

NICCO: Assisting the police force to support children of offenders



“We was there when he got locked up”

200,000
children experience the imprisonment of a parent every year

Find out how to support offenders' children and their families

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders' children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo's was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders' children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

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'We was there when he got locked up.' Girl, 7¹

It is estimated that 200,000 children experience the imprisonment of a parent every year in England and Wales.² Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation and financial difficulties. Currently there is no routine identification of who these children are and therefore no ways of ensuring their needs are met.

Children of offenders and the police force

"She didn't go to school that day... we couldn't find her uniform ... They just threw everything all over the place." Grandparent of girl aged 16 years³

Children may often be present during the arrest of a parent or the search of a family home – this can be forceful, frightening, take place late at night or early in the morning, and children may hear what their parent is charged with. As well as in the home, an arrest may happen in a public place. Children not present at their parent's search or arrest may be unaware where their parent is or why their home has been disrupted. Decisions around temporary childcare can be rushed at the time of arrest, potentially leading to inappropriate care arrangements.

These negative experiences can have a long lasting impact on the child, damage the parent-child relationship and shape the child's attitude towards the police force and authority in general.^{4,5} Given that 65% of boys with fathers in prison go on to offend,⁶ it is essential that police engage positively with young people affected by a parent's arrest. A recent inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children concluded that children's encounters with the police can have a lasting effect on how they view the force and engage with them as adults, highlighting the need for police to ensure their contact with children develops confidence and trust. The inquiry stressed that encountering the police should always be a positive experience for children, even in challenging situations.

"...as the home was being raided by police... their son who was present at the arrest was allowed to continue with his daily routine and get ready for school." K Kristmann, Arresting Development, 2013

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) are in a strong position to develop protocols to ensure staff have adequate training and awareness to engage with families in a constructive, meaningful way. Developing communication arrangements and information sharing protocols can ensure officers in the community work closely with partner agencies (such as schools, children's centres and health services).



This is demonstrated through existing approaches such as Operation Encompass in Plymouth, where clear communication channels have been established with schools to ensure a quick and effective response to domestic abuse incidents witnessed by children.

Officers involved with search, arrest or station reception are well placed to ensure minimal damage to children's wellbeing and offer initial information about support services and resources to families. Research highlights the benefits of a sensitive approach,⁸ including: wearing civilian clothing during arrest, routinely applying for warrants that identify whether children will be present, appropriate explanation of the situation and direct follow up with other agencies to ensure children are being cared for.⁹ Having time to say goodbye and arrange appropriate child care can also reduce anxiety in the offender,¹⁰ and their children. Police protocols and procedures are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, for example the 'Persons on Premises' form identifies children that reside and are present at a premises searched as the result of a warrant. Police could also play an important role in identifying which offenders have children.

How can NICCO support police?

"Police should act in partnership with relevant local partners to make arrests of parents less distressing for children." Director of Action for Prisoners Families

The Department for Education have recognised that professionals should be able to recognise and understand these families' needs. The importance of working effectively with offenders' families has been recognised by National Offender Management Service through the children and families reducing reoffending pathway. More recently, Phase 2 of the Troubled Families programme develops a focus on parental offending, with criteria including families where a parent is serving a community sentence and adults with a proven offence in the previous year. COPING, a pan European research project,

highlighted the impact of positive and negative experiences of police duties on children's wellbeing¹¹ and a charter for PCCs across England and Wales, written by young people, stresses that views of young people should be taken into account by the police at all levels.¹²

"Easy to access, read and understand information which informs staff of the practices in place" NICCO user

NICCO is a national one stop information and advice service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information that can assist police to consider offenders' children and families:

- interactive resources to raise awareness of impact of parental offending on children
- guidelines from government around safeguarding children and young people
- local and national services which work with offenders' families to sign post to, and resources for children and families
- details of local multi-agency training for frontline staff regarding the impact of offending on families
- examples of existing multiagency practice that promote the well being of children and families
- research, evidence based practice, and evaluations to inform the development of work around children and families

NICCO recognises that police work in a busy environment with multiple demands on their time.

NICCO puts all the resources in one place, so help and information is there when it's needed.

References:

- 1 Owen Gill, Every night you cry, Barnardos, 2009
- 2 Kim Williams, Vea Papadopoulou and Natalie Booth, Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners, Ministry of Justice, 2012
- 3 Adele Jones et al, COPING: COP, interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health, 2013
- 4 Kris Kristmann, Arresting Development?, Police Professionals, 2013
- 5 Oliver Robertson, COP-The arrest procedure. Justice for children of prisoners newsletter, Children of Prisoners Europe, 2013
- 6 Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, Ivana Sekol, Rikke F. Olsen (2009), Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review, Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2009
- 7 All Party Parliamentary Group for Children, "It's all about trust": Building good relationships between children and the police - Report of the inquiry held by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children 2013-2014, October 2014
- 8 Adele Jones et al, COPING: COP, interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health, 2013
- 9 Oliver Robertson, COP The arrest procedure, Justice for COP, Police, Judges & Sentencing COP Europe Newsletter, 2013
- 10 Oliver Robertson, The Impact of Parental Imprisonment on Children, QUNO, 2007
- 11 Adele Jones et al, COPING: COP, interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health, 2013
- 12 http://pccyouthcharter.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/ncvys_pcc-youth-charter_english_final.pdf

Examples of existing practice

Cheshire constabulary's **Youth Ambassador** has an active role in ensuring the views of children and young people are heard. He has recently featured in the press speaking out about children who are affected by parental involvement in the criminal justice system.

Action for Prisoners Families have produced a **practical factsheet** for police around how to ensure the wellbeing of offenders' children. The information includes specific policy and relevant service contact details.

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