



changing lives  
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# Outside help

Produced in partnership with

**Action**  
for Prisoners' Families

Practical information for the families of people in prison





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reducing crime

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### **Nacro Resettlement Plus Helpline**

169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU

Telephone 020 7840 6464

Fax 020 7735 4666

Email [helpline@nacro.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nacro.org.uk)

[www.resettlement.info](http://www.resettlement.info)

[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

Nacro is a registered charity no. 226171



### **Action for Prisoners' Families**

Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney  
Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ

Telephone 020 8812 3600

Prisoners' Families Helpline  
0808 808 2003

Email [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk)

[www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

Registered charity no. 268369

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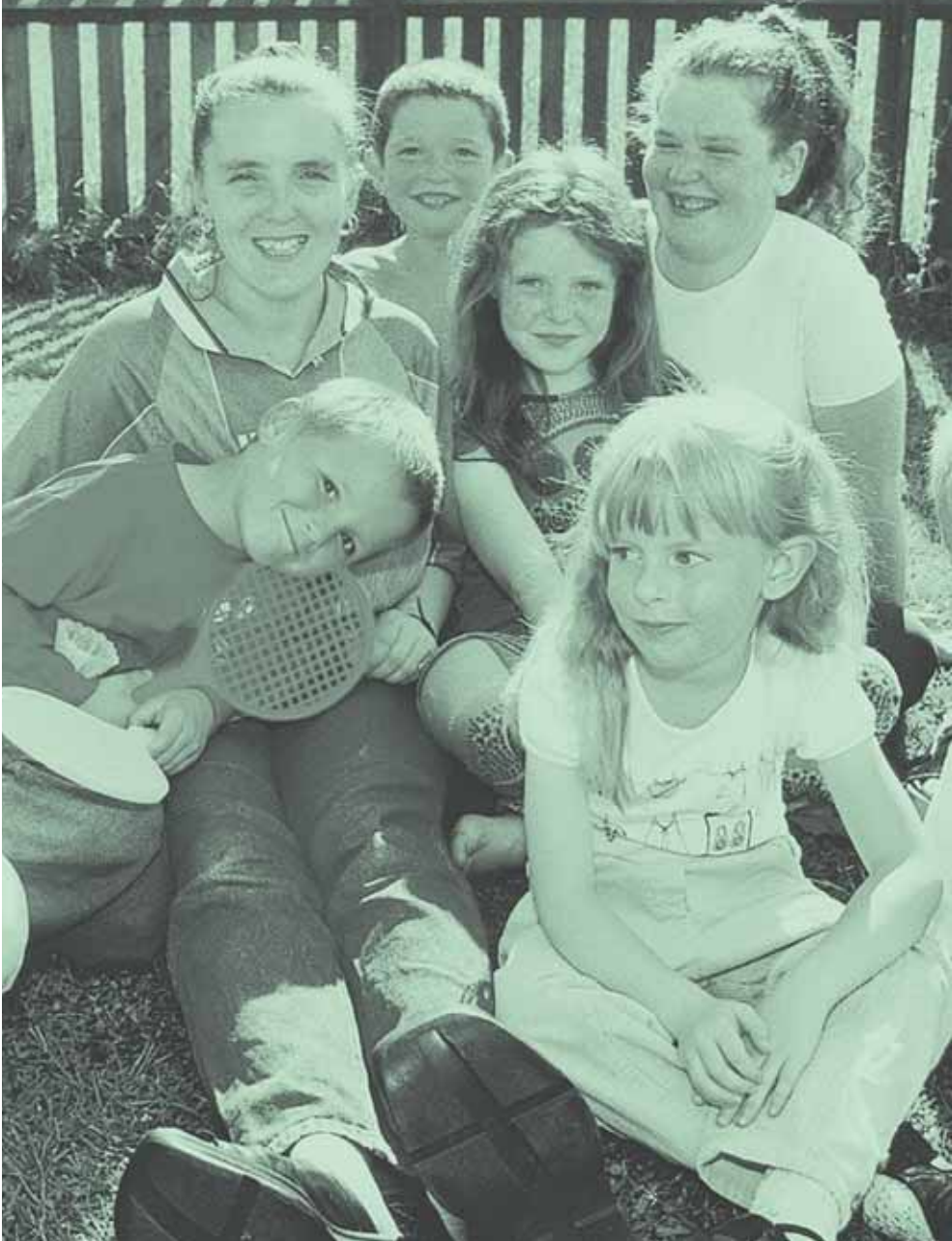
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# Introduction

This booklet is for people who have a relative or friend in prison. It provides information on what help is available, how you can keep in touch and what to expect when the prisoner is released.

It also tells you about the things that need sorting out as soon as someone is sent to prison, such as applying for benefits or securing the person's accommodation, as well as telling you about where you or the prisoner may get help.

There are 140 prisons in England and Wales. These range from old Victorian prisons to modern buildings, and from high security dispersal establishments to 'category D' open prisons. How things are done varies considerably between prisons, so you might want to contact the prison where the prisoner is held for specific information about visiting, such as whether you have to book a visit or to find out about facilities for children. If you have the internet at home, or in your local library, you can visit the Prison Service website: **[www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk)**. You could also contact the **Prisoners' Families Helpline** on **freephone 0808 808 2003**.



My Dad's in prison .....  
but what about me?

### MY SPECIAL BOOK

My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
and how is what?



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# 1

## *On the outside: life goes on*

This part of the booklet is about the things you might need to do if a member of your family has been sent to prison. You will find information here about:

- Benefits
- Tax Credits
- Keeping your home
- Where to get advice

## ●●● Money

If you are the partner or a relative of the prisoner, you may be entitled to benefits to cover various costs. Some of these are outlined briefly below. The benefits system can be very complicated, so seek advice from your Jobcentre Plus\* or from a local advice centre or a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) if you are not sure what you are entitled to. If you were not already receiving benefits, you may now be eligible because of the change in your circumstances.

If you were claiming jointly with your partner before they went into prison, you need to inform the Jobcentre Plus of your change in circumstances. They will advise you if you need to make a fresh claim. You will need to act fast to sort out transferring the claim into your own name, as prisoners have very limited rights to benefits.

Young people aged under 18 can only claim Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right in certain circumstances, for example where their parents are in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. If you need to claim, seek advice.

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\* In April 2002, the Department of Social Security merged with the Department for Education and Employment and changed its name to the Department for Work and Pensions. Over the last few years, the Government have combined Benefit Agency offices and jobcentres into a single Jobcentre Plus service, from where most benefits are paid. Most areas now have a Jobcentre Plus but some may still be known as social security offices.



You can obtain leaflets about social security benefits from your local Jobcentre Plus, CAB and main post offices.

Each Jobcentre Plus office has a customer services manager to deal with complaints. You also have the right to ask for a review, or appeal against any decision made about your benefits. If you are unhappy with the way your claim has been dealt with, you can always seek independent advice from a local advice centre.

**Jobseeker's Allowance** is the benefit paid to people who are not in full-time work (this means not working more than 16 hours for you and, if you are claiming income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, 24 hours for your partner) and are actively seeking it. You must be capable of work and under pensionable age.

**Income Support** is a benefit for people on a low income who are unable to work for some reason – eg, because of their age, because they are a carer, or because they are sick or disabled. If you have any savings or anyone else in the household is earning money, this will affect how much you will get. For more details, ask at your local Jobcentre Plus or CAB.

**Tax Credits** If you are responsible for a child under 16, or a child under 19 in full time education, you can claim Child Tax Credits. If you are working and on a low income, depending on your age and circumstances you can claim Working Tax Credits if you work more than a certain number of hours per week. If you pay childcare costs and are eligible to claim Working Tax

Credit, you will be able to get an additional amount towards this. If you were claiming Tax Credits jointly with a partner who has been sent to prison, you can claim an additional lone parent element payment if they will be in prison for longer than one year.

You should contact HM Revenue and Customs (formerly the Inland Revenue) about claiming Tax Credits if you think you are eligible:

- Website: [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)
- Tax Credits helpline: 0845 300 3900 (textphone 0845 300 3909)

**Guardian's Allowance** is a weekly cash benefit paid to people looking after children where one parent has died and the surviving parent has at least two years left to serve. You do not have to be a legal guardian.

**Child Benefit** and **Child Tax Credit** can be paid to people looking after children whose primary carer is in prison. It will also be paid to women who have their babies with them in prison. If you are claiming child benefit for a child who is held in detention or custody, the benefit will be stopped after eight weeks. It will be reimbursed if the child is not sentenced to imprisonment or detention after a period of remand.

**Housing Benefit** and **Council Tax Benefit** give help with paying rent and council tax. If you are claiming Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, you will be sent a claim form by the local

council. If you do not get Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance but are on a low income, you may still be able to get help with paying rent and council tax. To ensure you do not lose your benefit, get a claim form from the local council without delay. (For more information on this, see the section 'Keeping your home' on page 13.)

**Various disability benefits** are available, including attendance allowance, disability living allowance, industrial injuries benefit and incapacity benefit. Your local CAB, Jobcentre Plus or social security office will be able to give you advice.

**Maternity payments** cover statutory maternity pay for women who are employed and are having a baby; maternity allowance for some women who do not qualify for statutory maternity pay; and Sure Start maternity grants for women who qualify under Social Fund rules. Women who are having a baby are also entitled to free prescriptions and dental treatment. Those who are on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance are entitled to free milk tokens and vitamins, as are children up to five years old who live in a family where someone is claiming these benefits.

**The Child Support Agency (CSA)** is responsible for collecting maintenance from absent parents. If you are on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and someone who is paying you maintenance goes to prison, let the Jobcentre Plus or social security

office know as soon as possible so they can increase your benefit and inform the CSA of the change of circumstances. If you are on Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit, your benefit will be altered when this is next assessed. If you take over responsibility for a child when someone receiving maintenance goes to prison, contact the Jobcentre Plus/social security office to arrange to receive maintenance (and Child Benefit) in their place.

## ●●● **Extra financial help**

If you are receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit above a certain level, you can get free prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and eyesight tests, and help towards the cost of glasses or lenses, free NHS wigs and fabric supports. You can also claim for your travel fares if you need NHS hospital treatment, and will be able to get your travel costs for prison visits paid under the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (see page 27).

You may also be entitled to some or all of these costs because of your age, a specific medical condition or pregnancy, or if you are on a low income. If you have already paid for any of these services you may be able to claim some of the money back: fill in form HC5, available from the Jobcentre Plus or social security office.

More information about help with all these health costs is in the Department of Health leaflet HC11 'Help with health costs', which is available from Jobcentre Plus and social security offices, post offices, NHS hospitals, dentists, doctors, opticians and pharmacists. Information is also available in Chinese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

If you have any problems getting Department of Health leaflets, you can contact the Department of Health by writing to PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH (tel 08701 555455).

If you are receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance you are entitled to free school meals for your children. You can also get free milk and vitamins if you are pregnant or have children under five.

## ●●● The Social Fund

The Social Fund helps people with costs that are difficult to meet from their usual income. Help may be given as discretionary grants, interest-free loans, or non-discretionary payments.

You may be able to claim a **Community Care Grant** from the Social Fund if you are on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Grants can be awarded for essential items such as furniture, bedding, clothing, moving expenses and travel

costs. The grants are discretionary, which means you do not have an automatic right to them even if you do seem to fit the criteria for help. It is a good idea to get advice and support from a social worker or welfare advice worker if you want to apply for a grant.

You can also claim a **Budgeting Loan** if you or your partner has been on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance for at least 26 weeks. This is also discretionary. Loans are paid back by deducting money from your weekly benefit, so you need to make sure that you will be able to survive on less money while you repay the loan.

People who need help urgently can claim a **Crisis Loan**. This is a discretionary interest-free loan to help people with their immediate, short-term needs in a crisis. You do not have to be on Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or any other benefit to claim a Crisis Loan.

A number of other benefits are available from the Social Fund. These are winter fuel payments, cold weather payments, funeral payments, and maternity payments. To find out more about these, contact your Jobcentre Plus.

If you are refused a grant or a loan from the Social Fund, you can ask for the decision to be reviewed. You can get advice about this from an advice centre or CAB.

## ●●● Keeping your home

If you and the prisoner are joint tenants or own a property together, you will be liable for the prisoner's share of the rent or mortgage. It is therefore important to get advice on this, either from a housing advice centre, the council housing office, or a CAB. You may be entitled to financial help, whether you are working or not, and especially if you have children. Seek advice early on – don't let the debt mount up!

If the property in which you are living is in your friend or partner's name and their name alone, it may be a good idea to transfer the tenancy into your name. Again, seek advice.

If you are an owner-occupier and have been used to sharing the cost of the mortgage repayments with the prisoner, it may be worthwhile sub-letting a room to a lodger to help towards the mortgage. You could also consider letting out the entire property for the duration of your partner or friend's imprisonment. However, bear in mind that most building societies do not allow private properties to be let, or may only allow you to let your home with written permission. Seek proper advice on this.

In almost all situations you cannot be evicted from your home unless a court order is made against you. If you have any difficulty with your landlord about staying in your accommodation, consult Shelter's free helpline on 0808 800 4444, a housing advice centre, or a CAB.

Remember, you may be able to claim Income Support or Housing Benefit to cover some or all of your housing costs.

## ●●● **Getting more advice**

There are many different organisations that will be able to give you support and advice. We've listed just a few on pages 62-64 who will either be able to advise you themselves, or direct you to the best service to meet your needs. There are also people inside the prison who may be able to help you or the prisoner (see page 33).



# 2 *Keeping in touch*

This section of the booklet tells you how you can keep in contact with a friend or family member who is in prison. You will be able to find out about:

- How to find a prisoner
- How many letters a prisoner can write and receive
- How a prisoner can contact you by telephone
- How often you can visit a prison and what to expect on visits
- What gifts you can send in

## ●●● Finding a prisoner

If the prisoner has just been imprisoned, you may be able to find out which prison they are in by contacting the court they appeared in, if you have this information. When telephoning (the court's number will be listed in the phone book), ask to speak to the general office.

If the prisoner has been inside for some time and you don't know where they are, you can contact the Prison Service's Prisoner Location Service. Write to them (at PO Box 2152, Birmingham, B15 1SD), or email [prisoner.location.service@hmpr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:prisoner.location.service@hmpr.gsi.gov.uk) giving as much information as possible, including the prisoner's name and date of birth, their offence (if already convicted) or their charge (if known), your relationship to them and why you want to contact them. The process can take a couple of weeks because the service has to contact the prisoner to find out if they are happy for you to know where they are. A prisoner's location cannot be given to you over the telephone.

## ●●● Letters

When writing to someone in prison always put their name and prison number at the top of your letter.

Generally, there is no restriction on the number of letters you can send to and receive from a prisoner.

However, prisoners can only send one or two free letters each week – any more have to be paid for by them, except special letters sent out for official or welfare purposes.

There is no routine reading of mail by prison staff except for category A and high-risk prisoners (eg, those convicted of offences against children). However, letters may be opened to check for things which aren't allowed to be sent in. Prisoners can receive photographs through the post of anything except pictures of themselves, so you cannot send in family snapshots in which they appear. A full risk assessment must take place before prisoners who have been identified as presenting a risk to children are allowed to have photographs of children in their possession.

Limited email services are being piloted in some prisons, and you should contact the prison to see if this is possible.

## ●●● Telephone calls

PIN phones are now used in all prisons instead of phonecards. Prisoners are asked to complete a form to select telephone numbers for family, friends and legal contacts, and the list has to be approved. Outside the high security prisons and depending upon the category of a prisoner, it may be possible to make telephone calls to family, friends and legal

contacts without having the number approved.

The system works on a credit basis. Prisoners can purchase credit from prison shops (known as the ‘canteen’) and the cost of phone calls made is deducted automatically from their PIN account. There may be restrictions on the number of credits prisoners can buy.

There are likely to be restrictions on the times of day prisoners can use the phones, and they will probably have to queue or book a time in advance to use one.

Your calls may be listened to on a random basis. If the prisoner is a high security category, all their calls may be listened to.

## ●●● Visiting a prisoner

### ● Rules and regulations

Rules and regulations vary from prison to prison, and they depend on whether the prisoner is convicted or unconvicted. All prisons have to abide by minimum rules, but different prisons have different procedures setting out how long you can visit for, how often, and what you can/cannot hand in. It is always worth checking with the prison before making a visit as procedures can alter at any time.

At many prisons all visits must be booked in advance, usually at least 24 hours before the visit. This usually means that visitors have to phone the prison to

arrange the date and time of the visit and say who will be visiting. It may not always be easy to get through on the booking line(s). At some prisons, visitors can book their next visit before they leave. If you have booked a visit and arrive late, you may get a short visit or may not be able to visit at all.

All prisons operate a high level of security that will affect visiting arrangements (see 'Security and searching' on page 25).

The prisoner's behaviour can affect visits (and other aspects of keeping in touch). Under the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme, prisoners earn their privileges through good behaviour and performance. They can lose their privileges if they fail to keep to the prison's standards. A prisoner will therefore be on one of the three privilege levels: basic, standard or enhanced. Extra visits might be one of the privileges which a prisoner can earn through good behaviour.

### ● **Visitors' identification**

You will be asked to provide identification (ID) before you are allowed to visit. You can use one of the following: benefit books; passport; driving licence; birth certificate; senior citizen's public transport pass; annual public transport season ticket with photocard; or employer's ID card (but only if this clearly shows your name and that of your employer, and has a photograph or signature which can be compared with your appearance or signature).

If you are unable to provide one of the above forms of ID, prison staff may accept combinations of two or more of the following: rail or bus pass with photograph; cheque book or credit/debit card; employer's pass or ID; young person's proof of age card; and trade union or National Union of Students membership card.

An increasing number of prisons require you to bring ID for your children. Before you visit, check with the prison whether ID will be required for your children and, if so, what sort of ID will be suitable.

Prison staff may accept at their discretion any other forms of identification that clearly identify you.

- **Visiting unconvicted prisoners**

Before setting out on your first visit, ring the prison to check whether it is necessary to book your visit in advance so you don't make a wasted journey.

You can normally visit an unconvicted prisoner at least three times a week during the week and once every weekend, totalling a minimum of one and a half hours a week. You should check this with the prison. As prisoners are only allowed one visit a day, you could contact other people who may be visiting to make sure that you do not go on the same day. Up to three adults are usually allowed in on the same visit, together with their own or the prisoner's children.

You are strongly advised to check how many children you can take on the visit. It is also best to inform the

prison of their ages, as older children may be counted as adult visitors for seating arrangements.

**Visiting orders** (see below) **are not required for visits to unconvicted prisoners.**

- **Visiting convicted prisoners**

In many prisons, you can visit a convicted prisoner within a few days of reception. This reception visit is normally in addition to the ordinary visits entitlement. Visiting orders (VOs) for reception visits are often left at the prison gate for you to pick up when you arrive.

Following the reception visit, you can visit a convicted prisoner at least twice a month for a minimum of 30 minutes (but usually at least one hour) each time. Some prisons allow more than two visits a month and these may last up to two hours. You will need to check with the prison.

At most prisons holding convicted prisoners, the prisoner will send out a visiting order. This lists all the adults and children you are allowed to take on that visit. You must take the visiting order with you when visiting the prison. Visiting orders have to be used by a certain date. The 'use by' date is usually given on the order.

Some prisoners (those convicted of offences against children) have to seek permission before they are allowed to have visits from children. The children who

visit will have to be their own or those of close relatives. The children's ID will be checked.

Visitors under the age of 18 are not allowed without an adult escort. This applies even to young women under 18 who have children by the prisoner and even if they are married.

- **Special arrangements**

If it is difficult to see the prisoner every month, you may be able to save up your visits and go several times within a few days. In some cases, the prisoner can be transferred to a prison nearer to you in order to take up what is known as 'accumulated visits'. The prisoner should talk to their personal officer to see if they can arrange this. It may be possible to arrange an overnight stay for you near the prison.

Prisoners can also apply to the prison chaplain or to a prison probation officer for a special visit (sometimes called a welfare visit) if there is an urgent or particularly sensitive domestic matter to resolve.

Escorted children's visits can be arranged if the person caring for the prisoner's children does not want to visit but another adult is able to escort them. Contact your local social services department or the prisoner's outside probation officer (if they have one) for advice about this.

If the prisoner is a category A (maximum security) prisoner, you will have to go through a security check



under the Approved Visitors Scheme before you can visit. The prisoner must ask for you to be included on their list of approved visitors, and you will then be sent a letter from the prison governor asking whether you wish to visit and explaining the procedure for the check. Once you have been cleared, you should then be able to visit under normal conditions.

- **Getting there**

You can get travel directions for the prison from the Prisoners' Information Book – *Visiting and Keeping in Touch* available from visitors' centres or the Prison Reform Trust (tel 020 7251 5070). You can also ask the prison for directions or visit the Prison Service website if you have access to the internet: [www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk). A few prisons enclose this information with visiting orders. If you have any particular problems with travelling, there are also some support groups who can help with travel – you can find out about them by contacting the Prisoners' Families Helpline on freephone 0808 808 2003. Financial assistance may be available from the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (see page 27).

- **Visiting facilities**

Many prisons have a visitors' centre outside the prison gates. These are places where you can usually get information and talk about any difficulties you are having, as well as being a warm and welcoming place

to wait. Most sell light refreshments and have toilets and baby-changing facilities.

In prisons that do not have a visitors' centre or waiting room, you will often have to wait in the open, so make sure to take umbrellas and warm clothes if it looks like the weather might be bad.

If you have any difficulty getting into the prison for a visit (such as a mix-up over a visiting order or a booked visit), you can ask to speak to the duty governor. All prisons have a governor whose job it is to run the prison on a daily basis, and they can be contacted by staff on the gate, or by telephone. You can also ask for help from visitors' centre staff or volunteers.

During the visit you will usually sit at a table with the prisoner. Many prisons have a play area for children in the visits room, and most have a refreshment bar run by prisoners or volunteers. (Some visitors' centres also have a play area for children, but they are usually unable, by law, to look after unsupervised children.)

Some prisons now run special visits enabling children to spend time with their imprisoned parent. During these visits, the room is set up with play equipment for parents and their children to enjoy together. Often these visits will take place in a completely different location to normal visits. Usually the prisoner will have to make an application from within the prison for this type of visit.

- **Security and searching**

At almost all prisons, visitors now have to leave their bags and personal belongings in lockers either in the visitors' centre or at the gate. No food or drink can be taken in on visits, but you may be allowed to take in money to buy refreshments. Some prisons allow visitors to take in a spare nappy and baby wipes, baby food and a baby bottle. Sometimes only empty bottles are allowed, although milk is available in the visits room. Check this out with the prison before visiting. If you are on medication, you can bring this through with the permission of the visits staff. This is usually left on the officer's table in the visits room where you can get to it if you need it.

You may also have to undergo a 'rub down' search that involves a prison officer passing his or her hands lightly over your clothing. A woman will always search women and girls. Men will be searched by either sex. However, if they object to being searched by a woman they can ask for a man to search them; this request cannot be turned down. Children aged 10 or under will usually be searched by a female officer although a man, with the carer's consent, can also search boys. All routine searching is carried out with the consent of the visitor. You have to consent to the search in order to be allowed into the prison, although governors will sometimes let you in without a search and allow a closed visit instead where you are separated from the prisoner by a glass partition.

Prison officers will always be present during visits. The prisoner will be given a 'rub down' search before and after your visit.

- **Drugs**

Many prisons now ask visitors to pass through a metal detector and an increasing number use drugs dogs. The dogs have been specially trained to use their sense of smell to pick up the scent of a range of drugs. If you're frightened of dogs, try not to worry. These dogs have such a powerful sense of smell that they only need to walk past someone in order to get the scent. The dogs are normally very friendly and they should always be on a leash and under the control of a trained handler. When a dog picks up the scent of drugs on a person, it will block that person's path, usually by sitting in front of them. This is an indication that someone might be carrying drugs, or have been in contact with them. Visitors pointed out by the dog may be fully searched or made to have a closed visit or even several closed visits.

If staff have reasonable cause to suspect a visitor is trying to bring in drugs or a firearm they have the right to search you without consent – this applies even to full searching. There is no obligation on prison staff to call the police, though the policy is to do so. If the police cannot come, prison staff are authorised to do the search.

Prisons can ban visitors who try to smuggle drugs into prisons, or who they think are trying to smuggle drugs into prisons. Bans last at least three months and are followed by three months of closed visits. Prisoners involved in bringing drugs into prison will also be

punished, usually by having to take visits in closed conditions for three months.

People who try to bring in drugs end up getting a prison sentence themselves.

All prisoners can be tested for drugs. They are chosen at random, but if officers suspect that a particular prisoner is involved in misusing drugs, that person may be tested more often than others. Prisoners who test positively will be disciplined.

## ●●● **Travel expenses**

If you qualify for the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme, you are entitled to help with travel expenses every two weeks, up to a maximum of 26 assisted visits per year. You may also be entitled to extra visits for sentence planning or special family visits. This applies whether the prisoner is on remand, convicted, sentenced or awaiting deportation.

To qualify, you must be a close relative of the prisoner. This includes wife, husband, civil partner, mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, grandparent or adoptive/step/half brother/sister, step child or step parent, or the prisoner's partner (which is defined as someone who lived with the prisoner in an established relationship immediately before imprisonment, including same sex partners, or if you have a child from your relationship with the prisoner). You may also qualify if you are the only adult visitor that the prisoner receives.

If you are aged 75 or over, or have a medical condition that makes travelling difficult, or if you are too young to visit unaccompanied, you may qualify for an escort (ie, a friend or companion) to help you during the journey. The scheme will contribute to their travel expenses.

To qualify for the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme, you must be:

- in receipt of one of the following: Income Support, Child Tax Credit\*, Working Tax Credit with a disability element\*, Working Tax Credit with Child Tax Credit\*, Pension Credit or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

*\* a maximum household income limit applies*

or

- on a low income (which is not much above Income Support level) and hold a Health Certificate (HC2 or HC3), which you can apply for by filling in form HC1, available from Jobcentre Plus or social security offices, the Assisted Prison Visits Unit or from the Health Benefits Division, Sandyford House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 1DB (tel 0191 203 5555).

To make your first claim for assisted prison visits, obtain an application pack (VA001P), from one of the following places: your local Jobcentre Plus; the prison you are visiting or its visitors' centre; a probation office; a prisoners' families support group; or direct from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU), Freepost BM2257, PO Box 2152, Birmingham B15 1BR or phone 0121 626 2206.

The notes included with the form tell you how to fill it in and what you can claim. Return the completed form to the APVU at least two weeks before you wish to visit. Or you can claim for a visit already made, if it took place less than four weeks before putting in your claim. You will need to provide proof of your travel expenses, such as train or bus tickets, for all visits that you make and car users will be paid a fixed mileage rate.

A Confirmation of a Visit form must be completed by you and the prison to prove you attended. Copies are included with the application pack. If for any reason the form is not completed the APVU will contact the prison to confirm you attended, but this may take a couple of weeks.

Payment is by giro cheque, which is cashed at a nominated post office; rail users who apply for an advance payment will normally be sent a rail warrant to exchange for tickets. You should allow at least two weeks for your claim to be processed.

If you have an enquiry about the scheme, you should write to the APVU. A customer enquiry line is available for urgent enquiries on 0845 300 1423 or textphone (for people with hearing problems) 0845 304 0800 from 10.15am-11.45am and 2.15pm-3.45pm, Monday to Friday only.

Information is also available on the Prison Service website: [www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk) or you can email an enquiry to: [assisted.prison.visits@hmps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:assisted.prison.visits@hmps.gsi.gov.uk). Please remember to include your full name and address if requesting an application pack.

## ●●● Gifts

What you can take or send into prisons varies – for example, some prisons will allow items such as toiletries to be sent in, while others will allow only money to be sent in. You can find out about things you can't take or send in to the prisoner in the prison's 'facilities list' which is available from the Governor. Although only limited items can be sent in to prisoners, they can buy toiletries, cigarettes and other items from the prison shop ('canteen') each week, and they can buy from catalogues.

If you are sending in money, send a cheque or postal order so that you have proof of the amount sent. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to 'HM Prison Service' and the prisoner's name should be written on the back; the money will then be transferred to the prisoner's account. Unconvicted prisoners are allowed up to £15 a week or up to £30 a week depending on the privilege level they are on (see page 19). Convicted prisoners are allowed up to £2.50, £10 or £15 a week depending on their privilege level. This money is in addition to any wages they may earn in prison.

You need to find out from the prison what sort of radios/CD/cassette/MP3 players are allowed. The prisoner may have electricity in their cell, but you will need to check first. Batteries have to be bought inside the prison from private cash.



# 3 *On the inside: prisons and the prison system*

This part of the booklet describes the prison system and how you can find out more if you want to. You will find information here about:

- Security categories for prisoners
- Who's who in a prison and how they can help you
- When transfers happen and why
- Sorting out prisoners' outside accommodation

If you have access to the internet (most public libraries can offer this service free of charge) you can also visit the Prison Service website: [www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk).

Some of the terms used may be confusing, and you can find out what some of them mean in the 'prison jargon' section which starts on page 54.

## ●●● Categories of prisoners

Remand prisoners (those awaiting trial or sentence) are usually held in local prisons or remand centres near to the court which remanded them. Prisoners who have been tried and are awaiting sentence (ie, judge's remand) are treated as convicted prisoners for visiting purposes.

Sentenced prisoners usually begin their sentences in local prisons. Those serving short sentences often serve their whole sentences there. Other prisoners will probably be sent to another prison, which could be a long way from home.

The prison which adult males are sent to will depend on the security category they are given on reception. There are four security categories:

- **Category A** is for prisoners for whom escape would be highly dangerous to the public, police or to the security of the nation. Around 1% of prisoners will be categorised as category A, requiring maximum security conditions.
- **Category B** is for prisoners for whom the highest conditions of security are not necessary but for whom escape must be made very difficult.
- **Category C** is for prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions but who do not have the will or resources to make a determined escape attempt. The majority of prisoners are classified as category C.

- **Category D** is for prisoners who can be trusted to serve their sentence in open conditions.

Unconvicted prisoners, female prisoners and young offenders are not subject to formal security classification unless they are classified as category A. Unconvicted prisoners are usually treated as category B. Female prisoners and young offenders are simply classified as suitable for either open or closed conditions. Prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or more will have their categorisation reviewed at regular intervals.

## ●●● Foreign national prisoners

Foreign national prisoners experience great difficulties trying to maintain family contact, especially fulfilling their role as parents. Separation from family in an alien environment can mean that their mental health needs are often greater than for other prisoners. Many prisons now have Foreign National Liaison Officers who might be able to help families. Families could also try contacting:

- **Detention Advice Service:** tel 020 7254 6888, email [das@detentionadvice.org.uk](mailto:das@detentionadvice.org.uk)
- **Female Prisoners Welfare Project/Hibiscus:** tel 020 7278 7116, email [fpwphibiscus@aol.com](mailto:fpwphibiscus@aol.com)
- **Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI):** tel 020 7251 8708, email [info@jcwi.org.uk](mailto:info@jcwi.org.uk)

## ●●● Who's who inside a prison

If you are worried about the prisoner, there are people in prison who may be able to help you:

- The **personal or wing officer**: if you know which wing the prisoner is on, the wing officer may be able to help. Many prisoners are allocated a prison officer who acts as a 'personal officer' and can give them advice and support.
- The **chaplain**: there is at least one Christian chaplain in every prison and they should be able to help regardless of your religious beliefs. Other faith representatives, such as imams and rabbis, usually visit the prison rather than being based there.
- The **race relations liaison officer (RRLO)**: every prison has an RRLO who is responsible for making sure that staff act in a non-racist way. You, or preferably the prisoner, should contact the RRLO if you have a complaint.
- The **Independent Monitoring Board (IMB)**: the IMB (formerly known as the Board of Visitors) is a group of lay people appointed by the Home Office whose job it is to keep an independent eye on the treatment of prisoners. The Chair of the IMB can be contacted via the prison.
- **Listeners** Every prison has prisoners trained by the Samaritans to be 'Listeners' – prisoners who can listen in confidence and offer emotional support to other prisoners 24 hours a day. Prisoners may also

call their local Samaritan branch at any time of the day through the PIN phone system.

- The **governor**: if you have a complaint or want to raise a serious matter, write to the governor. If you phone the prison, ask to speak to the duty governor.

If you want to speak to any of these people, telephone the prison. If you don't know the number you can look it up in the phone book, ring directory enquiries, consult the Prison Service website ([www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk)) or look at a copy of the Prisoners' Information Book – *Visiting and Keeping in Touch*, which is available in visitors' centres and direct from the Prison Reform Trust, which publishes it ([www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk), tel 0207 251 5070). It is also available to download from the Prison Service website.

## ●●● Prisoner safety

If you are worried about the safety of a prisoner you should telephone the prison and ask for the duty governor or suicide prevention co-ordinator and talk to them directly. If neither are available then ask to be put through to the chaplains' office and let them know your concerns. You should be able to arrange for them to check the welfare of the prisoner and then get back to you to let you know the situation.

If you are uncomfortable about doing this yourself then you can call the Prisoners' Families Helpline 0808 808 2003 who will call the prison on your behalf.

## ●●● Transfers

Unless a prisoner is serving a very short sentence, they will be transferred to a category B or C 'training prison' following sentence. High-risk prisoners are sent to dispersal prisons. The rules about transfer apply in women's and men's prisons. However, women's prisons do not have the same system of security categories (see page 33).

As a prisoner progresses through their sentence, they may be transferred again as their security category changes. As they near the end of their sentence, they may be sent to a resettlement unit or prison nearer home to help them adjust to normal life.

Prisoners who are unhappy about the prison they are in can request a transfer to another prison. If they are a long way from home and this makes visits difficult, it is worth including information about the impact on your family with the request for a transfer. A letter from a GP or social worker may help the prisoner's case. However, many requests will be turned down because there is overcrowding in the prison system. The governor of the establishment should answer any requests or complaints about transfers within seven days.

Prisoners may be transferred if they are being disruptive. The prison authorities have to tell the prisoner as soon as possible why they are being

transferred, but this may be after they have arrived at the new prison. The authorities can keep information back if they need to for security reasons. High-risk category A prisoners are transferred from prison to prison for security reasons as a matter of course. It is very difficult to challenge the transfer of these prisoners.

If a prisoner is to be transferred, they can send a free special letter to let their visitors know. They can also ask for extra phone calls for this purpose. Category A prisoners will not be told in advance if they are to be moved. However, they can complete form F1994 as they leave the prison, giving the names of anyone who needs to be told that they are moving. Prison staff should then ring these people on the same day to tell them. If you are concerned about your partner or friend's whereabouts, you can contact the allocations unit of the prison where they were last based and ask where they have been sent. You can also contact the Prisoner Location Service (see page 16).

If you have a wasted journey to visit a prisoner who has just been transferred, you should claim your travel costs from the prison, unless the journey was already paid for by the APVU (see page 27). The prison will give you a note for the APVU to make sure you are paid for your travel to the new prison.

## ●●● Prisoners' accommodation on the outside

If the prisoner has left their home empty, it may need securing against illegal entry or theft. You might like to check whether they want you to keep an eye on it. If the property is owned by the council or a housing association, they can secure it, although they usually charge for this.

## ●●● Prisoners' housing costs

The prisoner may be able to get their housing costs paid while they are inside. If they are eligible, they need to apply for benefits as soon as possible. To do this, they should try to seek help from within the prison, which may have a housing advice centre, a resettlement centre or other services which can help. If there is no help available, the Nacro leaflet *Keeping your Home* (see page 59) advises prisoners on how to claim housing costs.

### ● Tenants

If the prisoner is a tenant, they may be able to claim Housing Benefit (see below), depending on whether they are on remand or under sentence.

**Remand prisoners** can claim Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks. This applies to unconvicted prisoners awaiting trial, and to convicted prisoners awaiting sentence. Payments to remand prisoners should not be delayed while they are awaiting trial or sentence. It



is important the prisoner insists on payments beyond 13 weeks if they are still on remand.

**Sentenced prisoners** can only claim if they are likely to serve 13 weeks or less (including any time spent on remand). In effect, this means that any convicted prisoner given a sentence of up to six months (of which they will only serve half in prison – see page 44) may be entitled to Housing Benefit. Prisoners sentenced for up to ten and a half months may also be able to get Housing Benefit if they are eligible for home detention curfew ('tagging') (see page 49), but this is entirely at the discretion of the Housing Benefit office in the prisoner's local area.

**Housing Benefit** claims by prisoners should be made as soon as possible. Even if an eligible claim is not met immediately, it is important that the local council has a record of the claim so that it can be backdated when the prisoner gets out of prison.

**Giving up a tenancy:** If the prisoner is not going to be eligible for Housing Benefit and has a council or housing association tenancy, they should write to the council or housing association to see if they will give them another tenancy on release if they give up the tenancy now. If they agree, the prisoner should ask for this to be confirmed in writing. Even if the prisoner has a written agreement that they will be rehoused, they should stay in touch with the council or housing association and let them know their earliest date of release as soon as possible. This makes it easier for the council or housing association to plan for their release.

- **Owner-occupiers**

Remand prisoners who are owner-occupiers and were receiving mortgage interest payments in their Income Support before going into prison can continue to receive this help while on remand. They should complete an A1 application form (available from their Jobcentre Plus or social security office) and send it to their local office. Remand prisoners are treated as 'existing borrowers' (regardless of when they first took out their mortgage) and will receive nothing for the first eight weeks, 50% of their mortgage interest payments for the next 18 weeks, and 100% thereafter. Because claimants will not receive any money straightaway, they should contact their bank or building society and ask them to reschedule mortgage payments.

Prisoners who were receiving Jobseeker's Allowance before they were on remand will need to make a new claim for Income Support. However, even if the claim is met, they will not get any money for the first eight weeks; they will then get 50% of their mortgage interest for the next 18 weeks and 100% thereafter.

Sentenced prisoners with mortgages cannot receive benefits and they should ask their building society or bank to reschedule their mortgage. Sentenced prisoners who are facing a long sentence and cannot reschedule payments may want to consider letting the property out (if their mortgage provider will let them), or selling it – they should seek advice on this.

- **Council tax**

Depending on their circumstances, remand prisoners and most sentenced prisoners may either be exempt from paying council tax or eligible for a discount. Prisoners who still have to pay some or all of their council tax bill can claim Council Tax Benefit.

Prisoners should advise their council of their change of circumstances so that the council can work out whether they are still liable to pay council tax. Prisoners should also notify the council if they wish to claim Council Tax Benefit.

If you were sharing your home with the prisoner, you may qualify for a discount on your council tax bill now that the number of people living in your home has fallen. You should write to the council with details. You may also be able to claim Council Tax Benefit (see page 8).

- **Other housing costs**

Water rates, fixed heating charges and standing charges for gas and electricity are not covered by Housing Benefit. This means that arrears will build up while a person is in custody unless these services are disconnected. The prisoner should advise the water and power companies that they fully intend to pay off arrears on release, or that the services should be disconnected.

Prisoners should seek help with these other housing costs from within the prison. Nacro's leaflet *Keeping your Home* (see page 59) also deals with these issues.

## ●●● **Storing belongings**

If the prisoner loses their accommodation, you and friends and relatives may need to store their belongings between you. If you and others are unable to do this, it may be necessary to store essential property and sell or dispose of the rest. Councils do not usually store people's belongings and commercial storage is expensive.

# 4 *Release and resettlement*

This section of the booklet gives you information to help prepare for a prisoner's release and resettlement. You will find out about:

- How to work out a prisoner's release date
- Who is eligible for 'tagging' (home detention curfew)
- Looking for accommodation for a prisoner
- How a prisoner can get temporary leave
- How to get benefits set up for a prisoner on release

## ●●● How release dates are decided

Prisoners are unlikely to serve the whole of their sentence in prison (unless they are serving one week or less). Those prisoners who were sentenced before October 1992 will be released from prison after serving two thirds of their sentence (plus any time added on for prison disciplinary offences). They may also be eligible for release on parole after one third of their sentence.

**Prisoners sentenced from October 1992** will serve at least half their sentence in prison before they can be released.

**Prisoners sentenced to less than four years** will be released automatically after half of their sentence or on their home detention curfew (HDC) date. Those sentenced to 12 months or more will then be supervised on release by a probation officer until the three-quarters point of their sentence.

**Prisoners sentenced to four years or more** may be released on 'discretionary conditional release' between the half-way point and the two-thirds point of their sentence; those who reach the two-thirds point will be released automatically. Prisoners will be supervised on release by a probation officer until the three-quarters point of their sentence. Sex offenders will be supervised on release until the end of their sentence if the trial judge ordered this.

For prisoners serving sentences of between four and under 15 years, decisions on granting release before

the two-thirds point of the sentence are made by the Parole Board. Decisions for prisoners serving sentences of 15 years or more are made by the Home Secretary, to whom the Parole Board makes recommendations.

**Prisoners sentenced for offences committed on and after 4 April 2005** For determinate sentences of 12 months or more, release will be at the half-way point or HDC date, supervised by the probation service until the sentence expiry date. Those on extended sentences for public protection are released on approval by the Parole Board between the half-way point and the end of the custodial period, and are then under supervision until the end of the sentence.

**Prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection (ISPP)** Indeterminate sentences are given to prisoners whom the court believes are dangerous. The court will recommend a minimum period that these prisoners must serve in custody. The Parole Board will consider the prisoner for release in much the same way as they do for prisoners serving life sentences. If release is granted, the prisoner will be on a licence for life. However, unlike with a life sentence where the licence can never be removed, the licence given to a prisoner with an ISPP could be reassessed and terminated by the Parole Board once the prisoner has completed a minimum period of 10 years on licence from the date of their release.

**Prisoners supervised on release** can be recalled to prison if they are convicted of another imprisonable offence or if they fail to comply with any conditions of their licence.

There are no rules specifying when a prisoner should be told their release date – so the release date could be known either months in advance or only a few days beforehand.

Prisoners cannot appeal against refusal to grant early release, but prisoners serving sentences of more than four years will be given a date when their suitability for early release will be reconsidered.

- **Home circumstances reports**

If the prisoner normally lives with you and is being considered for discretionary conditional release or parole, a probation officer from your area may visit you to prepare a home circumstances report for consideration by the Parole Board. This is standard procedure and one of the many reports that go the Parole Board. Home circumstances reports may also be made prior to temporary release.

- **Preparing for release**

If the prisoner has nowhere to live on release, they should start searching for accommodation well before their release date. It normally takes many months for people to secure somewhere, especially in London and



the south, where there is a shortage of hostels and supported accommodation. Many prisoners are released with no home to go to and end up on the street as a result. In searching for accommodation, the prisoner should make full use of any resettlement services available inside the prison. It is especially important that the prisoner asks for help from family and friends. Family and friends can, for instance, search for inexpensive private-rented accommodation in their area and club together to raise money for deposits and rent in advance.

Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline (0800 0181 259) has leaflets for prisoners giving advice on housing, and on employment and benefits (see page 62).

## ●●● **Release on temporary licence (ROTL)**

This used to be called 'home leave'. There are four types of temporary release licence:

- **Resettlement day release:** This can be considered for the following activities:
  - reparative community work/unpaid employment
  - life and work skills training/education
  - maintaining family ties
  - finding housing
  - probation interviews
  - job searches and interviews

- paid employment (for prisoners in a designated resettlement prison only)
- driving lessons (for prisoners in a designated resettlement prison only)
- car maintenance (for prisoners in a designated resettlement prison only)
- opening bank accounts
- **Resettlement overnight release:** Resettlement overnight release is to allow prisoners to spend time at their release address, or an approved temporary hostel address, re-establishing links with family and the local community. Prisoners can also use these temporary absences to facilitate interviews for work, training or accommodation.
- **Childcare resettlement leave:** Childcare resettlement leave is for prisoners who have sole caring responsibility for a child or children under 16, to encourage the maintenance of the parent/child relationship and to help prepare the prisoner to take up their parental duties on release.
- **Special purpose:** This is a short duration temporary release, often at short notice, that allows eligible prisoners to respond to exceptional, personal circumstances and to wider criminal justice needs.

Prison Service Order 6300 gives a lengthy description of eligibility for temporary release. It can be downloaded from the Prison Service website: [www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk).

## ●●● Home detention curfew (HDC or ‘tagging’)

Most prisoners aged 18 and over serving sentences from three months to under four years are eligible to spend up to the last two months of their sentence under an electronically monitored curfew or ‘tag’. This means that at specified times of the day or evening the offender must be where the curfew licence says they should be. Release will only be considered after a risk assessment, taking account of the prisoner’s home circumstances. The curfew conditions are set by the prison governor. There is no maximum length of time per day for the curfew but it must run for at least nine hours. Usually the curfew runs for 12 to 13 hours overnight.

Tagging works by attaching a small device – the tag – to the ankle of the offender. The tag is connected electronically to a monitoring unit, usually in the person’s home, which detects whether the person is where they are supposed to be during the curfew. Private companies are responsible for installing and removing the equipment, monitoring the person and notifying the Prison Service if the person breaches curfew hours.

## ●●● Discharge grants and travel warrants

Most sentenced prisoners aged 18 and over will receive a discharge grant and a travel warrant to get to the place they intend to go to on release. Sentenced prisoners who are aged over 18 and have been

sentenced to 14 days or more will receive a discharge grant of £46 when released from prison. An additional discretionary £50 can be paid direct to a housing provider to cover initial rent if the released prisoner would otherwise be homeless. If the prisoner is aged under 18 they will not receive a discharge grant. If the prisoner is a remand or civil prisoner they will not receive a discharge grant, but they will be given a travel warrant. Prisoners released directly from court do not receive any financial help.

## ●●● **Claiming benefits**

If the prisoner intends to claim benefits on release, they should be encouraged to do so on the first day of their release – whether or not they receive a discharge grant – in order to minimise the delay in receiving benefit.

If the prisoner was not convicted, they may be entitled to claim arrears for some types of benefits which were suspended while they were in custody – they should seek advice from the Jobcentre Plus or CAB.

The main benefit most released prisoners will be entitled to is Jobseeker's Allowance but, because this is paid two weeks in arrears, prisoners may have difficulty in managing until it is paid. If they have received a discharge grant, this should be spent very carefully. If the money runs out, they may be able to get a Crisis Loan (see page 12), but this will have to be paid back out of subsequent benefit payments.

Prisoners intending to claim Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance after release can apply for a Community Care Grant up to six weeks prior to release. The grant is to help people re-establish themselves in the community after a stay in institutional care. To stand a chance of getting a grant, a strong case for the prisoner's needs would have to be made. Prisoners could ask their probation officer or a welfare rights adviser at a CAB or advice centre to help with this.

## ●●● **Young people leaving prison**

Young people aged 16 and 17 are not automatically entitled to Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Instead, they will be offered a place on a youth training scheme and will receive an allowance while in training. However, Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance can be paid in certain circumstances – for example, if non-payment of benefit would result in severe hardship. Young people are advised to contact their local Jobcentre Plus, social security office or advice service if they are unable to take up a youth training course and can make a good case for receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

None of the special conditions or entitlement to Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance apply to Housing Benefit. If a young person lives independently and is responsible for paying rent, they will probably be eligible for Housing Benefit.

However, those under 25 will only be eligible for benefit at the single room rate. Even if they have been refused Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or are on a bridging allowance or youth training scheme, they can claim Housing Benefit.

If they are refused it, they should contact a local advice centre for help in pursuing their claim. Young people of 16 and 17 years old living independently are not liable for council tax, so cannot usually get Council Tax Benefit. However, if the landlord passes the tax on as part of the rent, then benefit may be paid as part of Housing Benefit. A 16 or 17 year old living as a lodger with another adult will not affect that person's entitlement to Council Tax Benefit or discounts.

## ●●● Sex offender notification

Under the *Sex Offenders Act 1997* (as amended by the *Sexual Offences Act 2003*), people convicted or cautioned for certain specified sexual offences since 1 September 1997 are required to notify the local police of their names and addresses every 12 months. This requirement lasts for varying periods of time, depending on the sentence given. The 2003 Act also introduced notification orders which require people convicted or cautioned for sexual offences abroad to register with the police. This notification system is sometimes referred to as the 'sex offenders register'.

# 5 *Finding out more*

This section will help you find further information and support, and understand the prison expressions you will often hear while your relative or friend is in prison. You will find out about:

- Prison jargon – what the terms mean
- Other publications giving information about prisons, prisoners' families and resettlement
- Organisations who help prisoners' families

## ●●● Prison jargon

In any new situation – moving into a new home or starting a new job – you are bound to feel confused by unfamiliar arrangements and sometimes a new language that is almost like a foreign language to you. The official language of prison life is confusing enough, and then there's all the prison slang. Here are a few words and phrases that often crop up:

**Adjudication:** Daily process where the governor deals with disciplinary matters.

**App:** Prisoners have to put in an 'app' (application) to the governor for anything different from normal daily routine eg, for goods to be brought into prison.

**Association:** Time when prisoners are allowed out of their cells to meet, talk, play pool, watch TV, etc. This is also the time that prisoners can make phone calls.

**Basic:** There are three levels of prison regime: basic, standard and enhanced, based on behaviour in prison. The higher the regime, the more privileges the prisoner has, such as an increased number or length of visits.

**Block or 'seg':** Prison segregation unit where prisoners are sent for bad behaviour or sometimes for their own protection.



**Canteen:** This is the prison shop, where prisoners will be able to order extra food, toiletries, tobacco, etc.

**Category A, B, C and D:** Prisoners are categorised and allotted to prisons according to their category. Women and young offenders are categorised as suitable for open or closed conditions, but adult males are given one of the above categories, with A being for those whose escape would be regarded as highly dangerous to the public in a sliding scale of risk down to D for those who can be reasonably trusted to serve their sentence in open conditions.

**Closed visit:** Visit supervised by officers where the prisoner and visitor are separated by a screen. A prisoner can be put on closed visits if under suspicion of smuggling drugs. Where there is proof, a prisoner may be put on closed visits for up to three months. However, this often means three months' worth of visits – ie, six visits, rather than three calendar months. Therefore, if you choose not to visit for three months you will still have to do six closed visits before going back to normal visiting arrangements.

**In possession:** Prisoners are allowed a strictly limited number of articles 'in possession' to keep in their cells. Anything above the limit is usually kept in 'private property' or handed out on a visit.

**IMB (Independent Monitoring Board):** These are lay people appointed by the Home Office to act as watchdogs and look after the interests of prisoners.

**Knockback:** A setback such as losing an appeal, being refused parole, etc.

**Legal letter:** Prisoner's letter to or from their solicitor. This is covered by prison rule 37A and cannot be opened except in the prisoner's presence. Both correspondents need to write Rule 37A on the envelope.

**Legal visit:** Lawyers are allowed to visit clients in prison without using a visiting order.

**Listeners:** Prisoners trained by Samaritans to listen in confidence and offer emotional support to other prisoners. Listeners are trained specifically not to give advice, but to empower the 'caller' to make their own decisions. However, they can, only with the caller's permission, pass on information to prison officers.

**MDT (mandatory drug testing):** Random urine testing for drugs.

**'On the rule':** This is a prison rule under which some prisoners are segregated for their own protection, either because they have large debts to other prisoners or because they have committed an offence such as a sex offence which would put them at risk from others.

**Personal officer:** Each prisoner should have a personal officer to look after their interests.

**Private spends:** Money sent in by relatives or friends – small amounts of which can be spent in the prison canteen (shop).

**PVO (privileged visiting order):** Sent out to visitors at the prisoner's request. Prisoners can be allowed these extra visits in return for good behaviour.

**Shipped out:** Moved from one prison to another, often without warning (when it is known as being 'ghosted').

**Tariff minimum term:** The part of a life sentenced prisoner's sentence which must be served 'for retribution and deterrence'. At the end of the tariff period the prisoner may be released on licence.

**Town visit/community visit:** Some prisoners are judged to be suitable to go out for the day to a place within a certain radius of the prison (usually 20 miles) in the company of family or friends.

**VO (visiting order):** This is sent out by the prison, at the request of the prisoner, to family and friends who the prisoner wants to get a visit from.

**VPU (vulnerable prisoners' unit):** Where prisoners at risk are held (see 'On the rule' opposite).

## ●●● Publications

The Prisoners' Information Books are produced jointly by the Prison Reform Trust and the Prison Service. They are made available to prisoners, and sometimes to prisoners' families. There are four books in the series: *Male Prisoners and Young Offenders*; *Women Prisoners and Female Young Offenders*; *Life Sentence Prisoners* and *Visiting and Keeping in Touch*.

- *Male Prisoners and Young Offenders and Women Prisoners and Female Young Offenders*

These two books contain information for prisoners about prison conditions, regimes and prison procedures, among other things.

- *Life Sentence Prisoners – 'Lifers'*

This book gives information about all aspects of the life sentence, including where sentences are served, the release process and review procedures. It is being updated and revised. Please contact the Prison Reform Trust for more information (see opposite for contact details).

- *Visiting and Keeping in Touch*

This book details everything prisoners and prisoners' families need to know about visiting a prison, such as information on searching, what can be taken in on a visit, and where to get

funding to pay for visits. It also contains a section on visiting prisons which lists every prison in England and Wales, how to get there and what facilities are available for visitors. A list of useful organisations is also provided.

Copies of these books should be available in prison visitors' centres. If you cannot get a copy from the prison, free copies are available from the Prison Reform Trust, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0JR, tel 020 7251 5070, email prt@prisonreformtrust.org.uk, www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

- *How to Appeal*

This is a guide to the appeals process which is available from JUSTICE. The guide is free to prisoners. Details from JUSTICE, 59 Carter Lane, London EC4V 5AQ, tel 020 7329 5100, email admin@justice.org.uk, www.justice.org.uk. The guide is £2.50 including postage where paid for.

- *Keeping your Home*

A practical guide for prisoners on getting housing costs paid, so they do not lose their homes while inside. The leaflet includes standard letters for writing to landlords, the council, and the Jobcentre Plus/social security office. This is available from Nacro Publications, 169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU, tel 020 7840 6427, email publications@nacro.org.uk, www.nacro.org.uk

- **Publications for families**

- *The Outsiders*

A series of information booklets produced by Action for Prisoners' Families (APF) for the partners and families of prisoners. There are five booklets, free to prisoners' families:

- *Sent to Prison*
- *Keeping in Touch*
- *Living with Separation*
- *Telling the Children*
- *Preparing for Release*

- *Who's Guilty?*

A free leaflet for 12-18 year olds to help raise awareness of the issues for a young person with a relative in prison.

- *A Problem Shared – Starting your own Support Group*

This gives helpful suggestions on how to start your own support group (£5.00 including postage).

All the publications above are available from Action for Prisoners' Families (APF), Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ, tel 020 8812 3600, email [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk), [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

- *Dads and kids: The inside story*

A study by Richard Nicholls of the factors influencing the quality and frequency of visiting between imprisoned fathers and their children (£5.00 including postage). Available from The Ormiston Children and Families Trust (see below).

- *Prisons, Drugs and You*

Produced by Adfam to help prisoners' families become better informed about how drug use can affect you and your family member in prison. Available from Adfam priced at £1.75, Waterbridge House, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH, tel 020 7928 8898, email [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk), [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

- **Publications for children**

- *Danny's Mum* for children up to 6 years of age (£3.00)

- *Tommy's Dad* for children aged 4-7 years (£3.00)

- *Finding Dad* for children aged 8-11 years (£4.50)

Contact APF (see opposite) for these three booklets.

- *My Mum's/Dad's in Prison*

This set of leaflets is priced at £4.00 including postage and is available from the Ormiston Children and Families Trust (see below for contact details) or it can be downloaded free at [www.ormiston.org](http://www.ormiston.org)

- *Visiting my Dad*

A book for children which talks them through a visit to see their dad in prison. This book is priced at £3.00 including postage and is available from the Ormiston Children and Families Trust (see below for contact details) or it can be downloaded free at [www.ormiston.org](http://www.ormiston.org)

The Ormiston Children and Families Trust, 333 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich IP3 9BU, tel 01473 724517, fax 01473 274255.

## ●●● **Contacts for more help**

There are many different organisations that will be able to give you support and advice. We've listed just a few who will either be able to advise you themselves, or direct you to the best service to meet your needs.

- **England and Wales**

- **Prisoners' Families Helpline**

This is a free and confidential service for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a close family member or friend. Tel 0808 808 2003, email [info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk), [www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk)

- **Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)**

Provides a national voice for prisoners' families. It encourages the development of organisations providing support to affected families. Contact Action for Prisoners' Families, Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2NQ, tel 020 8812 3600, email [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk), [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

- **Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline**

Provides information and advice for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families and friends on housing, employment and education, benefits and any other aspects of resettlement. Contact Resettlement *Plus* Helpline, Nacro, 169 Clapham



Road, London SW9 0PU, tel 0800 0181 259,  
email [helpline@nacro.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nacro.org.uk), [www.resettlement.info](http://www.resettlement.info)

- **Affect**

An organisation for the families and friends of prisoners facing long sentences. It provides a range of support services in the West Sussex and Hampshire area. Contact Affect, PO Box 274, PO22 6WY, tel 01329 832254 (counselling) and 01243 583264 (information), email [information@affect.org.uk](mailto:information@affect.org.uk), [www.affect.org.uk](http://www.affect.org.uk)

- **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

CABs provide free, confidential and independent advice on a wide range of subjects from nearly 3,400 locations including bureaux, GP surgeries, hospitals, colleges, prisons and courts. Advice is available face-to-face and by telephone. Most bureaux offer home visits and some also provide email advice. Go to [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) to find details of your local CAB, or look in the phone book.

- **Prison Reform Trust (PRT)**

Provides up-to-date information on prison life, rules and regulations, and prisoners' rights. They give advice and assistance up to 'casework' level to families and prisoners. Contact Prison Reform Trust, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0JR, tel 020 7251 5070, fax 020 7251 5076, email [info@prisonreformtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonreformtrust.org.uk), [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk)

- **Northern Ireland**

- **Family Links**

This is a partnership between the Probation Board Northern Ireland, the Youth Justice Agency, and NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) providing a range of services to the families and children of prisoners. Its main purpose is to help families maintain contact during imprisonment. Services offered include: transport to and from prisons; childcare in the home for families who would otherwise be unable to visit a relation in custody; welfare advice services; childcare, canteen and advice facilities at prison visitor centres in Hydebank Wood and Magilligan; and social activities and respite breaks for prisoners' families. Contact NIACRO, Amelia House, 4 Amelia Street, Belfast BT2 7GS, tel 02890 320157, email [niacro@niacro.co.uk](mailto:niacro@niacro.co.uk), [www.niacro.org.uk](http://www.niacro.org.uk)

- **Scotland**

- **Families Outside**

Families Outside runs the Scottish Prisoner's Family Helpline for families affected by imprisonment (0500 839383). Through its research, training and partnership work, Families Outside aims to raise awareness of the needs of families affected by imprisonment so that they can get the information and support they need to cope. Contact Families Outside, 19a Albany Street, Edinburgh EH1 3QN, tel 0500 839383 (helpline), 0131 557 9800 (information), email [admin@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:admin@familiesoutside.org.uk), [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)

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Every effort has been made to check that the information and advice in this booklet is as accurate as possible. However, we cannot guarantee its accuracy or completeness, and any liability for it is expressly excluded and disclaimed by Nacro and APF.

**Further copies of this guide are available from Nacro Publications on 020 7840 6427, fax 020 7840 6444, email [publications@nacro.org.uk](mailto:publications@nacro.org.uk)**

Single copies free. Multiple copies: voluntary organisations 50p each; statutory and commercial organisations £1.00 each.

**Photos** main photo, small photos bottom left and bottom right by [www.stuartrayner.com](http://www.stuartrayner.com); small top photo by Martin Cooke.

Nacro is very grateful to everyone who appears in the photos. Please note, it should not be assumed that any individuals depicted have any association with the stories or activities described in the text.

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