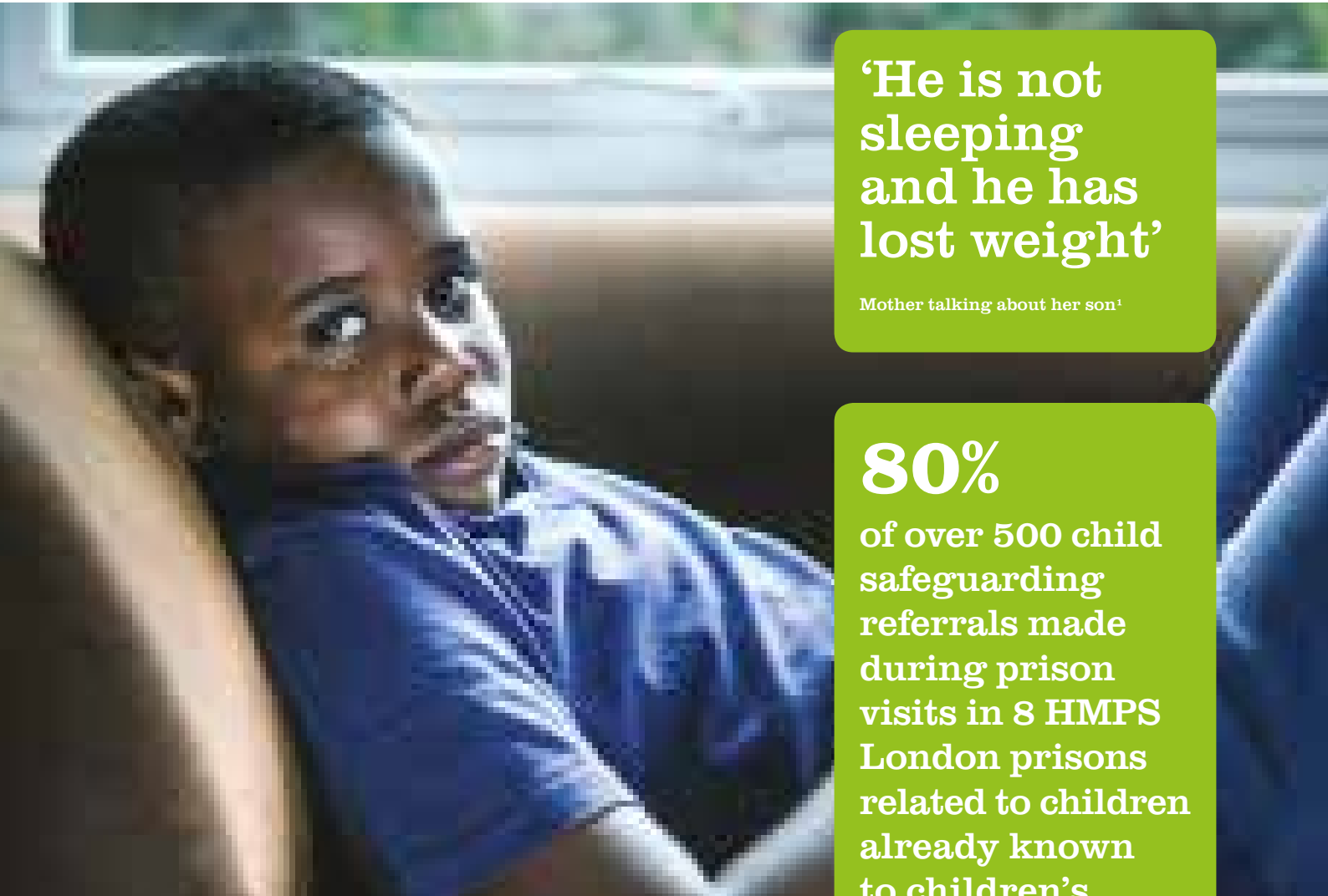


NICCO: Assisting prisons to safeguard children with a key attachment figure in custody



‘He is not sleeping and he has lost weight’

Mother talking about her son¹

80%

of over 500 child safeguarding referrals made during prison visits in 8 HMPS London prisons related to children already known to children’s services²

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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“Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 gives Prison Governors/ Directors a legal responsibility to...ensure that they ... safeguard and promote the welfare of the children ...with whom they have contact”
– HMPS Public Protection Manual, 2009

Each year, **200,000** children experience the imprisonment of a parent in England and Wales³ and **half a million** visits are made by children to public prisons⁴. Prisoners who receive visits from family members are **39% less likely to reoffend**⁵ and strengthening family relationships can have a positive impact on children too where it is healthy and safe to do so⁶. However, when the welfare of offenders' children is not prioritised, they can become increasingly vulnerable.

Safeguarding children in prisons

“No one speaks to me when I am being searched” – 11 year old girl⁷

Research shows that prisoners' children are more likely to be living in poverty and suffering from poor physical or mental health^{8, 9}. Because of the stigma offenders' families often experience, it can be hard for them to raise concerns about their children's wellbeing to professionals.¹⁰

All children need to be protected from harm and prison staff have as much responsibility to respond to concerns as other professionals. During a prison visit a child might appear withdrawn, malnourished or be visibly injured.¹¹ These concerns may not have been raised by another professional in the prison or the community.

When visiting a prison, children could encounter adults who pose a risk of harm to them; the person they are visiting or another prisoner or visitor. An adult's behaviour during a visit, such as aggressive or age inappropriate language, could be deemed to have a negative impact on a child. Regardless of whether there is a safeguarding concern, visiting prison and undergoing the search process can be an upsetting experience for children, impacting on their sense of security and wellbeing.¹²

“For a child I think it's very intimidating and scary to have to go through” – Parent referring to walking through a prison with their child on a visit¹³

Whether or not to allow contact between a child and an offender identified as a potential risk



to children must be decided through a multi-agency risk assessment that keeps the child's best interests central. Booking systems must be properly monitored and prisons need to work well with other agencies in order to identify increased risks to children and protect them.

When visits are granted, prison officers play an essential role in ensuring children's wellbeing; for example by conducting searches in a friendly manner and reassuring anxious visitors.

Prison staff working in all parts of the prison, including reception, cell wings and on programmes and interventions, are well placed to look out for children's safety and wellbeing. They may witness or overhear concerning things or have disclosures made to them that require action. Routine monitoring of correspondence and telephone calls may also reveal safeguarding concerns.

Mother and Baby Units are required to have a member of staff on duty proficient in child protection, health and safety and first aid. Each baby must have a care plan which sets out how their best interests will be maintained while at the unit.

Overall responsibility for child safeguarding lies with the Prison Governor or Director who could work with the Local Safeguarding Children Board to ensure best practice. Prisons should have a child safeguarding policy in place which identifies how concerns should be responded to. The policy should ensure that there is an identified child safeguarding lead in the prison. All staff should receive clear guidance on how to implement the policy as well as training around interacting with children and identifying risks.

It is essential that staff report concerns to children's services in the child's home local authority or the police, depending on the immediacy of risk¹⁴, in line with the referral process identified in the prison child safeguarding policy.

“It would be helpful if stories and good practice from prisons were shared”

– Prison Officer¹⁵

How can NICCO support prisons with safeguarding children?

Safeguarding children is everybody’s responsibility.¹⁶ The procedures that prisons should follow, such as those noted above, are outlined in the HMPS Public Protection Manual (2009) and national multi-agency guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children. These documents provide clear instruction about how to ensure Section 11 of the Children’s Act 2004 is met. This important legislation states that all organisations are obliged to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract

out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (p11).

“I had forgotten that the experience of the children is so important when they come to visit and NICCO reminded me of this”

– Prison Officer¹⁷

NICCO is the national one-stop information service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information and resources that can assist prisons to keep children safe. NICCO recognises that prison staff work in a busy environment with multiple demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help is there when it’s needed.

1. Glover (2009) Every night you cry, The realities of having a parent in prison, Barnardo’s
2. Spurgeons (2014) Supporting children with a parent in prison; A review of the London Prisons Visiting Service
3. Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth (2012) Prisoners’ childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners, Ministry of Justice
4. Kalkan and Smith (2014) Just Visiting: Experiences of children visiting prisons, Barnardo’s
5. May, Sharma and Stewart (2008) Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004, Ministry of Justice
6. Jones, Wainaina-Woźna (eds) (2013) Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health, University of Huddersfield
7. Barnardo’s (2015) Locked out: Children’s experiences of visiting a parent in prison
8. Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo and Knapp (2007) Poverty and disadvantage amongst prisoner’s families, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
9. Jones, Wainaina-Woźna (eds) (2013) Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health, University of Huddersfield
10. Murray and Farrington (2008) The effects of parental imprisonment on children, Crime and Justice
11. Spurgeons (2014) Supporting children with a parent in prison; A review of the London Prisons Visiting Service
12. Barnardo’s (2015) Locked out: Children’s experiences of visiting a parent in prison
13. Gill (2010) She just cries and cries, Barnardo’s
14. Department for Education (2015) Working together to safeguard children
15. NICCO website user survey 2015
16. Department for Education (2015) Working together to safeguard children
17. NICCO website user survey 2015

Practice Examples

HMP Askham Grange female prison has a deeply embedded ethos of child protection. All staff have a clear understanding of how to report concerns about children both on site and in the wider community. Safeguarding is discussed at a **weekly multi-agency family team meeting** between prison, Barnardo’s, health and probation staff.

The **SW Prisons’ Children and Families Implementation Team** is working to ensure there is consistent and effective support for children and families across the region. One key action is to ensure effective child safeguarding. A **Child Safeguarding Policy template** is being developed by the team to ensure every prison has a consistent policy in place and an identified **Single Point of Contact** for child safeguarding concerns.

Visit NICCO

Visit www.nicco.org.uk to discover resources to support you in your work with children and families of offenders and find out more. Sign up to become a member to receive free regular e-newsletters.

