone in prison allowed?

This will depend on the prison your partner or relative is in and whether they are on remand or have been convicted. A person on remand can usually have visits up to six times per week; people who have been convicted are more likely to have weekly visits.

### How many people can visit at once?

Up to 3 adults are usually allowed at any one visit in most Scottish prisons. In most prisons there is no restriction on the number of children, within reason, who can visit with the adults. Anyone attending who is not listed on the visiting list will be refused entry.

### What time do I have to be there?

In some prisons, such as Edinburgh and Kilmarnock, you are required to be there 30 minutes before your visit begins, otherwise you may not be allowed in. This varies in other prisons. It is always advisable to arrive early for your visit, to ensure the required checks can be completed and your visit time is not impacted. You can contact the prison if you are unsure. If you have any special requirements regarding access to the prison, please contact the prison before your visit to inform them of any adjustments or support you require. The prison will make every effort to accommodate your request.

### What identification do I need?

All visitors over the age of 16 need to take some form of photographic identification, such as a passport, driving licence, or government approved identification. You can contact the prison, the prison Visitors' Centre or contact the Families Outside Support & Information Helpline for further information. You will also need proof of address - this could be something like a utility bill (gas, electric or landline telephone), council tax bill, or letter from an official source. Information for what is needed by each prison is available on the SPS webpages. You can find these here: <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Prisons/Prisons.aspx>.

### What about my own belongings?

Some prisons allow visitors to take in loose change to purchase refreshments, but all other possessions must be left outside the visits room and stored in the lockers provided.

### Is there anywhere I can wait?

All prisons have a waiting area. Some prisons also have Visitors' Centres or Family Help Hubs, where you may be able to purchase some light refreshments and leave your valuables. Most have a play area for children, toilet, and baby changing facilities, and you will have access to a range of information. At Edinburgh, Stirling and Kilmarnock, visitors can book in at the Visitors' Centres or Family Help Hub. Staff there will be able to assist and answer any questions you may have.

### Are there any facilities for children?

Prisons with Visitors' Centres will have play areas, baby changing facilities, vending machines, and/or hot and cold food. Some of the larger prisons may also have specific areas within the prison visits room for a small play area. When going into the visit, you can take essentials such as a change of nappy, baby wipes and baby bottle with milk – no baby food or glass jars are permitted.

### Can I hand in money?

The guidance on handing in money has changed following COVID-19. Prisons no longer accept physical cash and all money is now transferred to people in prison electronically. This is done via bank transfer. HMP Addiewell and HMP Kilmarnock only accept payments sent through the SPS online secure payments service. You can also send money to some prisons via Royal Mail, however this will take longer to process. It is advised that you avoid sending cash where possible, however if you do need to send cash via Royal Mail, SPS advise sending it recorded delivery as there is always a risk of mail being lost. This gives you the option of tracking the delivery.

### What about property and clothing?

The general guidance is that property should be sent in via postal mail. HMP Perth, Shotts, Inverness and Grampian will not accept property handed in. Each prison will have its own rules on when they will accept clothing handed in. You should check with each prison about when you can hand in clothing or essential items such as underwear, socks and reading glasses. Contact the prison before doing so to double check this, as processes can change.

If you are posting property into a prison, your relative will need to complete a Proforma for the property required. This is signed by prison staff, then the person in prison will have to get this form to you. Only post in property that is on the Proforma, otherwise they will not receive it. Mark the parcel for the individual's attention. It is advisable to send any parcels as recorded delivery. This ensures you can track the parcel and make sure it arrives safely (the cost of this will be incurred at the post office).

### Will I be searched?

Before entering the visits, all adults will be searched in accordance with the Prison Rules 2011. This is done by a staff member of the same sex and may involve visitors emptying their pockets and opening their mouths for inspection. Visitors may also be asked to remove shoes and allow for staff to search their outer garments and personal possessions. Some other security measures may include:

**Metal detecting equipment** is similar to equipment used at airports or at court and will involve the visitor walking through archways or the use of hand held metal detecting equipment

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**Searches** for women and children will always be carried out by a female officer

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**Drug Detection Dogs** are used in many prisons to help stop drugs and other banned items coming into the prison

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**Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)** cameras are used to supervise visits rooms and other areas within a prison, including car parks

### What if I refuse to be searched?

The prison has the right to refuse a visit if visitors decline to be searched, although the visitor may be offered the option of a closed visit (see below). If the prison has reasonable grounds to suspect that something will be attempted to be smuggled into the visits room, the visit will be refused.

### What is a closed visit?

This means that the person in prison and the visitor are separated by a glass partition and cannot make physical contact. If there is a reasonable suspicion that security will be breached either by the visitor or the person in prison, the person in prison may be restricted to closed visits for either a specified length of time or number of visits. The position is reviewed at the end of the period and a decision made by prison staff as to whether closed visits will continue.

### What if I am asked to take in a banned item?

You may be under pressure from your partner or family member to attempt to take drugs (or other banned items e.g. SIM cards, mobile phones, chargers) into the prison; they may be having difficulty coping with their sentence, and you will feel that this can only help. However, the consequences can be huge: involvement of the police, you may be arrested, charged, and risk being sent to prison. There is also a possibility that Social Work will be involved if there is concern about young children and drugs, and the children may be taken into care. If visitors are caught with a banned item, it may result in closed visits for the prisoner for all family members and friends for a specified period of time. **PLEASE: Do not take any items into the visit area or attempt to pass anything into the prison.** If you or a family member are being bullied or need help with drugs or other addictions, you can talk confidentially

to the Families Outside Information & Support Helpline [0800 254 0088](tel:08002540088). They will support and signpost you to an agency who will be able to help.

### Who can I ask for help?

Visiting can sometimes be a difficult and stressful time. If you are unhappy with the search procedures or in any way upset at a member of staff who may have carried out the search which made you uncomfortable, try to remain calm and polite. If you have a complaint or would simply like to comment about any aspect of your visit, ask to speak to the Visits Manager on the day, or ask for a Visitors' Complaints Form. Complaint forms are available in all SPS establishments at the main entrance and visitor waiting areas. Completed forms should be handed to a member of staff at the front desk or put in the complaints box provided.

### What if I am unable to visit in person?

If you are unable to travel to a prison or visit your loved one in person, you may be able to have a video call, sometimes referred to as a virtual visit. Using this form of contact, you can see and speak with the person in prison on your smartphone or tablet as long as you have an internet connection. To apply for a video call, you must be on the approved visitor list. Similar to an in-person visit, you will have to provide identification when you register for the service. These visits should be booked at least 3 days prior to the video call. The prison will offer you a time slot, which are allocated on a first come, first served basis. Video calls are usually 30 minutes long and should be within the home (not outdoors or in a public space). To request a video call, you will need to make an account with Email - a - Prisoner (EMAP). You will need an account with Email a Prisoner to send emails and to set up video calls. This link from the Scottish Prison Service talks you through the process of setting up video calls:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0SFZZoGbmM>

- **Family Contact Officers (FCOs)**

Each prison has a Family Contact Officer (FCO) who should be available to talk through any concerns you may have about visiting, and they can be contacted at the prison through the telephone switchboard, or they may be available when you visit.

You can also call the Families Outside Support & Information Helpline on [0800 254 0088](tel:08002540088).

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