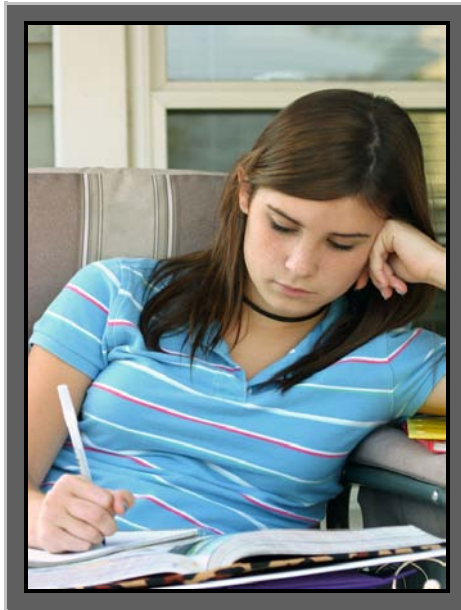




## Education of Children with a Parent or Close relative in Prison or at Risk of a Custodial Sentence.



### Information and guidance for schools

#### Aims of these guidelines

These guidelines have been produced specifically for schools and other educational establishments as part of the Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Policy for the Education of Children with a Parent in Prison.

- To raise awareness of the needs of the children and young people with a parent in prison
- To secure the educational achievement and attendance of these children and young people
- To ensure positive outcomes for this group of children and young people in line the Every Child Matters, through effective multi-agency working
- To promote social inclusion and equal opportunities of these children and young people
- To share best practice

## Background

The recent joint review by the DCSF and Ministry of Justice highlighted the fact that the children of prisoners are at risk of poor outcomes, many of these children have complex needs and may be from socially excluded families. This group of children is surprisingly large and is estimated to be around 160,000 children with a parent in prison. To put this figure into context it is two and a half times the number of children in care and over six times the number of children who are involved in child protection measures.

- 7% of children will witness a parent imprisoned during their school years
- 25% of men in Young Offenders Institutes are, or are shortly to become, fathers
- 60% of women prisoners are mothers and 45% had children living with them at the time of imprisonment
- Around 55% of female prisoners have a child younger than 16 and 33% a child under 5
- 65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend
- In 2006, more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family
- Given the over representation of black and ethnic groups in prison, it would be logical to assume that this would translate to the children of prisoners group

The full review report can be found via the following link

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social\\_exclusion\\_task\\_force/assets/think\\_families/offenders\\_review\\_080110.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/think_families/offenders_review_080110.pdf)

## What are the risks to children of prisoners not achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes?

### Be Healthy

- Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems compared to their peers.
- The sudden removal of a parent from the family creates feelings of separation and loss and may affect the emotional health of the child

### Stay Safe

- Parental imprisonment can lead children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing
- Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment, and children are often subject to unstable care arrangements
- During the consultation with parents in prison bullying of their children was the greatest concern. Several parents also voiced their concerns that their own children had bullied other children
- Discrimination from members of the local community can have major implications for the children of parents in prison
- Children of parents in prison may be exposed to substance misuse by family members and their peers

### Enjoy & Achieve

- Children of prisoners may experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers
- Some families choose not to inform schools that a pupil has a parent in prison. Yet, having a parent in prison can lead to poor attendance, lack of support and isolation for the young person
- Children of prisoners may have to take on more responsibility in the household or take on a caring role
- Children of prisoners may have higher levels of anxiety or worry that prevent them from participating fully in learning

### Make a Positive Contribution

- Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers
- 65% of boys with a convicted parent, go on to offend

### Achieve Economic Wellbeing

- Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption
- 72% of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison
- Costs of visiting the parent in prison may prevent the child from visiting their parent

## Information Sharing

DCSF and Communities and Local Government have produced information sharing guidance that can be accessed via the following link

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00340/>

This guidance states that information sharing is the key to meeting the Government's goal of delivering better, more efficient public services that are coordinated around the needs of the individual. It is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare for wider public protection. Information sharing is a vital element in improving outcomes for all.

The Government understands that it is important that people remain confident that their personal information is kept safe and secure and that practitioners maintain the privacy rights of the individual, whilst sharing information to deliver better services. It is therefore important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day to day practice and do so confidently. It is important to remember there can be significant consequences to not sharing information as there can be to sharing information. You must use your professional judgement to decide whether to share or not, and what information is appropriate to share.

### Seven golden rules for information sharing

- 1. Remember that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing information** but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.
- 2. Be open and honest** with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
- 3. Seek advice** if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.
- 4. Share with consent where appropriate** and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.
- 5. Consider safety and well-being:** Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.
- 6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure:** Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.
- 7. Keep a record** of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

## Identification of children with a parent in prison

The children with parents in prison have been described as an 'invisible group' as there is no formalized procedure for the courts or other agencies to inform schools or children's services when a parent is sentenced to a term of imprisonment unless there are safeguarding issues.

The Government funded 'Families Do Matter Project report 2009' states that, 'Many school staff become aware that a child has family members in prison. On occasion this is volunteered by the carer of the child, and sometimes for the purpose of seeking support from the school. However, all too often this is not the case, with staff either having no knowledge or only that which is assumed or comes to them unofficially. In those circumstances, offering help is extremely difficult and often impossible. There are many reasons why a carer or parent chooses not to disclose to the school. Many fear the stigma that they or the child may suffer and many have a fundamental mistrust of institutions, including schools.'

During the consultation with parents, who have a custodial sentence themselves, the consensus was that school should be told if a child's parent has been sentenced to prison, even if the carers do not agree to any additional support, it does mean that the school can monitor the pupil and take into account their personal circumstances.

As part of its commitment to support the *Every Child Matters* outcomes for children with a parent in prison, Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young Peoples' Services will promote partnership working with adult support agencies to encourage carers of children to inform their child's school should a parent be sentenced to a term of imprisonment and to develop information sharing procedures. The Families Do Matter Project Report suggests that schools could encourage disclosure through, 'publicity, within school prospectuses, newsletters and promotional materials. The availability of a named person to support children of prisoners would highlight to families the school's awareness of the needs of those children and give permission to families to approach the school and seek support.'

## Designated teacher/Named Person in School

The principle for a named person in each school with responsibility for this group of children, who will implement procedures set out in the policy guidance was specified in the original policy in 2002. It was recommended that this person be a member of the school's senior management team and it was suggested that it may be helpful if the designated or named teacher be the same person who is the named teacher for Looker After Children or Child Protection.

### Training

At the time of writing this policy there are plans to offer training through the partnership of National Offenders Management Services and Gloucestershire County Council through the 'Families Do Matter Project.'

In view of the high percentage of boys with a parent in prison who go on to offend, it is recommended that this named person also be the contact for Youth Offending Service to enable information to be shared and if appropriate. To obtain advice and support for Young Offenders in your school the YOS contact is [Gerard.harford@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:Gerard.harford@gloucestershire.gov.uk)

The level of input and support given to a child may be determined by whether or not the family chooses to tell the school that someone in the family is in prison.

**The designated teacher/named person should:**

- Keep the Head teacher fully informed
- Liaise with other relevant school staff on a 'need to know' basis
- Provide a point of contact in the school for external agencies in order to share information
- Liaise with the family and seek their consent to provide additional support for the child as necessary
- Liaise with other statutory and voluntary agencies
- Promote the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to identify the needs of the child unless a Core Assessment has been completed
- Convene a multi-agency meeting to address the needs of the child and to identify a key worker for that child following the completion of a CAF
- Consider the use of an individual education plan for the child concerned
- Arrange for copies of reports and other information for parents to be sent to the parent in prison if the school has been informed that a child has a parent in prison
- Monitor the achievement, attendance and behaviour of the child with a parent in prison
- Act as an advocate for children with a parent in prison, particularly if the child is a Looked After Child (LAC) as LAC have poor levels of visiting a parent in prison. If this is the case, the Virtual School may provide support to encourage LAC and their carers to visit their parent in prison
- Consider purchase of books and resources on the subject of prisons and prisoners for the school library
- Keep appropriate and current records with reference to information sharing guidance

## **Guidance for Teachers**

A classroom teacher has a vital role to play in ensuring that a child affected by imprisonment is supported within the school. The secure, stable and consistent routines of school can provide reassurance for a child who is experiencing difficulties in their personal life and a classroom that has an awareness of the emotional health and well-being of its pupils will enable all pupils to feel valued and safe, including those with a parent in prison.

For a teacher, 'knowing' that a child is affected by imprisonment may be a question of educated guesswork or hearsay from other staff, pupils or parents. In some situations, everyone in the school and community will know that a child's parent is in prison if the court case received a high profile in the local media. In other cases a pupil may confide in a teacher or drop hints and clues through school work or in conversation. In many cases, a

classroom teacher may not know that they are working with the child of a prisoner at the time.

'Knowing' does not necessarily mean that the teacher needs to let the child know that he or she knows that their parent is in prison as the pupil may be unwilling to discuss the issue with anyone in school. It may be that the family of the child merely wish the child's performance and behavior be monitored for any change.

### **Confiding**

For a younger child, the teacher is often the most important person in their life outside the family, and children will often confide sensitive, personal details about their family life to the class teacher. For older pupils, they are more likely to confide in a member of staff that they know and trust. If a pupil raises issues concerning the imprisonment of a parent during school time, the following responses may be helpful:

- Allow the pupil to express him or herself
- Listen carefully
- Acknowledge what is said
- Reassure the pupil
- Agree future action with the pupil

### **Basic principles of responding to disclosure**

- See the child as an individual with their own specific needs
- Be non-judgmental – the child has not committed a crime
- Don't ask about the crime
- Acknowledge the child's preferences
- Follow safeguarding principles if appropriate

### **Who to inform – Need to know**

If a child does disclose sensitive information about a parent in prison to a teacher or member of school staff, it is important to acknowledge their situation and be clear with them about who needs to be told in order to support them. It may be useful to explain the role of the designated/named person in school, and to negotiate and agree with the child what steps need to be taken.

## **Recognising the signs – changes in behaviour and performance**

Children of prisoners may exhibit changes in behaviour and performance that can be likened to a child's emotional response to divorce or bereavement. Clearly, the experience of having a parent in prison is about 'loss.' The child's, and the family's resilience to this loss will determine how it impacts on the child in their behavior and performance at school. There are certain events that can make these changes in a child more apparent and these can include;

- The arrest of parent, carer or sibling
- Finding out about the imprisonment
- A visit to a parent in prison
- A home visit by a parent from prison
- The release of a parent from prison

The following are possible changes in pupils with a parent in prison

- Moodiness
- Chattering
- Bullying
- Difficulty with peers
- Appearing upset
- Appearing withdrawn
- Showing a lack of concentration
- Showing a lack of interest
- Antagonism towards authority
- Tiredness

However, for some children, the removal of a parent to prison may be beneficial to the child and behaviour and performance in the classroom may improve.

## **Bullying**

Many children of prisoners report being teased or bullied at school. This is also one of the main concerns that parents in prison spoke about during the consultations. Abuse can range from name calling to physical violence and needs to be dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy.

## **Attendance issues**

Schools have good systems for monitoring attendance and the school's Education Welfare Officer will always provide support in circumstances where a child of a parent in prison begins to develop attendance issues. It is possible that one of the following situations applies:

- The child is in court with, or visiting the prisoner
- The child is providing support for the remaining parent or siblings, as a young carer
- The child is having difficulty coping with school or is being teased or bullied about having a parent in prison and is becoming disaffected
- Education Welfare has a statutory responsibility to ensure regular school attendance. They will provide advice and guidance on this matter for schools, parents/carers and other agencies. It is important that parents / carers are aware of the law around regular school attendance



## **Disruptive pupils**

In the case of a disruptive pupil, imposing discipline without offering some kind of support may simply result in further deterioration in behaviour. This does not mean making too many allowances, but trying to discover the root cause, being sensitive to the situation and seeking practical solutions.

In addition to the school's behaviour policy and systems, consideration may be given to placing the child on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, Pastoral Support Plan or use of other strategies that can be employed to maintain their school place. If a common assessment (CAF) has been completed, additional support may also be available to the pupil from other agencies following a multi-agency meeting. Discussion with the delegated teacher/named person will be a useful first step.

## **Particular problems**

### Prison visits

Teachers say that performance and behavior of children of prisoners can become more erratic at the time of a prison visit.

If a teacher, or teachers, have a good relationship with pupils who are happy to confide in them, there may be opportunities to allow pupils to take samples of work to show parents when visiting. However, reports or written work, drawings or artwork can be sent by post or email. Although prisoners do not have open access to email, it may be possible for the pupil to send email from school to a prison email address for the information of their parent. Photographic attachments or school work or events may also be sent in this way subject to prison's protocol. Please check with the prison first.

If the school is supporting the child to write a paper letter, it would help if a school compliment slip was attached to the letter. However, restrictions may apply to communication between child and parent.

### Financial implications

A family may experience significant loss in income with a parent in prison and face severe hardship. Teachers would be aware of the potential difficulties for children of prisoners finding the money for school trips and resources in school. A CAF may have identified these issues and support already put into place. Education Welfare Officers can also provide support for the family at times to access funding from grants and benefits.

## **Children of prisoners held overseas**

This is a relatively rare occurrence for residents of Gloucestershire, but can be all the more distressing with a lack of access, distance and unanswered concerns about a prisoner's welfare.

Gloucestershire County Council Children Young People's Services will provide information and support to schools and families. The local authority named person for children with a parent in prison should be contacted in the first instance in order for the appropriate support to be identified.

Other helpful organizations and individuals in these circumstances include

- Amnesty International
- Local councilors and member of Parliament
- Prisoners Abroad

## References

1. Children of Offenders Review (2007) Jointly by Department for Children, Schools and Families and Ministry of Justice
2. Guidelines for Working with Children who have a 'Family' Member in Prison (2009) Sharon Evans, Chartered Educational Psychologist, Oxfordshire County Council
3. Telling the Children (2003) Action for Prisoners' Families
4. Families Do Matter Project Report (2009) Families Do Matter Project, West Midlands
5. Castlegate Family Support Group leaflets and information for children and families.
6. The Bromley Briefings published by Prison Reform Trust December 2008.