

NICCO: Assisting Schools to support children of offenders



‘My dad can’t make parents’ evening. He’s working away’

70%

of children experience the imprisonment of a father during their time at school.

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.

** Department for Education and Skills (2003), Every Child Matters, London: The Stationery Office*

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“We was there when he got locked up.”

7 year old girl

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

Children of offenders and schools

“Usually when I go out to playtime I thinks about my dad.” 7 year old girl

- Seven percent of children will see their father go to prison during their school years¹
- Parental imprisonment is also associated specifically with negative school experiences, such as truanting, bullying and failure to achieve in education²
- 25% of children of prisoners are at a higher risk of mental ill health³ and have an increased likelihood of experiencing poverty compared to their peers⁴

Due the stigma and bullying that these children often experience, there can be a reluctance for families to talk about and seek help when a parent is in prison. And given that there is no systematic identification of these children and families by local authorities, prisons, police or children’s services, they can often be left feeling isolated and with a lack of support.

“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that. School might think they are the same as their father.”

Mother

Schools, with their central role in the community and as the most universal service provision for children, can be well placed to both provide support to these children, and be a non-judgmental, confidential place for families to disclose information. Because of the sensitive nature of the issue, children and families may wish to inform only a single staff member, or they might be happy for this information to be shared appropriately with all relevant school staff. In their role to safeguard the pupils in their care, schools play an integral part in ensuring that the needs of these children are recognised and acted upon.



Furthermore, there can be great benefits to the parent in prison having a hand in their child’s education via the sharing of school reports or helping out with homework for example.⁵

How can NICCO support schools?

“I would imagine there are some very specific things that could be done to help children understand their circumstances.” Headteacher

Ofsted in April 2013 identified children of offenders as a target group for Children’s Centres with needs requiring additional support.⁶ The findings of COPING, a large-scale European study looking at the vulnerabilities and resilience of children with a parent in prison, emphasised the role that schools can play in supporting these children. Recommendations include recognising children with a parent in prison as a vulnerable group and reducing stigma by promoting a positive school environment.⁷

“The school has been absolutely fantastic.”

Mother

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 support school staff in working with children affected by parental offending:

- **resources** that teachers and other school staff can use directly with children
- existing **strategies** for whole school working that are being used by local authorities

- details of local and national **services** that work specifically with children and families of offenders, to signpost pupils and their families to
- **guidelines and toolkits** to support both school staff in their practice and the development of a whole-school approach
- details of local multi-agency **training** for professionals
- **research** into the impact of imprisonment on children and families

NICCO recognises that teachers and school staff work in a busy environment with demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when it's needed.

Examples of existing practice

Frome Learning partnership in Somerset have developed a **Champion model** whereby each school has one person responsible awareness raising and supporting children and families affected by parental offending. Schools work together to develop good practice.

Barnardo's have produced "**Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member: A handbook for schools developing good practice**". This is a practical resource to support schools to better address the needs of this group of children. It contains information about the effects of imprisonment, and strategies that can be used by the whole school and individual staff to effectively provide support to these children.

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

Teachers' quotes are taken from Helen O Keefe, *The Invisible Child: Perspectives of Headteachers about the role of primary schools in working with the children of male prisoners*, Prison Service Journal, Issue 209, September 2013

References:

- 1 Department for Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters*, London: The Stationery Office, 2003
- 2 Jones A D and Wainaina-Woźna A E (Eds.), *COPING: Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, University of Huddersfield, 2013
- 3 Social Care Institute for Excellence, *Guide 22 Children of Prisoners; Maintaining Family Ties*, 2008
- 4 Rowntree Smith R, Grimshaw R, Romeo R, Knapp M, *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoner's families*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007
- 5 Evans, *Locked out: Children's experiences of visiting a parent in prison*, Barnardo's, 2015
- 6 Ofsted, *Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013
- 7 Jones A D and Wainaina-Woźna A E (Eds.), *COPING: Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, University of Huddersfield, 2013

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