Under fives and their families affected by imprisonment

A handbook for Sure Start Children's Centres

Believe in children M Barnardo's





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Foreword

The children of prisoners and their families are a highly vulnerable group. Sure Start Children's Centres, with their combination of universal and targeted services, their base in the community and their potential for early intervention are a key resource for meeting the needs of this group.



This handbook is designed to be an accessible aid to practice for children centre staff and their managers as they strive to develop their reach to these children and families. It is not a call for more resources. The aim is to support children's centres to target resources effectively towards the most vulnerable.

It is based on Barnardo's experience of delivering services inside prisons and services for the families of offenders in the community and also our policy and research work in relation to this group.

In addition Barnardo's runs a large number of children's centres and we have used this experience to focus on the needs of under fives and their families who are affected by imprisonment.

In the handbook we use brief case notes from current practice work and research consultations to illustrate key challenges in children's centre work with this group.

We hope the handbook will be widely used and have a real impact on the way in which children's centres respond to the needs of these families.

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Hard copies of this handbook are available at £6 from swpublications@barnardos.org.uk. A free PDF download (excluding the A3 poster) is available at www.i-hop.org.uk.

Notes

- 1. The handbook is aimed at Sure Start Children's Centres in England, similar provisions for Early Years children and their families in Scotland and Northern Ireland and Integrated Children's Centres in Wales.
- 2. For the purpose of the handbook the term 'children and families affected by imprisonment' includes:
 - families where a father or mother is in prison
 - families where someone of significance in the lives of children is in prison (for instance, a brother or sister, grandparent, step parent, partner of a parent etc)
 - families where someone has been in prison and where this continues to have an impact on the lives of children.
- 3. In the handbook we refer to children's centre 'reach'. This is usually defined in two ways (Barnardo's, 2011):
 - the number of families with children under five in the area
 - the extent of engagement with families at risk of poor outcomes who may be in need of support but are less likely to take up the services on offer at their children's centre.
- 4. The idea behind the enclosed A3 poster is that children's centres can display this prominently to make it clear that families affected by imprisonment are welcome. We have left a space on the poster where details of the centres' relevant activities (for instance, groups for partners of prisoners etc) can be written.

Section one: Background and policy context Over recent years there has been a welcome recognition of the needs of children and families affected by imprisonment (see for instance Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE], 2008 and University of Huddersfield, 2013). But although we now have fairly comprehensive research information on the impact of imprisonment on children and families there is still a lack of guidance on how mainstream service providers can meet the needs of this group. What practical guidance has been produced has tended to focus on the school years rather than the foundation years.

Ofsted's Children's centre inspection handbook from April 2013 (Ofsted, 2013) named children of offenders and/ or those in custody, as a target group that children's centres may identify as having needs or circumstances that require intervention or additional support. The handbook does not explicitly state that children's centres need to target support to this group of children, noting that target groups will vary according to the centre's identification of its community and their needs.

Originally however, the children of offenders were identified as one of the target groups for Sure Start Children's Centres. In guidance published in 2006 the then Government (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) identified a number of groups as being at risk and being priority groups for children's centres. Amongst these groups were 'families with a parent in prison or engaged in criminal activity'.

Identifying specific groups was then superseded by a more generic definition of the groups which children's centres are intended to reach. The core purpose of children's centres was stated (Department for Education, 2011) as being 'to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, so children are equipped for life and ready for school, no matter what their background or family circumstances'.

As a response to a recognition that there is a need for professionals to be informed about the effect of parental imprisonment on children and equipped to respond appropriately, the Department for Education funded i-HOP in 2013. i-HOP (see details in Appendices) provides an online information service that brings together resources to help professionals to support children with a family member in prison, as well as a free helpline.

Research shows that children and families affected by imprisonment are a key group in terms of disadvantage.

Children of offenders have significantly poor outcomes compared with their age mates. There is considerable evidence of intergenerational offending. As they grow up, the children of prisoners are approximately three times more likely to be involved in delinquent activity compared with their age mates. They are more than twice as likely to experience mental health difficulties (SCIE, 2008).

Research also shows that having a parent in prison increases the likelihood of the child experiencing poverty and the family becoming vulnerable to housing disruption (Smith et al, 2007). There is also an increased likelihood of children entering the care system – particularly when women are imprisoned.

However, in spite of research showing the very clear needs of this group and the likelihood of an association with multiple family risk, there is very little evidence that local authorities focus consistently on the needs of this group. For example, children of prisoners are often not recognised in Children's Plans or in Local Safeguarding Children Board policies and protocols. There can often be a wide variety in the extent to which local authorities recognise the needs of these families.

Numbers of children affected by parental imprisonment

No systematic records are kept of which prisoners in the UK have children and how many. The Ministry of Justice (2012) estimated that a total of 200,000 children had a parent in prison during the year of



2009, and that in June 2009 at a single point in time there were 90,000 children with a parent in prison.

This figure does not take into account the number of children who might be affected by having a close non-biologically related adult in prison – for instance, a mother's partner. Crucially this is also an estimate of the number with a parent in prison over a single year and also at one point in time. It does not include the *cumulative* impact of imprisonment and therefore the very large number of children who at some stage in their childhood will experience the imprisonment of a parent or other close adult.

The majority of the children will have a father in prison because the number of men in prison is far higher than the number of women. At the end of August 2014, the prison population in England and Wales was 85,401, comprising 81,489 men and 3,912 women (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Again we do not know the number of under fives with a father in prison. But it is likely to be proportionately high because the prison population is significantly weighted to younger adults (e.g. who are more likely to have young children). For instance, in June 2014 40 per cent of the men in prison were aged 18 – 29 years (Ministry of Justice, 2014). It is estimated that each year 18,000 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment (Corston, 2007). Of these children, 34 per cent are under five years old.

Invisible children and families?

There is no local information that schools, children's services or health services can access to identify which children in a local area are affected by having a parent in prison.

In the case of children's centres, some parents may tell the centre that a family member is in prison and some agencies may refer individual families with this information but there is no systematic information available.

Adding to the 'invisibility' of this group is the stigma that families in this situation may experience. This stigma in local communities may mean that families are unwilling to identify themselves to agencies.

Also, the families may themselves, because of their circumstances, be isolated and therefore less aware of local facilities such as children's centres and how to access them.

In some cases difficulties and rejection may mean that families uproot themselves from their community areas to 'start life afresh', thereby making it even more difficult to ascertain which families in a particular reach area are affected by parental imprisonment.

In view of the very large numbers involved, it is likely that in almost all children centre reach areas there are children and families affected by imprisonment. This will be the case in the more affluent areas as well as disadvantaged areas.

A key target group for children's centres

The high number of under fives affected, the poor outcomes, the association with poverty and with other multiple risk factors and the importance of early intervention all indicate that children affected by imprisonment should be a key target group for children's centres.

But there is much anecdotal evidence that children's centres are not reaching the young children and families affected by imprisonment to anything like the extent that their very high numbers and high vulnerability would indicate is required.

Also, children affected by imprisonment may be over represented in other groups that children's centres aim to target. For instance there are a disproportionate number of black and minority ethnic (BME) men and women in prison (Prison Reform Trust, 2011) and therefore there is likely to be a disproportionate number of BME families with under fives affected by imprisonment in children's centre reach areas.

Children's centres offer a range of services including health care, childcare, family support, parenting advice, signposting and advice in relation to finances and housing difficulties and access to training and employment opportunities. All of these services may be crucially important for children and families affected by imprisonment. The centres' ability to offer a holistic model of support to the child and family means they are in a unique position to address difficulties in the different 'domains' in the 'ecology' of the child's life (Department of Health, 2000, Horwath, 2010).

In addition, the community-based nature of children's centres means they may be a critical service for maintaining continuity in the child's life while the family goes through the turmoil of having a parent in prison.

Section two: The impact of imprisonment on under fives and their families In this section we look at the impact of imprisonment of a parent on under fives and their families. Research points to differences in the experience of men and women offenders and so we treat these separately.

In what follows it is important to keep in mind there can be a wide variety in the impact of a parent's imprisonment on the lives of children. In some cases relationships may not be strong and the imprisonment may have little impact on the child. Equally there are likely to be some families where the imprisonment of a parent makes the life of the child more straightforward. In some cases the imprisonment of a parent may mean the child is safer, although of course that does not necessarily mean the child does not experience loss.

It is also crucial to keep in mind that parental imprisonment is likely to be significantly correlated with a range of family problems including domestic violence and drug and alcohol misuse (Prison Reform Trust, 2011). This is particularly the case for women (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

For the children's centre worker a family being identified as affected by imprisonment should act as a **key marker** for the possibility of other difficulties. The specific difficulties identified below should therefore be seen as **additional** to other key family difficulties.

Impact of imprisonment of fathers

The family

• The family is likely to be put under stress. This stress may be the result of the mother coping with her own emotional loss, anxiety and perhaps anger and at the same time trying to juggle the needs of the children concerned. The prisoner may also be putting pressure on the mother in terms of demands for reassurance etc.



'I really miss him. I'm always in tears. He's missing so much of [son's name] growing up.'

Barnardo's research interview

- The pressure may be particularly acute in the early stages of imprisonment. The family may not have known the father was going to be sent to prison. If it is the first time the family has experienced imprisonment they may not know about many of the practicalities, including how to make contact or how to arrange visits.
- The mother may be in a conflicted position, not herself wanting contact with the father but feeling that it is important that relationships are maintained between the child/ren and father.
- The family may be experiencing negative reactions from their wider family or local community as a result of the father going to prison. There might have been local press reports about the crimes and so the family's situation may be well known in the community. Some people in the local community may feel that the children and family having a tough time is part of the punishment (e.g. 'he should have thought about that before he did what he did.')
- Related to the above the family may be experiencing isolation from previously supportive networks. This may particularly be the case if the family decides to keep the imprisonment a secret and consequently withdraws from contact.
- In some cases the imprisonment may lead to the family feeling they have to move out of an area because of threats/ostracism etc.
- This potential transience may be associated with a breakdown in relationships with trusted local professionals such as health visitors.
- A father going to prison may have a significant impact on family finances.
 Earnings may stop and the family be forced

onto benefits. (In some cases family finances might of course improve as a result of a father going into prison who had previously used a disproportionate amount of the family's money).

"...when [partner] was here and working he would have been able to buy [son] more clothes and things. Obviously he wasn't here when he was born... without him being here and working I couldn't go out and buy things when I needed them."

Barnardo's research interview

- There may be costs associated with imprisonment that further undermine family finances including cost of visiting and the cost of providing 'treats' for the prisoner inside etc.
- Visiting the father in prison may be a particularly stressful time for the family. It is likely to involve long tiring journeys and waits at the prison. Stresses may be increased if the family is facing other challenges such as having a disabled child. Visits may be a very emotional experience for the family.

'When we go to see him... [three-year-old] is just evil until the next day and with [father] being away, it's like "where's daddy gone...?"

Barnardo's research interview



The child under five with a father in prison

Depending on her or his developmental stage the child under five may be experiencing:

- Negative impact on mother's parenting capacity as a result of the stress she is experiencing.
- A sense of loss and anxiety at the departure of the parent.
- An underlying feeling of confusion because the child doesn't know what is happening to the father.
- If the young child knows the father is in prison she or he may have worrying thoughts about what happens in prison and be frightened for the safety of the father.
- Significant changes in the family finances may have an impact on the child's sense of security and more generally their health and wellbeing.
- There may be a breakdown of the child's relationships with trusted adults, including wider family members through the family being ostracised, withdrawing from contacts or 'moving right away'.
- Visiting the father in prison may be a time of particular stress for the children. It may involve a tiring journey followed by a long wait in unfamiliar and perhaps frightening surroundings. The children may be searched.

When the child sees the father this may be accompanied by stress between the adults. It may also create confusion for the child. Visiting facilities will differ between prisons with some being relatively child-friendly but others being very formal. In some prison visiting rooms the father may not be able to hold or cuddle the child.

Impact of offence on family

Particular offences may lead to increased family complexity for young children. A father for instance may be in prison as a result of sexual offences committed to an older sibling.

The young child may experience all the loss associated with the father going to prison but in addition to this there may be restrictions on the child visiting and restrictions on contact when the father leaves prison.

Impact of imprisonment of mothers

Although women offenders are only a small minority of the overall prison population they have often experienced very significant difficulties in their lives and have complex needs. For instance, a high proportion are identified as having mental health and drug and alcohol misuse problems. Also a significant number have suffered abuse or domestic violence (see Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011 for a review of research).

The following are some of the specific factors related to the impact of maternal imprisonment for under fives.

- The impact on under fives is likely to be very great when a mother goes into prison because mothers are far more likely to have sole responsibility for childcare.
- The child is much more likely to move from the family home if the mother is imprisoned. Research has shown that only five per cent of children remain in their own homes once a mother has been sentenced (Prison Reform Trust, 2000). Some will be cared for by their father. Many will either be looked after by wider family members (particularly grandparents) or enter the care system. A Ministry of Justice (2009) report found that 12 per cent of children of female prisoners were in care with foster parents or had been adopted.
- The child going into care or being with foster parents obviously will have implications for the parental challenges the mother will face on release. Gelsthorpe et al (2007) state 'Women's relationships do not always survive their imprisonment... Moreover, some women face huge difficulties in re-establishing relationships with their children after release from prison, especially where children have been taken into care or where the separation has been long-term.'
- Not only may personal and family relationships break down but also relationships with key professionals (health visitors etc) may be impacted to the detriment of the child.
- There are fewer prisons for women and these are typically a long way from where the family lives. This can make it difficult for children to visit their mothers, and therefore for women prisoners to maintain a relationship with their children whilst imprisoned. For the child it may mean long, tiring and emotionally charged visits.



'Two children have a mother in prison and they are being looked after by an uncle. The mother is in prison more than 200 miles away. The uncle drives them to visit their mother as frequently as he can but the journey involves an overnight stay. Because money is tight they sleep in the car in a motorway service area.'

> Barnardo's research interviewchildren aged five+

- Problems for the mother may continue on release. Where the children are young she may have missed important stages in their development, lack confidence in parenting and feel she is a stranger to them.
- The mother could also face practical difficulties on release such as a delay in receiving benefits.
- Housing difficulties can also be very important when the mother leaves prison. Some women may lose their homes as a result of imprisonment. One particular dilemma may be the 'catch 22' that the mother cannot get accommodation unless her children are with her, but she cannot have her children return to her without accommodation (Corston, 2007). For the children this can extend the period of uncertainty and confusion.
- On leaving prison the mother may face additional rejection and isolation. Not only will she have the stigma of criminality but also she may face the stigma of being seen to have deserted her children by risking imprisonment.

Section three: Developing inclusive practice Providing services for families affected by imprisonment is a key aspect of inclusive practice for children's centres.

Children's centre good practice in relation to children and families affected by imprisonment involves two aspects. The first is effectively engaging with a group of families who are likely to be 'hard to reach' or perhaps more crucially are likely to find the children's centre hard to reach. The second is direct work with parents and children which engages with the daily reality of the effects of imprisonment.

In terms of children's centre work it is helpful to think in terms of the 'offender journey' and the effects on children and families of different stages of this journey. This 'journey' has been presented by Action for Prisoners' Families in the following way:



There will be different requirements of children's centre staff in their work with children and families who have a parent at different stages in this journey.

Engaging with families

Engaging with families affected by imprisonment produces particular challenges. As we have discussed, parents in this situation may feel overwhelmed by the pressures in their lives, they may be isolated and know little about local facilities. They may feel stigmatised and unwilling to be involved in a community-based children's centre where they feel other parents will look down on them.

Formal pathways

It is essential to develop formal pathways between the children's centre and local offender management services.

It is obviously important to develop links with prisons themselves, either through direct support of activities in prisons or else through referrals from prison staff.

A number of children's centres are involved in providing or supporting visiting arrangements in prisons or organising 'family days' in prisons, thus making the experience more child-friendly for young children and through this making links to their own centres.

Ormiston Prison Link project delivers special children's visits in prisons where fathers have the freedom to move around, interact and engage in activities with their children. Local children's centre staff have attended these special visits to deliver activity sessions with the families.

Local children's centre staff have also provided activities for families at the visitors' centre outside the prison. At these sessions the families are given information about what is on offer at local children's centres. Children's centre staff also attend events held for prisoners such as resettlement open days where they meet with prisoners and provide information on support available at children's centres.

However, even in the case of local prisons, there will be difficulties in that many of the prisoners' families are likely to come from outside the reach area of the children's centre.

Links between children's centres and staff within the prisons, and a clear referral system will be another important pathway whereby vulnerable families come into contact with their local centre.



A children's centre receives a referral about a prisoner who is about to be released. Although initially the prisoner will not return to his family home, he wants to regain an active relationship with his young children who live in the centre's reach area. The mother, who has not previously been involved with the centre, is in agreement with this. On his release a centre worker meets with the mother and father to plan how his contact with the children will be organised.

The father also starts attending a parenting course at the centre which he completes and which enhances his relationship with his children.

Barnardo's children's centre

Obviously in all these contacts that involve the offender being at the children's centre, a rigorous assessment is necessary in relation to any threat the offender may present to children, parents or staff.

The offender management service will be another key source of referrals. Developing close ties and liaison between local offender management services (predominantly probation officers) and children's centres is crucial.

In a pilot scheme in Swindon, appointments with probation, including community-based assessments, can be undertaken in a local children's centre to facilitate the families of offenders linking with the services on offer. The family of the offender can attend a 'stay and play session' while the offender manager and the offender meet in another room.

An offender manager with previous experience of working in a children's centre has been instrumental in setting up this scheme. One example of the benefits of this arrangement is of an offender manager who was requested to complete a pre-sentence report within 24 hours for a woman with a young baby. It was impossible to set up childcare at short notice and children are not allowed at the probation office. The offender manager met the mother at the children's centre where childcare was available. Also the centre staff were able to introduce the mother to the services they provide.

Offender managers assess the risk that having each offender on the premises could present to children, parents and staff before arranging the appointment.

As this example illustrates, one key aspect of the links between the offender manager and children's centre staff will be to agree what information each party provides for the other, and can expect from the other, particularly in relation to risk factors.

Another important formal pathway will be referrals from health visitors. For this group of parents, as for other vulnerable parents, the health visitor actually bringing the parent to the children's centre and being able to spend a little time with them in the centre will be important.

In addition children's centres should make links with local services that are likely to be involved with families affected by imprisonment. For instance, services run by charities such as Mind and Shelter are likely to be in contact with families in this situation, as will local drugs projects.

Also, in the case of women offenders many parts of the country are served by Women's Community Services that work with women in the community to reduce their offending and address their needs (see Women's Breakout in information and resources section).

In developing effective pathways between relevant services and the children's centre it is



important that attention is given to breaking down the barriers that can be a result of different professional cultures. It is difficult to produce hard and fast guidelines around this but a starting point is to share at a faceto-face level the different outcomes that each professional group might have.

But in doing this it is also important to recognise commonalities. For instance professionals in the criminal justice system will acknowledge the impact that developing support networks has on offending behaviour and developing these same support networks will be regarded as crucial by children's centre staff for effective family functioning.

Informal pathways

Many of the ways in which children's centres develop effective reach to their communities will be important for engaging with children and parents affected by imprisonment. Links with community and voluntary organisations, advertising, a presence at community events, links with community leaders and locals who 'know everybody', pounding the streets in order to get known, newsletters, posters etc can all play an important part in making contact with families affected by imprisonment. This obviously has to be done with a recognition of different cultural patterns and links in different communities. Children's centre understanding and ways of engaging with BME communities will of course be very important in this.

But in addition an important aspect of engaging with families affected by imprisonment is to recognise the stigma that these families may experience in their local community. Parents affected by imprisonment may be put off attending the local children's centre not necessarily by how they think the staff will react to them but how they think other parents from the community who are regulars at the centre will respond to them.

The solution to this will be different in different settings. But making it clear to all users that the centre is a place where families affected by imprisonment are welcome will be important. It will also be important to develop a general culture in the centre whereby the children and families of offenders are not seen as guilty of offending by association. This can be done in a number of ways. It can be done by messages in the centre about families being affected by imprisonment being welcome (we hope the poster included in this handbook will be useful in this respect). It can also be done in discussions in the various group meetings which are the lifeblood of a children's centre – parents' advisory groups, discussion groups, drop-ins etc. Staff skill and sensitivity will of course be necessary in this as it is in any discussions in the centre relating to inclusion.

Ultimately of course this relates to a key general challenge for children's centres which are required to provide universal nonstigmatising services but at the same time target very vulnerable families.

Recent Barnardo's research (Barnardo's, 2011) has drawn on practitioner feedback on what works in engaging hard to reach families. The following approaches are seen to be effective:

- inclusive ethos, flexible 'can-do' attitudes and persistence - this involves working at parents' own pace, encouraging them to join groups and courses when they are ready and persisting through phone calls, texts, befriending, offering lifts etc
- people skills and awareness recruiting staff with the skills and awareness to work confidently with diverse service users, including those facing specific barriers, those with challenging behaviour and those for whom there are safeguarding concerns

- accessibility and location of the centre
- representative images and literature.

The research also refers to work by Jones (2009) in Bristol about the way in which highly vulnerable mothers may come to use the services and support of children's centres. Again, these findings are relevant for the challenge of engaging both mothers who have a partner in prison or alternatively who themselves have been in prison.

Jones says that some mothers become 'rejection sensitive' and 'group phobic' as a result of a bad experience (for instance, 90 minutes of sitting alone or being 'given dirty looks'). She says ways to counter this include:

- encourage first time attendees to come with someone they know or introduce them to an existing group member beforehand
- skilled facilitators should manage groups to integrate new members so cliques do not marginalise others
- appoint a parent as 'welcomer' to greet new attendees
- run groups for short times so that strong cliques do not form.

Engaging mothers who have been in prison may be particularly challenging because of disordered lifestyles. A Barnardo's practitioner



who is experienced at working on parenting issues with mothers who have been in prison notes that constant: 'phoning, texting, sending invites by post are things that have worked... offering mothers a lift to a children's centre is also recommended.'

On running groups for women who have been in prison, the same experienced worker says a crucial challenge is to make allowances for the sometimes disorganised lifestyle of the women by not making arrangements for group sessions too far in advance. Also there will need to be recognition of the challenges some of the women will face in terms of social skills etc.

Working directly with families, parents and children

As we have emphasised, families affected by imprisonment may suffer a range of interconnected difficulties such as domestic violence and drug and alcohol misuse. The children's centre needs to work with these core difficulties or effectively signpost to other services. But in addition it needs to address the following issues directly related to a family imprisonment.

 Families affected by imprisonment may face isolation as a result of breakdown of community and wider family relationships, housing transience and stigmatisation.

Responses to increase network links can include helping families to make supportive links in their communities or re-establish supportive links with wider family. This can be done through the daily activities of the centre – meetings, drop-ins, trips, activities etc. In the case of a breakdown in support from wider family, family meetings could be considered.

• Families affected by imprisonment can face difficulties in parent-child relationships.

Practice responses can involve skilled support work to address these difficulties. In the case of either fathers or mothers who have been imprisoned and are returning to parenting this may involve working with a lack of parenting skills and confidence and working to re-establish trusting relationships with children. In some serious cases it may mean working with families where there is a child protection plan.

• Families affected by imprisonment are likely to face key crisis points. One of these will be at the start of sentence.

Children's centres must be prepared to give immediate crisis support to families where a parent is about to be or has been sent to prison. There can be a whole range of practical and emotional difficulties that need to be addressed at this point. These can include the family knowing how to visit and maintain contact and the emotional bewilderment of young children.

The following case notes illustrate the challenges that families can face at the point of imprisonment:

Children's services refer a family to the children's centre. The family knows that the father is going to prison imminently. There is a three-year-old in the family and the mother is expecting another child. The father will be in prison when she gives birth.

The father has lost his job because of his offending and the family's income has dropped. Even before the father lost his job, the family was in debt.

The mother suffers from depression and at times is unable to leave the house. The father has taken responsibility for all decisions about finances and the health care etc of the three-year-old. The mother is feeling overwhelmed that she will now have sole responsibility.

Barnardo's children's centre

 Families affected by imprisonment may face practical difficulties relating to benefits, housing, debt etc It is important that there is a member of the children's centre team who takes the lead on knowing about responses to practical difficulties that are likely to occur (difficulties with benefits or housing etc). If it is unrealistic for a staff member to develop this expertise then there should be clear knowledge about which local services to signpost to. For women offenders, this will include developing a relationship with any Women's Community Service operating locally.

• Families affected by imprisonment may face specific practical difficulties relating to maintaining contact with the prisoner, arranging visits etc.

A staff member should be able to advise families on contact, visiting etc or should have information about where to signpost (see information section at end of handbook).

 Children's centres must focus on the child's world and the child's understanding of their world in relation to parental imprisonment.

The child may be experiencing a sense of loss because a parent has been taken from their life. The experience may be more confusing because the child does not comprehend the reasons. It may also be difficult because developmentally under fives are unlikely to understand the timing involved and when the parent may return home.

In addition there may be specific situations which will be confusing for the young child. Visiting the parent in prison may raise disturbing questions. Why can't the parent cuddle or hold me*? Why can't the parent stand up and move around with me*? Why can't the parent come home with us? *This will depend on the visiting regulations of individual prisons.

Underlying this may be a more general anxiety about the perceived changed position of the parent in terms of authority and power to organise the world for the child's benefit – a key element in the child's developing sense of security.

Children's centre staff should, of course, regard it as core practice to develop skills in talking with and listening to young children who are dealing with anxieties (see Lancaster and Broadbent, 2010).

Telling the truth within the child's ability to comprehend is key. General approaches to communicating with young children can be used in this context, including stories, drawing, puppets etc.

A practitioner has particularly identified the way in which Lego can be used to talk with a young child about what prison is.

One of the questions that practitioners are often asked is what the parent at home or relatives should tell the children about a mother or father being in prison. The best approach is to advise them to tell the truth within their understanding of the child's ability to comprehend.

A mother disclosed to the outreach practitioner that her partner had gone to prison and that she had told the children that he had gone on holiday. The prison link worker went on a joint home visit to the mother to provide advice, support and information on how to tell the children where the father was. Ormiston's *Visiting my dad* book was used to support this.

Ormiston Prison Link Project (see information and resources section of handbook for how to access Ormiston publications)

There are other helpful resources available. Action for Prisoners' Families has produced two picture story books, *Tommy's Dad* and *Danny's Mum*. They are about children whose parents have gone to prison and are designed to be read and discussed with four to seven-year-olds (see details in information and resources section of handbook).

 In many cases a parent going into prison will present a range of challenges in the different 'domains' of the child's life. It is important to approach these in a 'joined up' way and to offer continuity to the child.

Local children's centres, because of their range of provision and their community base are well positioned to offer an integrated response to the needs of the family and continuity in the life of the child. This is illustrated by the following case notes:

A mother with children aged two and four is coming to her local children's centre to make use of universal services on offer. Some time after starting at the centre she is sent to prison.

There is uncertainty about who is to look after the children but eventually the children's grandmother says that she will care for them. The centre is able to support the grandmother in this task which at times feels overwhelming, not only in terms of the practical needs of the children but also in coping with her own stress and the emotional trauma of her daughter being in prison.

The grandmother feels uncertain and concerned about telling the children about what has happened to the mother and how long she will be away. The centre supports her to work out a plan for talking to the children.

The grandmother also feels unable to organise taking the children to visit their mother in prison. It is agreed a staff member will help her organise the first visit and go with her to help look after the children. As a result of this support the grandmother is able to arrange subsequent visits.

While the mother is in prison the grandmother takes the children to open groups at the centre and this provides continuity in their lives. This continuity is maintained when the mother eventually leaves prison and comes back to her own community and caring for her children.

Barnardo's children's centre



• The prisoner returning to the community and perhaps directly to the family setting can be another crisis point in the offender's 'journey' at which the centre should offer support.

In the case of a father returning home from prison there may be a range of challenges which are appropriate for skilled children's centre support. These may include unrealistic expectations about what family life will be like, uncertainty about parent-child relations, tensions and possibly anger between the mother and father, stress of practical situations including finances, attempting to find work etc. The content of work will need to be agreed by both parents but the 'crisis' of the parent returning home may be a very important time for the centre to engage with families.

A male worker from a children's centre in South Bristol visits fathers in prison when they are approaching release to talk about their return to the local community and to parenting responsibilities. When the prisoner is released, continuity is maintained and the worker is able to support him as he re-establishes his relationship with his children.

 For mothers, returning to parenting from prison may be a particularly challenging time. A key factor will be the length of sentence a mother has served.

Children's centre workers may be called upon to work and support the mother in relation to bonding and attachment issues. There may also be a lack of confidence in parenting skills, ability to 'cope' in general and ability to safeguard the child.

In addition, women returning home may be very wary about accessing support because they may fear that scrutiny will mean they lose their children again (Gelsthorpe et al, 2007).

They will also be moving from a structured environment where actions are controlled into

a position where they need to take decisions about their own welfare and the welfare of their children.

Compounding these challenges, as already indicated, may be housing problems and achieving somewhere safe for the mother to be reunited with her children.

All of these challenges will need recognition and skilled support from children's centre staff and close liaison and 'joined up working' with offender management colleagues and other professionals.

Section four: Checklist for good practice This handbook supports children's centres to reach and work with children and families affected by imprisonment. The checklist below is designed to be used by managers and staff to assess whether they are moving towards good practice in relation to children and families affected by imprisonment.

We recognise that children and families affected by imprisonment are a very important group for our centre to be working with.	
We recognise that in our reach area there are almost certainly children and families affected by the imprisonment of either a father or mother or other significant adult.	
We understand the different ways in which the imprisonment of a father or a mother may affect children. We include coverage of this in team meetings and training.	
We recognise that different services may be available to offer support to families, depending on whether it is their mother or their father that has entered custody.	
We are clear to local agencies that we welcome and work with this group of children and families.	
When considering opportunities to work with prisons and establish referral pathways, we consider both the male and female prisons.	
We develop close links with probation trusts, local integrated offender management schemes and Women's Community Services and encourage referrals and if appropriate set up service level or partnership agreements about referral paths and content of work.	
We recognise the importance of health visitors in knowing the backgrounds of families in our reach area and actively encourage them to refer children and families affected by imprisonment to the centre.	
We are clear to the local community that we welcome and work with this group of children and families (for instance, publicising through posters and newsletters).	
In our practice work we support children and families affected by imprisonment. This may be through individual or group work approaches or through signposting to other agencies.	
We recognise that a parent going into prison is often a time of crisis, particularly for children. We are ready to support children and families immediately.	
We recognise the stigma and isolation that families affected by imprisonment may experience and actively work to counter this.	
A named staff member has responsibility for being a resource for staff and families in relation to the impact of imprisonment and practical information.	
We recognise the direct experience of loss and confusion that many young children may experience as a result of a family imprisonment. If appropriate, we will talk directly with children about a family imprisonment. We will also support parents to talk with children and give them appropriate information.	
A resource pack of local and national agencies who can provide additional support for this group of families is kept at the centre and regularly updated.	
We link with other children's centres in our area to provide information for prisons and other offender management services about how families affected by imprisonment can access our services.	
We monitor the number of referrals relating to families affected by imprisonment and the use made of the centre by families in this situation.	

Section five: Information and resources This section gives information about practicalities around imprisonment and support organisations which will be useful for children's centre staff working at the various stages of a parent's 'journey' through the prison system.

Our experience with parents affected by imprisonment indicates that they particularly value support workers who can advise or signpost them in relation to practicalities of having a family member in prison and sources of support.

Practicalities

Advising a family about finding which prison someone is in

For court appearances in the last few days, ring the courts and ask to speak to the cells, who should be able to tell you which prison the family member went to. The family member's solicitor may also be able to let you know this.

If the family member has been in prison for some time, or has been transferred to another prison, contact the Prisoner Location Service. They will only take queries in writing or by e-mail, and this can take about two weeks as the prisoner will be asked if they are happy for you to know where they are.

Prisoner Location Service, PO Box 2152, Birmingham, B15 1SD

Email:

prisoner.location.service@noms.gsi.gov.uk

Finding information about specific prisons

Information about specific prisons (such as contact details, address and visiting information) can be found by using 'Find a prison' on GOV.UK: www.gov.uk/find-prison

Visits

It should be possible to visit a prisoner within 48 hours of a court appearance – unless the court appearance was immediately before a weekend. If someone is un-convicted and on remand, they are allowed three hour-long visits a week. A convicted prisoner is allowed at least two hour-long visits every four weeks. However, each prison is different and depending on the prison, there are different rules for things like the number of visits allowed and how many visitors can visit a prisoner at one time.

The online prison visits booking system allows people to book visits using **www.gov.uk/prison-visits**. The date and time that the visitor would like can be selected, and this is then reviewed by the prison. The prison then confirms the details by email within three working days. Visits can be booked up to 28 days in advance. Not all prisons currently have this system (you can find out which do at **www.gov.uk/find-prison**), and the previous system can still be used.

Prisoners on remand (unconvicted) do not need to send a visiting order, but will usually need to let the prison know the details of any visitors (name, address, date of birth, relationship to prisoner) before a visit can be booked.

To visit a convicted prisoner, the prisoner will need to send a visiting order, with all the names of the people who are going to visit. This should have the prison's visit booking phone number on it, which the family will need to ring to arrange a visit.

In the first few days of being sent to prison, convicted prisoners are allowed one 'reception visit'. You do not need a visiting order for this, but you will still need to book your visit by phoning the prison, and you should say that you are booking a 'reception visit' when you do so.

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

If a family is on a low income or on certain benefits (income support, employment and support allowance, income-based jobseeker's allowance, tax credit credits, universal credit or pension credit) they may be able to get financial help with the cost of prison visits. Close relatives, partners, sole visitors, or the escort to a child or young person are eligible to claim assistance, which can cover costs of public transport, mileage (if using your own car), car hire, parking, overnight accommodation and childcare costs. Visitors will need to fill out an application form. This can be downloaded, along with guidance for completing the form, from www.gov.uk/government/publications/ assisted-prison-visits-form. Alternatively it can be obtained by contacting the Assisted Prison Visits Unit:

Address: **APVU**, **PO Box 2152**, **Birmingham**, **B15 1SD** Tel: **0300 063 2100** Email: **assisted**.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk

Phone calls and letters

It is not possible to phone prisoners. However, prisoners are able to make phone calls out. They must give the prison a list of people they wish to call, to be approved. They can then use the phone, usually at set times – these times depend on each prison.

Prisoners need to buy credit to spend on phone calls, but if they have enough credit and there are available phones they can make as many calls as they like. Mobile phones are not allowed in prisons. Phone calls may be recorded for security reasons.

There is no limit to the number of letters that can be sent to someone in prison. They will be opened by the prison to check there is nothing in them that is not allowed. Sometimes they might be read by the prison for security reasons.

Prisoners can send as many letters out as they wish if they can pay for stamps, envelopes and paper themselves (bought from the prison shop). Convicted prisoners are given one free letter a week, and prisoners on remand are given two free letters a week.

Emailing prisoners

It is possible to send an email to a prisoner – the email doesn't go straight to the prisoner but is printed by staff, put in an envelope and delivered to prisoners with the rest of their mail. This costs 35 p per email and is likely to be only slightly quicker than writing a letter. To do this go to **www.emailaprisoner.com**

Welfare benefits

Turn2us provide information about benefits and entitlements for the partners of prisoners. Find this by searching "Partners of prisoners" at www.turn2us.org.uk, or going directly to: www.turn2us.org.uk/information_resources/ benefits/prisoners/partner_in_prison



Support organisations for families of prisoners

i-HOP

Details of local and national support organisations for families can all be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date details about support services for families, resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, research, policy, events and so on. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5. The organisations below and many more can all be found on i-HOP.

Tel: **0808 802 2013** Email: **i-hop@barnardos.org.uk** Web: **www.i-hop.org.uk**

Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)

APF runs Family Voices, which aims to increase families' ability to influence policy and practice at a local and national level. They also provide information, advice and training to members (free to join).

Address:	Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney
	Bridge Road, London, SW15 2NQ
Tel:	020 8812 3600
Email:	info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk
Web:	www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Clinks

Clinks supports the voluntary and community sector working with offenders in England and Wales. It produces a directory of offender services which allows anyone to search on the type of service, who it is targeted at and where it operates. www.clinks.org

NEPACS

NEPACS operates in North East England. They run visitor centres and tea bars at prisons, provide integrated family support and offer free caravan holidays and small grants to families of prisoners. They also run play areas and special children's visits at some prisons.

Address: 22 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HW	
Tel:	0191 375 7278
Email:	info@nepacs.co.uk
Web:	www.nepacs.co.uk

National Offenders' Families Helpline

The National Offenders' Families Helpline offers information and support for families from arrest through to release and beyond. Their website has information sheets that provide straightforward information and guidance on a number of issues, from visits to transfers to explanations of sentences and conditions. Their free helpline is open every day.

Address:c/o Family Lives, CAN Mezzanine, 49-51 East Road, London, N1 6AH Freephone helpline:0808 808 2003 Email: info@offendersfamilieshelpline.org Web: www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org

Ormiston Children and Families Trust

Ormiston works in the East of England and offers advice and support to families. They also run visitor centres and children's play areas, put on children's visits and run parenting courses for dads in prison. They also provide a range of literature aimed at supporting families of prisoners.

Address: 333 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, IP3 9BUTel:01473 724517Email:enquiries@ormiston.orgWeb:www.ormiston.org

Pact

Pact provides emotional and practical support to families and prisoners, runs visitors' centres outside prisons and children's play services in prison visit halls.

Pact also provides resources for children and families such as the booklet, *My visit*, which explains the visiting experience to children using illustrations and easy-to-understand words, with spaces for children to draw pictures with their mum or dad. Order along with other resources at www.prisonadvice.org.uk

Address: Park Place, 12 Lawn Lane, Vauxhall,	
	London, SW8 1UD
Tel:	020 7735 9535
Email:	info@prisonadvice.org.uk
Web:	www.prisonadvice.org.uk

Parenting Matters

Parenting Matters has developed a number of resources for prisoners and their families including *It's a tough time for everyone*, a booklet and DVD to help children come to terms with their parent's imprisonment, and *Family ties – information for when a mum is in prison.*

Tel: **028 90491 081**

Email: niparenting.matters@barnardos.org.uk

Partners of prisoners and families support group (POPS)

POPS provides support and information to prisoners, families of prisoners and those working with families of prisoners. In the North West they run visitor centres and their family support workers provide services at all stages of the criminal justice system.

Address: POPS, 1079 Rochdale Road,	
	Blackley, Manchester M9 8AJ
Tel:	0161 702 1000
Email:	mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk
Web:	www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Prison Chat UK

Prison Chat UK is an online community that gives support to families and friends of prisoners. Their website provides information and is a place to connect with others in a similar position and share advice, experiences and support. www.prisonchat.com

Prison Reform Trust – Advice and Information Service

The Advice and Information Service will provide information on prison rules and procedures, prisoners' rights and how to get help in prison. They also have a freephone line for prisoners.

Address: 15 Northburgh Street,		
London, EC1V 0JR		
Freephone line for prisoners:		
	0808 802 0060	
Tel:	0207 251 5070	
Email:	adviceandinformation@	
	prisonreformtrust.org.uk	
Web:	www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/	
	ForPrisonersFamilies	

Prisoners' Friends and Families Service (PFFS)

PFFS provides practical help for prisoners' families through their freephone helpline and in London their befriending service, court service and family centre. Their website has fact sheets on a range of related issues, prison procedures and resources.

Address:20 Trinity Street,	
	London SE1 1DB
Freepho	one
helpline	:0808 808 3444
Email:	info@pffs.org.uk
Web:	www.pffs.org.uk

Storybook Dads

Storybook Dads gives imprisoned parents the opportunity to record a story which is then given to their children on CD. They work in over 90 prisons in the UK. Address:Storybook Dads, HMP Dartmoor, Princetown, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 6RR Tel: 01822 322287 Email: info@storybookdads.org.uk Web: www.storybookdads.org.uk

String of Pearls

String of Pearls operates in the South West. It provides mentors for families of prisoners, who have themselves had a close relative in prison. They also run training for professionals working with the families of prisoners.

Address: String of Pearls Project, PO Box 94,
Crediton, Devon, EX17 5WXTel:07989922415Email:info@stringofpearlsproject.org.ukWeb:www.stringofpearlsproject.org.uk

Support organisations specifically for women involved with the criminal justice system

Women in Prison

Women in Prison offers support, advice and information for women affected by the criminal justice system and professionals working with them. They can help directly with employment, education and training advice and access to funding for educational courses and materials, as well as directing to other specialist agencies. They also offer parenting support – specifically, supporting women and children to deal with the impact of separation due to imprisonment.

If you wish to refer someone to Women in Prison:

Women in Prison, Freepost RSLB-UABE-TYRT, Unit 10, The Ivories, 6 Northampton Street, London, N1 2HY Freephone advice line for women: 0800 953 0125

Tel: 020 7359 6674 Email: admin@womeninprison.org.uk Web: www.womeninprison.org.uk

Women's Breakout

Women's Breakout is the representative body for a national network of voluntary and community sector organisations working with women offenders and women at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. Their website provides a directory of these services: www.womensbreakout.org.uk

Training material suitable for use by children's centres

i-HOP

Details of training materials and resources for professionals can be found on the i-HOP website. i-HOP (run by Barnardo's in partnership with POPS) provides an online hub that includes up to date resources for professionals and families, details of training for professionals, details about support services for families, research, policy, events and so on. Information can be filtered by local area and category. There is also a free helpline for professionals, open Monday – Friday, 9-5. The materials below and more can all be found on i-HOP.

Tel: **0808 802 2013** Email: **i-hop@barnardos.org.uk** Web: **www.i-hop.org.uk**

Action for Prisoners' Families

Action for Prisoners' Families have produced various resources for professionals, children and families. For example, their DVD Homeward Bound, although based on a family situation involving a child aged over five, powerfully captures the tensions in a family as the father is about to be released from prison.

They have also produced *Danny's Mum* and *Tommy's Dad*, books for young children about having a parent in prison. www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

Guide 22 Children of Prisoners; Maintaining Family Ties provides an overview of research, policy context and practice examples of supporting children affected by parental imprisonment. Their Children of prisoners elearning resources provide interactive, multimedia information for professionals (including Children of prisoners, an introduction, The pathway from arrest to release and Approaches to practice with children of prisoners) www.scie.org.uk

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