

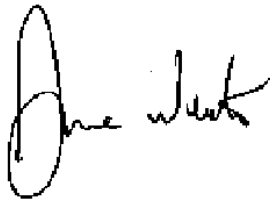
Supporting Young People with a Prisoner in the Family

Foreword

No one knows the exact number of children and young people who experience the loss of a parent or sibling through imprisonment each year. This group of young people have been overlooked until recently and it is only now that efforts are being made to acknowledge their existence within our communities.

Young people with a prisoner in the family often suffer loneliness, humiliation and stigmatisation. They may be bullied, fail at school and can be rejected by their friends. Children and young people may not confide their problems in anyone for fear of the consequences of doing so, or because they feel their confidence may not be respected. No specialist service exists to deal with the problems of this vulnerable group.

Connexions and the Action for Prisoners' Families (APF) are pleased to have worked together in the production of this information pack and it is hoped that this pack will provide both valuable guidance and food for thought for Connexions Personal Advisers and all those working within a partnership with young people.



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Supporting Young People with a Prisoner in the Family

Guidance notes for adults working with young people

Introduction

A significant number of young people in the UK experience the effects of the imprisonment of a family member. It is estimated that today, over 125,000 children in England and Wales have a parent in prison. There are no estimates on the number of young people with a sibling or other relative in prison. Though it is likely to affect all aspects of their lives, most professionals in contact with young people may not be aware of the reasons for this. Young people and their parents or carers, for example, may not tell the school about a relative's imprisonment, keeping it secret, as they fear that they might be discriminated against, shunned or bullied. They may also fear that information they do disclose may not be treated confidentially.

However, many young people affected by having a family member in prison may want to seek the advice and support of a trusted adult outside the family, for example a Connexions Personal Adviser, who could be key to their adjustment to the situation. It is important, therefore, that adults working with teenagers become aware of the issues and concerns for young people with a prisoner in the family.

These guidance notes have been produced to accompany the booklet *Who's Guilty?* which highlights – in their own words – the experiences of several young people with an imprisoned relative. The booklet is a collection of quotes from young people which reflect the wide range of circumstances they face and the wide range of issues that affect them. It is hoped that the booklet will be of use to young people with a family

member in prison, as well as helping to educate other people, both young and old.

The guidance notes will inform and support adults working with young people, by raising the issues to be considered under the themes of the booklet: *The beginning; To tell or not to tell?; Keeping in touch; Visiting; What about school?; Coming home; and what helps.*

These materials have been produced by the Action for Prisoners' Families (APF) which speaks out for prisoners' families and those who help them across the UK. They build on two previous project reports from the APF, both published in 2001:

- *No-One's Ever Asked Me: Young people with a prisoner in the family* – which highlights the impact of parental or sibling incarceration on the adolescent family members left on the outside. Quotes from the young people interviewed for this study form the basis of the booklet.

- *I didn't think anyone could understand, miss: Supporting prisoners' children in school* – a project to raise awareness in schools, colleges and LEAs, to identify good practice and to inform and influence policy and practice.

The guidance notes have been produced with the support of Connexions. The booklet for young people has been produced with the support of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

The beginning

‘The police raided our house to arrest my brother, but no-one was there – we got home to the house smashed up from the police raid. It was a mess. It was horrible. It’s not a pleasant thing to find out about at all. It was all in the papers and on the news as well. They even put our address in, which was really out of order. It was really hard. I weren’t sleeping, didn’t know what was going on. It felt like it were a dream.’

16 year old female, brother in prison

‘When he got arrested it caused loads of fights in the family. People were really upset with him again. Mum didn’t know at first until someone told her. I felt upset at first, and I missed him all the time. But I was ashamed and didn’t want to tell people. We never got any information from anyone, where he was or telling us what was happening.’

15 year old male, father in prison

Issues to be considered

- It can be a shocking and traumatic experience to witness the arrest of a loved one at home. Young people may experience a triple burden: losing a parent, sibling or other relative; supporting other members of the family; protecting younger siblings. Some young people experience the arrest of a relative on more than one occasion.
- Imprisonment can often bring to a family social and economic disadvantage. As such, families may not only have to cope with having a family member facing prison, but may also have to cope with unemployment, housing, social and financial problems. Some families may have to move as a result of the arrest of their relative and the case may be reported in the local media.
- The most common concerns for young people at this stage are being informed about what is happening, deciding whether to tell people and people knowing.
- It is a period of great uncertainty and change, when a relative is awaiting trial, either on remand or on bail. It can be quite disruptive for some young people, not knowing what is going to happen to their parent or sibling and being unable to plan for the future. Many will be angry and ashamed about what has happened.
- Many young people in this situation are not kept fully informed about what is happening, thus compounding the feelings of shame, anxiety and isolation.
- Adults working with young people need to be ready to be a trusted, non-judgmental listening ear as and when needed.

To tell or not to tell

‘I told me mates but I didn’t tell people at work. I have now, I’m not ashamed of it. But you have to be careful who you do tell. People look at you funny. But now if they think bad of me, I don’t care what they think anyway. But I am still careful who I tell. I’m cautious. I have to get to know someone first. I had all the support I needed off my mates and family. It was right.’

18 year old male, father in prison

‘I can’t decide who knows or doesn’t. It has been in the papers and the police are always here, so I think everyone knows. We did try to keep it quiet to begin with but it has gone on for so long and now everyone knows at my school and round here. I don’t care what they think of him. If they think bad things about me or my mum I get upset, but I don’t care what they think of him because he deserves it all.’

14 year old female, brother in prison

Issues to be considered

- Some families may forbid young people to tell anyone outside the family. Others may not tell younger siblings and expect the teenagers to keep the ‘secret’ hidden. Others may disclose some information, but not the whole story.
- Who to tell, when, how and what are major concerns for young people and their families. Many will be fearful of disclosure to teachers or other professionals because they are worried they and their families will be judged and because of confidentiality issues.
- Telling friends may be a calculated risk for many young people, as they may not be able to count on a positive, supportive response. However, not telling and keeping secrets is burdensome and isolating.
- Many young people in this situation would find it helpful to talk to a trusted adult outside the family, in an informal, confidential setting. If the home environment is turbulent, other settings can provide a safe haven for expressing feelings.

Keeping in touch

‘We were worried about him inside though, that he wouldn’t look after himself. It didn’t really cause any bad feeling in the family. We all stood by him. It was great when he was at home but it was awful when he went back. We had a real family day at the prison on Bonfire Day. They made it really special for all the families.’

18 year old female, father in prison

‘I’m his son - he tells me that I’m the one that makes him hang on. I feel that I’m keeping the family together – ‘head of the family’. I’m the only one visiting my brother.’

18 year old male, father and brother in prison

Issues to be considered

- For most young people with a parent, sibling or other relative in prison, keeping in touch is a priority. They care deeply about the welfare and well-being of their loved one in prison, whilst not condoning their crime.
- Many young people with a family member in prison often take on a responsible, caring role, putting the prisoners’ and their family’s needs before their own. This may put them under considerable emotional strain and pressure.
- Some young people feel angry towards the prisoner for disrupting their lives and causing hurt to their families, and may be reticent to maintain contact. Others may not wish to retain any contact, particularly if the family has experienced abuse and is relieved that the perpetrator is in prison.
- Most young people keep in frequent contact with the imprisoned relative by telephone and by letter, as well as by visits. The prisoner always initiates contact via the telephone and for visits by sending a visiting order.
- As reasons for maintaining contact, or not, are clearly complex, adults working with young people with a family member in prison need to be sensitive to the deep and often conflicting emotions they experience. A trusted adult outside the family, may be well placed to talk through the different options with young people for keeping in touch with the prisoner and supporting him/her. It is important here that such an adult is well informed regarding the rights of the young person and the many rules relating to contacts with prisoners.

Visiting

‘It makes you feel horrible, like you have done something too. They watch you and make you feel guilty just for being there. They search you and make you take your shoes off and you feel stupid and it is horrible. You don’t get used to it. You sit there waiting for them to call you. And waiting to be searched, and give them your lighter and things. And you feel ashamed.’

14 year old female, brother in prison

‘It gets on my nerves how much there is to go through. It makes you feel daft and stupid. No-one can have any privacy. You want some space to yourself. It is dead boring just sitting there. The chairs are uncomfortable and there isn’t anything to do. You just sit there and wait for ages, just to go in. I don’t know why they have to make you wait all that time.’

13 year old male, step-father in prison

Issues to be considered

- Visiting a family member in prison is more often than not stressful and time-consuming. There is usually quite a distance to travel, mostly by public transport. Visit times are inconvenient and pressured, and it is difficult to talk openly with the prisoner.
- Most young people want to visit their loved one in prison, but may not be able to because of other commitments such as school, work, having to care for other family members or involvement in social activities. It is not unusual for young people to forego extracurricular activities in favour of visiting their relative.
- Most young people visiting in prison find it an unpleasant and often frightening experience: being searched; a feeling of always being watched and surveilled; a lack of privacy with the parent, sibling or other relative in prison; endless waiting around.
- Young people visiting a relative in prison may experience a range of emotions:
guilt, embarrassment, anger, nervousness, sadness, depression, boredom and disgust.
- Although young people visiting in prison mostly understand the necessity of visiting processes, such as searching, they would like to see some changes made: more privacy during visits and when waiting for a visit; more things to do when waiting; more private time with the prisoner.
- Adults working with young people with a family member in prison need to be aware of and sensitive to the many complex issues around visiting. Young people may have to take time off school which may be counted as unauthorised absence, if the family has not told the school about the situation, and which may affect a student’s performance at school.

What about school?

‘I didn’t tell anyone, not friends or school. Teachers know now, because my behaviour deteriorated. A social worker got involved and informed the school. I told one friend who then told the whole school, who then stopped talking to me. Another girl supported me because her mum was in prison too. I dropped out of school for 6 months and left early without taking my GCSEs. I then got a job in a nursery.’

16 year old female, mother in prison

‘No-one knows at school. It has made me work harder, because my dad has asked me to try and do my best. I want my dad to be proud of me. I wouldn’t want my teachers to know – it’s none of their business, it’s private. They might judge me and my dad and they might not understand.’

14 year old male, father in prison

Issues to be considered

- Having a family member in prison may affect a young person’s behaviour and performance in school, but most teachers and support staff will not be aware of the reasons for this. Because the issue largely remains ‘hidden’ within families because of fear of stigma, young people at secondary school are often reluctant to tell teachers of the family situation. They are fearful about judgmental attitudes, lack of confidentiality and unpredictable repercussions.
- Schools often remain ignorant of the extent of the problem and of the numbers of their students affected in this way. As long as the issues remain ‘hidden’ schools will not be able to support this population of young people. Parents and young people need to feel confident to be open with the school and to share information with teachers. Teachers need to be receptive and understanding. It is important, however, that families approach the school in the first instance.
- Teachers and support staff need to be aware of the issues facing young people with a family member in prison. Schools could include in their policies and guidelines for supporting vulnerable young people the issue of prisoners’ families, ensuring the designated support person for young people is aware this could be an issue young people may choose to raise with them.

Coming home

‘Coming home won’t be too good. Prison does a lot to your brain, because it’s hard. It has damaged mum – she is more fearful of normal day to day things, like going to the toilet. It’s hard for the family to re-adjust. Mum needs support, because the family has grown different. Mum still thinks I’m 13.’

16 year old female, mother in prison

‘We got stressed by not knowing the date he was coming out. We thought we did and then it would change again and then he would just turn up... He was just sitting at home there one day when I got home from school. He looked different and talked different. It took time to get used to him again and I felt left out by my mum.’

15 year old male, father in prison

Issues to be considered

- When a parent, sibling or other relative is released from prison it takes time to resettle. It is again a period of uncertainty and change for the family. Some young people are excited by having their parent or sibling home again and look forward to improvements in their lives. Others are wary about the prisoner being back in the family as this can lead to more arguing and worry. Young people may be anxious about having to re-adjust to a new environment or wondering whether the prisoner will re-offend.
- If a parent or sibling has been in prison for some years, young people will have grown up and changed by the time of release. They will also have taken on a different role within the family, possibly with extra responsibilities. It may be difficult to adjust to the new situation of the ex-prisoner settling back into family life and wanting to have a degree of control over the young person or expecting things to be the way they were.
- Adults working with young people adjusting to the release of a family member need to be sensitive to the complex emotions the family are experiencing.

What helps?

‘It would be good to have someone to talk to, knowing that there was someone there that you could always talk to. I think my mum should talk to someone and I think she would go to a group, yes a support group or something.’

13 year old male, step-father in prison

‘I was in the dark about most things and would’ve liked to have been told more. Mum had fell out with dad, so I wasn’t getting any information off mum. It would have been nice to talk to someone at the time’

18 year old female, father in prison

Helplines and websites

Helplines:

- HARP Anglia (Help and Advice for Relatives of Prisoners, East Anglia)
Freephone 0800 389 3003
- POPS (Partners of Prisoners, North West and North Wales)
0161 277 9066
- PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust, London and the South)
Freephone 0800 085 3021
- PFFS (Prisoners' Friends and Families Service)
Freephone national helpline 0808 808 3444
- Prisoners' Families Helpline
Freephone 0808 808 2003
- Aftermath (for families of very serious offenders)
0114 275 8520

Websites:

- www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk The website of Action for Prisoners' Families
- www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk Prisoners' Families Helpline
- www.harinfo.org.uk HARP
- www.imprisonment.org.uk PACT
- www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk POPS
- www.s-h-a-r-p.org.uk SHARP
- www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk Prison Service

Model policy

Gloucestershire Local Education Authority: Policy for the Education of Children with a Parent or Close Relative in Prison, 2002

The Policy has been developed within the context of the overall support the LEA provides for vulnerable children and young people. It was preceded by their Behaviour Support Plan 1999-2002, where the following statement was included under the heading of 'Especially Vulnerable Children and Young People'. Other groups mentioned under this heading were:

looked after children; bereaved children; children of parents who separate or divorce; children experiencing domestic violence; school age parents; young carers; young people and drugs use; young runaways.

"120,000 children experience a parent being sent to prison each year in England and Wales. Statistics are not kept on these children, but it is likely that many of them will also be faced with a sudden move of home, losing the security of friends, school and known environment. Children's behaviour may change as a result of the experience, becoming aggressive or withdrawn. Children may lack concentration and behave out of character in the teacher's experience of the child. Additional domestic responsibility may also ensue, adding extra physical and emotional strain and making some into young carers. Prison visits may be stressful in themselves, but also further disrupt the child's education. Save the Children has published a resource pack, *'Working with Children of Prisoners'*, following its own research. SCF recommends the development of training programmes both at initial teacher training level and as professional development on the impact on children's education of a family member in prison. SCF Development Officer writes 'The prison population is rising and the needs and rights of this increasingly large group of children should be made visible.'

The Policy

Introduction

The aims of this policy are:

1. To raise awareness of the needs of children and young people with a parent, partner or close relative in prison;
2. To secure their educational achievement and attendance;
3. To promote social inclusion.

The Policy

Statement of Intent

1. Gloucestershire LEA will support children and young people with parents, partners or close relatives in prison, whether they reside in the county on a permanent or temporary basis, so that they are able to reach their full educational potential.
2. Gloucestershire LEA will provide schools with appropriate information and guidance so that schools are aware of their responsibility towards this group of children and young people and are able to provide support as necessary.
3. Gloucestershire LEA is committed to challenging prejudice, discrimination and racism. Our goal is for children from all cultures and backgrounds to be equally valued and respected.
4. Gloucestershire LEA will involve parents, carers and other agencies as appropriate to support the education of this group of children, keeping strictly within the confidentiality protocols which will be outlined within the guidance.

Strategies

1. The LEA will establish a named person in each school who will be the person responsible for this group of children and will implement procedures set out in the guidance document. It is recommended that the person responsible for other vulnerable young people is a member of the school's senior management team.
2. The LEA will provide schools with the name (s) of a person(s) within the LEA who can be a source of support.
3. The LEA will provide schools with information and guidance so that schools will have a better understanding of the problem to be able to raise awareness of the issue amongst

their staff and establish clear internal policies.

4. The LEA will provide appropriate training to named teachers in schools in order to help them carry out their school role effectively.
5. Schools will provide the LEA with basic information regarding this group of children, without breaking the confidentiality protocol, so that the LEA can gain more knowledge about the size and nature of the problem and respond appropriately.

Monitoring

The LEA will monitor the implementation of the guidance through the named LEA person and the work of the Education Welfare Service and the Looked After Children Education Service.

Commitment for the Future

The Education Welfare Service and the Looked After Children Education Service will play important roles in the implementation of this policy and the LEA asks all schools to have regard to the principles set out in this policy. However, the success of the policy depends on a range of partners, not least the following:

Gloucester Prison is asked to provide a named contact for liaison with the LEA on these issues. The contact will be able to offer general advice about national and local prison service procedures, including those relating to visits and communication. Where a child undergoes a particular crisis as a result of the parent's imprisonment, joint work between the LEA and the prison contact will explore ways of supporting the individual child.

- Connexions is asked to recognise young people who are the children, siblings or partners of prisoners as especially vulnerable and include them where appropriate in its priority group
- The Youth Offending Team is asked to recognise young people who are the children, siblings or partners of prisoners as especially vulnerable and to consider what support might be most appropriate in individual circumstances.
- The Gloucestershire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership(EYDCP) and Adult Continuing Education and Training (ACET) are asked to include consideration of this group in all policies and developments which target vulnerable children and families and to support parenting initiatives within Gloucester prison.

Information and Guidance Document for Schools

This covers thorough and helpful information under the following headings:

- The Current Situation
- Confidentiality
- School Records
- The Role of the Headteacher
- Role of the Designated Teacher
- Guidance for Teachers
- Being Aware of the Situation
- Confiding
- Who to Inform – 'Need to Know'
- Recognising the signs – changes in behaviour and performance
- Unexplained absences
- Basic principles
- Classroom management
- Disruptive pupils
- Teasing and Bullying
- Attendance issues
- Children in the Same Family
- Particular Problems: prison visits; release; financial effects; prisoners held overseas

The full report is available from:

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