

# NICCO: Assisting professionals to work with babies affected by the criminal justice system



‘I haven’t told the nursery about her Dad being in prison’

**11,800**  
0-2 year olds see a parent go to prison each year

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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Barnardo's Registered Charity  
Nos. 216250 and SC037605

In Partnership with



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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](http://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.

Galloway, Haynes & Cuthbert (2014) An unfair sentence, All babies count, NSPCC.

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**“H’s parents take (daughter) up to prison... We’re lucky that they are both still too young to understand.”** Parent

There are an estimated 200,000 children a year that experience the imprisonment of a parent in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>. Research shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children and families – poorer outcomes, isolation, health and financial difficulties. However there is no systematic collection of data about these children or rigorous identification of who they are – therefore no way of ensuring their needs are met.

## Professionals and babies affected by the criminal justice system

**“I was pregnant when (partner) went away, but I would have liked to have had more help...”** Parent

The NSPCC estimates that in 2009 11,800 0-2 year old babies saw a parent go to prison in England and Wales.<sup>2</sup>

The criminal justice system (CJS) can affect babies in several ways. First, parents involved in the CJS often have complex needs that can impact on the care an infant receives e.g. Mothers caring for a baby when a partner is imprisoned are more vulnerable to mental health problems. Second, the CJS itself disrupts family relationships so that parent or carer-infant bonding is affected. Insecure attachment can lead to adverse outcomes in later life e.g. poor physical and mental health.<sup>3</sup> Maternal imprisonment has a disproportionate impact on children, especially infants; just 9% of children with an imprisoned mother live with their father.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, research shows that babies and their mothers in prison are more likely to experience perinatal and maternal mortality and morbidity.<sup>5</sup> Imprisoned fathers (of which there are far more) can face difficulties in bonding with or learning how to parent their baby.

Stigma can prevent families in the community talking about and seeking help when a parent is in prison. As there is typically no coordinated identification of these children and families by services, they can often be left feeling isolated and unsupported.

**“The health visitor knows that dad is in prison... She is supportive.”** Parent

The NSPCC has suggested that families are often motivated to make positive change in their lives during pregnancy and birth.



Therefore intervening at this important time can help to improve babies’ life chances and reduce parental reoffending.<sup>6</sup> Professionals working in secure settings are vital in ensuring parents are aware of their babies’ physical and mental development and health needs. Community based professionals such as midwives, nursery staff, children’s centre staff and health visitors are often the first service providers that families come into contact with, and can be a non-judgmental, confidential place for families to disclose information. The sensitivity of the issue, and sometimes a reluctance to engage with support services, means that some families may wish to inform one professional, or they might be happy for information to be shared appropriately with other supportive agencies. Professionals across all sectors have a responsibility to safeguard the wellbeing of babies, and can play an integral role in ensuring that their needs are recognised and acted upon.

## How can NICCO support professionals who work with babies?

**“I haven’t told the nursery about (daughter)’s Dad being in prison.”** Parent

NICCO, recognises the need for professionals to be aware of and respond to the particular support needs of children of offenders. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence’s (NICE) policy framework around perinatal healthcare services notes the complex social factors common in the lives of those within the CJS.<sup>7</sup> The National Offender Management service has stated that proper consideration is needed for those mothers in the CJS with young babies e.g. by providing mother and baby units close to home.<sup>8</sup> The multiagency guidelines Working Together to Safeguard Children, suggest that children with a parent in prison should be needs assessed in a similar way to children in need.<sup>9</sup>

**“I found your service to be very approachable and well informed. I was amazed at how much information you could provide me with.”** GP who had used NICCO

NICCO is a national one stop information service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information that can support professionals to work effectively with babies affected by parental offending:

- details of local and national **services** that work with the babies and families of offenders
- details of local multi-agency **training** for professionals
- **research** into the impact of imprisonment on babies and families
- **resources** for professionals and family members to help develop knowledge of the impact and practicalities of parental imprisonment
- existing multiagency **strategies** which are being used by local authorities
- **guidelines** to support staff to incorporate policy around babies in their practice

NICCO recognises that professionals work in busy environments with demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when needed. Sign up to become a member for FREE to receive our monthly e-newsletter.

**Note:**

Children’s and parents’ quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in a Barnardo’s report: Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo’s, 2009

Professionals quotes are taken from responses to NICCO survey March 2014 and quotes from informal NICCO helpline feedback.

**References:**

- 1 Kim Williams, Vea Papadopoulou and Natalie Booth, (2012) *Prisoners’ childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, MOJ
- 2 Galloway, Haynes and Cuthbert (2014) *An unfair sentence, all babies count: spotlight on the Criminal Justice System*, NSPCC
- 3 *ibid*
- 4 Corston, J (2007) *A Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*, London: Home Office
- 5 Albertson, K (2012) et al. *Tackling health inequalities through developing evidence-based policy and practice with child-bearing women in prison. A consultation*, The Hallam Centre for Community Justice, Sheffield Hallam University and The Mother and Infant Research Unit, University of York
- 6 Galloway, Haynes and Cuthbert (2014) *An unfair sentence, all babies count: spotlight on the Criminal Justice System*, NSPCC
- 7 National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence. (2010). *Pregnancy and complex social factors*. Clinical Guideline 110, NHS
- 8 C Robinson, (2013) *Women’s Custodial Estate Review*, National Offender Management Service,
- 9 Department for Education, *Working together to Safeguard children*, 2015

### Examples of existing practice

**HMP Doncaster’s Families First** is an award winning initiative which runs a **Daddy Newborn group** where Dads can learn skills for parenting a baby during visits and/or on release and providing the space/environment to enable them to bond. The **Toddlers sessions** enable Dads to engage with their child using fine and gross motor skills.

**Reading Local Authority** formally requires **Midwives** to ask new and expectant mothers whether the baby has a parent or close relative in prison. **Health Visitors** also have a vital role in information sharing in Reading in that they specifically refer families affected by parental imprisonment to their local **Children’s Centres** who have information packs to support their needs.

### Visit NICCO

Visit [www.nicco.org.uk](http://www.nicco.org.uk) to discover resources to support your work and find out more. Sign up to become a member to receive free regular e-newsletters.



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