



The Outsiders

“Someone I knew came and told me my husband had been nicked.”

This booklet is for individuals experiencing the imprisonment of a family member. It explains the impact on the family from the point of initial arrest to imprisonment itself, providing helpful information ranging from the changes in family circumstances and the practical considerations of imprisonment, to becoming familiar with prison jargon.

£1.00

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Sent to Prison

a guide for the partners and families of prisoners

Action
for Prisoners' Families

This booklet is one of a series of information booklets for families of prisoners called 'The Outsiders' published by Action for Prisoners' Families (APF), the national federation of services supporting families of prisoners.

APF works to increase awareness of the issues for children, young people and families when a parent, partner or other close relative is sent to prison. If you have any comments about the information in this booklet we would very much like to hear from you.

The Outsiders

Sent to prison

Keeping in touch
Living with separation
Telling the children
Preparing for release

Designed by Nicola Kenwood
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Freephone support helpline offering information, advice and guidance to prisoners' families

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Sent to prison

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Sent to prison

Shock and disbelief

“Someone I knew came and told me my husband had been nicked. It was nearly midnight, but I went down to the police station. They told me what had happened but I couldn't see him then, so I went home. I was shaking. Later the police came round and questioned me. We were all in total shock. The oldest boy just cried and cried - I don't think it really hit the younger ones. It was total chaos and it was all sort of hazy. There are still parts of those early days I just can't remember. This was the start of a nightmare. I just kept thinking it can't be true!”

This is how it was for one partner at the time of arrest. Although the circumstances can vary, people's first reactions are often very similar. Some partners have been living in dread of this happening, whilst for others it comes as a complete shock. For some it isn't a new experience.

What's it like when someone is arrested at home?

Many arrests take place in the home. This can be very traumatic, especially if children are present.

“It was a complete shock when the police came early that morning and arrested him. They raided the house and woke up the kids and took them from their beds during the search. When they took their daddy away they went into hysterics. The oldest tried to drag his daddy back.”

How are children affected?

It is hard to imagine that this experience doesn't affect children. Even very young children and babies who don't understand what's happening will be affected, because they may pick up the anxieties and emotions of the adults in their lives and subconsciously know that all is not well.

“My middle girl wanted to know where they were taking her daddy and she sobbed her heart out. My oldest was 8 years old then and it wasn't the first time her father had been arrested. She'd been through it all before and she comforted her sister.”

“My little boy is now terrified they'll come back and take me away too.”

“The children now have panic attacks when they see the police - it was very upsetting for them to see their mother being dragged away.”

“For months afterwards the children had difficulty sleeping. They started wetting the bed and having nightmares.”

Older children may be just as traumatised, especially when news of the arrest is in the papers and their friends get to hear about it. Kirsty was 16 when her brother was arrested:

“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 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 wasn't sleeping, didn't know what was going on. It felt like it was a dream.”

Sometimes both mother and father are arrested together. When this happens, neighbours may come in and look after the children, relatives are called on, or sometimes the children will be taken to the police station until care arrangements can be made by social services.

Some children may however be perfectly comfortable with the facts of imprisonment and may even bring it up at inappropriate moments, something that parents need to be prepared for.

How to deal with a family member's offence

For some families, the nature of the offence is a source of shame. This particularly applies to offences of a sexual nature and to other violent crimes though it can go across the board.

It is very difficult for some families to cope if there has been newspaper and television coverage of the case and the sentence. Children especially can find this very disturbing, and some women partners and parents feel a great sense of guilt, as if the offence was somehow their fault:

“When they came that morning into the house and arrested him it was awful. I felt so guilty myself going out - and so embarrassed too. Then I thought to myself, come on, pull yourself together. At first I just wouldn't go out at all - but now I make sure I get out once a week. You do need to get out.”

“The emotional strain was unbelievable. Because of the nature of the offence there was a lot of distrust on my part.”

Other families report being harassed by neighbours, or getting anonymous abusive phone calls and notes pushed through their letterbox. After recent high profile cases involving paedophiles, some families have had to move house and make a fresh start elsewhere

where they are not known. If you find that you are being harassed, then it may be useful to keep a record of exactly what happens. If you then require assistance from the police or housing association to move house, a dossier of events will be very helpful to your case.

If you feel angry, let down, disappointed and ashamed, you need to remember two important facts:

1. *These feelings are perfectly normal.*
2. *You are not guilty.*

Practical considerations

After the first shock of the guilty verdict there are some practical things you need to know about. Getting to grips with matters like money problems and transport to the prison can be very difficult when you are still trying to cope with the emotional trauma of seeing someone you love being sent away from you - particularly if they were on bail rather than being remanded in custody.

You will inevitably feel a sense of panic:

- Which prison have they gone to?
- When do I get to visit?
- What do I tell their siblings?
- What do I say to the neighbours?

This leaflet will give you some helpful advice on practical matters.

Which prison will your family member be going to?

Your family member's solicitor may possibly be able to arrange a brief visit to the cells in the court so that you can see your partner or other family member before they are taken to prison to start the sentence – but this is very rare and most courts do not allow any social visits at all.



In most cases their legal representatives will be allowed to visit the cells and they will be able to pass on information to families, e.g. about which prison your relative is going to. If you phone the court after 4.30pm and ask to speak to 'cells', they might be able to say which prison your partner is going to. However, when arriving at prison the prisoner will be allowed one postage paid letter to send home to their family, which is how many families first find out which prison their relative has been sent to and how they are.

When will you next be able to speak to your family member?

- Every prisoner is supposed to be allowed one free reception phone call within the first 24 hours after s/he arrives in the prison.
- In practice, there is such high demand for the use of prison phones that a prisoner new to that prison may not manage to get to the phone in time before s/he is locked in his or her cell for the night, so you may not hear from them until the next day at the earliest.
- Remember prisoners can't receive incoming calls.



Who can you talk to if you are worried about your relative or partner?

If you think that a prisoner is at risk from suicide or self harm, telephone the prison, explain that you think there is a risk of suicide or self harm and ask to speak to the Duty Governor. If you do not feel confident enough to do this, please call the **Prisoners' Families Helpline** free on **0808 808 2003**. Helpline staff will try to get through to the Duty Governor for you and call you back.

Visitors' Centres

Just over half of prisons in England and Wales have a visitors' centre, which offer information and support to families and friends of prisoners. Many are completely independent from the prison and you can talk to them in confidence about any worries or concerns that you may have. They should also be able to provide you with written information about visiting the prison and any special facilities for children that are available. However, when your relative sends you a visiting order, these details will be printed on it, together with a number to ring to book a visit.

- **You may, however, find it difficult to get through on the booking line, as, in some prisons, they are frequently engaged. After your first visit, ask whether you can book visits in other ways.**

All prisons should have a multi-faith chaplaincy and chaplains can arrange to visit a prisoner. You can contact the prison chaplain by ringing the prison number and asking for the chaplain.

There is much more information on visiting in the Outsiders booklet '*Keeping in Touch*' which should be available from prison visitors' centres or the **Prisoners' Families Helpline Freephone 0808 808 2003**. You can also download useful information at the **Prisoners' Families Helpline website www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk**

What should you tell people about your relative being in prison?

It's up to you how much or how little you tell your family, friends and neighbours about your relative being in prison. If you have children, they are bound to ask questions that you will have to deal with, and it is usually better to tell them the truth, explaining it in a way that they can relate to.

A woman prisoner said that at first she was so ashamed of being in prison that she decided not to tell her young daughter:

“At first I tried to pretend this was college I was at. But one day my daughter said she wanted the TV on during the visit and I said we weren't allowed. So she said, “Can't you ask the officers?” I'd always called them teachers and she looked really ashamed of letting it out and I realised she knew this was a prison. I was amazed how she'd picked it up - she's only five!”

Here is how another mother told her daughters about their elder brother being in prison:

“When he was on remand he was in a secure unit which wasn't really like a prison. It had comfortable chairs and nice tables, so we told the girls it was a hotel and Philip was working there. But when he was convicted and sent to a young offenders' institution it was much more like a real prison, and we had to tell them the truth. We'd decided to tell them anyway when the younger one wrote a letter to Father Christmas asking for her big brother back again. First when I told them they cried, but then they got used to the idea.”

That mother's decision to tell the truth seems to have been the right one. Her elder daughter, who was nine when her brother first went to prison, now has quite happy memories of her visits to him:

“I remember there was a children's corner with lots of playdough and me and my sister made penguins and Gary used to help us.”

For more information see the leaflet in the Outsiders series called *'Telling the Children'* – available from the **Prisoners' Families Helpline Freephone 0808 808 2003** or **Action for Prisoners' Families: 0208 812 3600**.

Sorting out money and bills

If your partner has been claiming income support for the family it is important that you transfer this claim to yourself as soon as possible after your partner has been sent to prison, as you will now be treated as a 'One Income' family. Go along to your local post office and ask for help or to any post office in a big town or city. As a partner or relative of a prisoner you may be entitled to benefits to cover various costs. The **Prisoners Families Helpline Freephone 0808 808 2003** will be able to give you some general information and can send you a fact sheet, but if you are in any doubt about what you are entitled to, seek advice from your local Jobcentre Plus, Social Security office or from your local CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau).

How will you manage to pay the bills?

Bringing up a family without a partner to share the financial burden can put a lot of strain on your finances. For some families this can mean going into debt and this is an enormous source of stress. Partners left at home have to manage and make choices, such as:

- **How can I avoid spending more than I have?**
- **Should I risk going into debt?**
- **Where can I make savings?**
- **How can I afford to pay for the children's food, clothes and school uniform as well as everything else?**

Mothers with partners in prison may be tempted to compensate their children for the loss of their father by spending much more than they can afford on birthdays and Christmas. Similarly they often spend more than they can afford on things for their partner in prison. They might also deliberately hide from their partner the extent of their debts for fear of causing anxiety. Here's what some women said:

“I try to deal with things myself - I don't like going in and burdening him. I tell him things when the time is right. I don't talk about money. I do have problems with debt but I try to hide that - like last month, my phone was cut off.”

“I had to cope with money and I got into debt, especially with the two teenagers wanting this and that. When I went up to the prison I often didn't have any money. But he didn't know about those things.”

Debt

One Parent Families (Freephone 0800 0185026) provide useful information on their website (www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk) about dealing with debt and can send you free factsheets on the subject.

There are some women, however, who feel they are doing better at managing money without their partners, especially if the partner had an alcohol or drugs problem:

“I manage fine - I'm very good with money. I'm better off now to be honest, though he'd be raging if he heard me say that. We always had less when he was here.”

Carrying on alone

When your partner is away through the enforced separation of imprisonment, the children lose one of their parents and many aspects of day-to-day life will change.

You become a one parent family. Not only do you have to accept the absence of your partner, but you also have to adapt to a whole new way of life – taking on new responsibilities, looking after the children on your own, keeping in touch with your partner and visiting the prison.

One wife said:

“I didn't plan to be on my own - and time doesn't make it easier. It just gets harder and sometimes I can see no end to it.”



Many parents, who as a result of the imprisonment of their partner have become one parent families have found useful information and support through organisations such as **Lone Parent Helpline 0800 018 5026** (or **0800 0191 277** if the first number does not work) and **Gingerbread 0800 018 4318**. Some families are reluctant to use the helplines because they do not see themselves as single parents. However, these organisations will help you even though your separation is only temporary.

Taking on the responsibility

There are inevitable emotional pressures for people whose partners are prisoners. You might feel that you always have to be strong for your children and that it is unfair to burden your partner with the harsh reality of what it is like to cope on the outside without them. The common feeling is that the prisoner is powerless to solve these problems from inside the prison.

“On the visit we’d talk about how we felt. I would tell him I was fine, but really I was telling him a pack of lies, because more often than not, I wasn’t coping. But I didn’t want him worrying.”

Another woman gradually changed her attitude:

“At the start I used to keep things back from him, because I knew he had to sit there and think about all those things and there was nothing he could do about it. But then as time went on, I started telling him everything that was happening, because I was the one having to cope and I had no one else to turn to.”

Even though your partner is in prison, many families have found that resuming the roles of family life following release from prison is made easier if the prisoner has been involved as much as possible with responsibilities and changes taking place on the outside (see the Outsider booklet entitled ‘**Living With Separation**’).

Who to turn to for help

You may be lucky enough to have supportive family and friends, or you may make friends with the partners of other prisoners when you go to visit your partner or other relative. You may find it helpful to speak to somebody outside of the family who is a little bit removed from the situation, someone whose feelings you don’t have to feel responsible for.

There are a number of local prisoners’ families support groups around the country. To find out if there is one near you call the **Prisoners’ Families Helpline Freephone 0808 808 2003** or, if you have access to the internet, check the directory on APF’s web site:

www.actionpf.org.uk. If you feel you have nobody to turn to, or you need more specialised help, the Prisoners’ Families Helpline may also be able to help you.

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. Your relative will soon slip into using this language quite naturally. Here are a few words and phrases that often crop up:

Adjudication – daily process when governor deals with disciplinary offences.

App – prisoners have to put in an app (application) to the governor for anything different from normal daily routine e.g. for things 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, such as 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 your relative will be able to order extra food, toiletries, tobacco, etc.

Category A, B, C and D: Prisoners are categorized and allotted to prisons by categories. Women and young offenders are categorized as suitable for open or closed conditions, but adult males are given one of the above categories, with A being those whose escape would be regarded as highly dangerous to the public, 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 3 months. However, this often means 3 months worth of visits, i.e. 6 visits, rather than 3 calendar months. Therefore, if you choose not to visit for 3 months you will still have to do 6 closed visits before going back to normal.

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 Secretary 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 solicitor. This is covered by prison rule 37A and cannot be opened except in the prisoner's presence. Both correspondents need to write Rule 39 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.

Personal officer – each prisoner should have a personal officer to look after their interests.

MDT – mandatory drug testing – random urine testing for drugs.

'On the rule' – 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 e.g. a sex offence – which would put them at risk from others.

Private spends – money sent in by relatives or friends – small amounts which can be spent in 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 will be felt 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 that the prisoner wants to get a visit from. They are only needed for convicted prisoners.

VPU – Vulnerable Prisoners Unit – where prisoners at risk are held (see 'on the rule' above).