

HMP Altcourse



Family and Significant Others Strategy

‘Building and maintaining family ties.’

February 2024



CLASSIFICATION:-Official Sensitive



Safe Ground

Introduction to HMP Altcourse

Who we are

HMP Altcourse is based in Fazakerley, Merseyside, and has been managed by Sodexo Justice since June 2023. Sodexo aim to change lives for the better by operating safe, decent, and secure prisons, rehabilitating those in our care. Sodexo provide purposeful activity, employment, education, and rehabilitation services, supporting offenders to lead law-abiding lives in their community on release.

HMP Altcourse operationally employs Prison Custody Officers, integrated Facilities Management, and a wide range of bespoke rehabilitation services, resettlement programmes, offender behaviour programmes, education and skills development, vocational training, and workshops and industries.

Our prison population demographic is complex and diverse, and we strive to deliver the best possible family services to those in our custody and those with family and significant others in their lives. We are committed to continuous learning and development here at Altcourse and recognise collaboration with partner organisations provides us with new opportunities and new ways of working with men in custody.

Fundamentally we acknowledge that we have both a professional and a moral obligation to support, guide, and help everyone in our custody. This includes support with family interactions, parenting, and building positive relationships and behaviours (where it is safe and appropriate to do so). We recognise that by fostering healthy and happy family and significant other interactions we have a significant positive impact on men in custody and the wider community.

Our Family and Significant Others strategy will guide us to positively influence the following three key areas of ongoing concern;

- **Reducing the likelihood of re-offending.**
- **Reducing the transference of intergenerational offending behaviour.**
- **Offering information, support and guidance to families, children, and significant others.**

To support our strategy, The director has identified the following staff to drive, implement and focus the attentions of all of those working within HMP Altcourse, ensuring we provide the best possible outcomes for prisoners in our care and their families.

Dave Davies- Head of Reducing Reoffending and Head of Offender Management Services
 Alan Warburton - Prison Family & Remand Service Manager & FaSO Champion
 Emma Hulme – SIG Family Service Manager & FaSO Champion
 Jane Murphy – SIG Deputy Family Service Manager
 Dianne Higgins & Tracey Best – Internal Visits Managers



Supporting Families & Significant Others

How we work

Families are the cornerstone of society and HMP Altcourse recognise how central they are for a positive rehabilitation process. Unlike statutory/non-statutory agencies families and significant others often remain the only constant source of support for men in prison providing emotional, physical, practical and/or financial help. Supporting families allows us to address and positively challenge the negative effects offending behaviour has upon prisoners, families, local communities and society as a whole.

We embrace the opportunity to work closely with families and our families & significant others strategy outlines our commitment to implementing an innovative, trauma informed service. We will work alongside our families, developing relationships, a shared sense of responsibility and desire to achieve positive outcomes for all. We'll provide spaces for men in custody and their families and/or significant others to feedback issues they're facing, helping us shape & build a pioneering new approach to family work across the UK's prison estate.

The strategy is built upon a desire to work differently at HMP Altcourse. Many of the families and significant others visiting the prison are in crisis with little access to support from statutory or voluntary services. The majority of our visitors are female, often with children, and our 2024 strategy outlines how we aim to provide bespoke support that addresses the complexity of the prison system and its wider impact. We will provide bespoke support for men through creative, trauma informed programmes, and address how we provide vital support for families and significant others, providing a safe space away from the pressures and complexities that may occur within the family unit .

Our Promise

HMP Altcourse is committed to supporting and developing creative and innovative ways that healthy family ties can be built, maintained, and strengthened.

We will.

- Treat people with dignity, decency, and respect.
- Provide safe and secure visiting facilities and areas so men and their families can build and maintain healthy relationships.
- Ensure that the needs of the child are paramount and robust Safeguarding & Child Protection policies are maintained and adhered to.
- Align HMIP expectations with our Family strategy.
- Collaborate with SIG Safe Ground to deliver a new, innovative Family Service developing a learning culture that influences positive change.
- Work in partnership with appropriate organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector to provide a rounded body of support.
- Build upon our Family Intervention Unit, embracing a Restorative Justice Philosophy, ensuring that we are an integral part of the Resettlement and Rehabilitation process.



- Consult with men and their families and significant others to better understand the complexity of the issues they face and clearly identify where and how our Family Service can provide provision
- Build a bespoke family counselling service that works with men and their families and significant others, as a unit and separately.
- Ensure that the men and families have access to other relevant services and support
- Deliver arts-based, trauma informed work highlighting the benefit of new and innovative ways of working.
- Identify and promote opportunities for families to be involved in key aspects of decision making/sentence plans where appropriate.
- Consistently monitor and evaluate the service we provide supporting a collaborative learning process that puts rehabilitation at the heart.
- Provide accurate, relevant and timely information to families at the point of committal to prison, during sentence and prior to release.
- Provide tailored support to families in times of crisis allowing additional requests for contact to be made and responding to them sensitively
- Provide opportunities for families to receive feedback on a prisoner's progress, where appropriate, through our family service team
- Provide unique opportunities for children, involving supporting them to communicate with a parent in prison positively
- Make additional efforts to assist families who live long distances away (including abroad) to maintain contact with someone in prison.
- Opportunities for children to communicate with parents in prison are provided.
- Build strategies to support for those who have limited interaction with families or significant others including those who do not currently receive visits.
- Work closely with Prison Offender Managers, Remand Support Service Officers and Key Workers to ensure we appropriately promotes the HMPPS strategy of reducing re-offending.



The Family Service

Social Interest Group & Safe Ground

HMP Altcourse identified the need to provide a bespoke and innovative service to families, especially for a prison with a high remand population. In partnership with SIG Safe Ground we will build a unique service that not only helps build and grow family ties and positive interactions, but provides both men in custody and their loved ones opportunities to reflect, learn and find new coping strategies during times of crisis.

In June 2023 HMP Altcourse partnered with Social Interest Ground (SIG) and their subsidiary charity Safe Ground to deliver & manage our family services and Outside Visits Centre. The service includes working with families in the Outside Visitors Centre seven days a week, delivering art-based therapeutic work with men across the prison and from February 2024 a bespoke family counselling service, the first of its kind here at HMP Altcourse.

The Social Interest Group (SIG) is a leading UK-based charity providing bespoke person-centred social and health care solutions. Safe Ground have been at the forefront of pioneering arts-based therapeutic work within the criminal justice system, creating and delivering the first-ever arts-based family programmes for men in prison and their families.

The Outside Visitors Centre

The Visitors Centre is located outside of the prison itself and is managed by SIG Safe Ground. HMP Altcourse is expected to have over 45,000 visitors visiting men in our care this year, with 10,000 of those being children. As a result of this SIG Safe Ground have a team of experience Family Liaison Worker who provide tailored support to families and significant others, seven days a week.

Visiting a prison can be an extremely stressful experience and as a local prison we support a high number of short stay prisoners and first time visitors. Experienced, empathetic staff work to ensure both children and adults have the best possible experience whilst at Altcourse and our Family Service team take care of all booking in processes. Family Liaison Workers provide one-to-one support to our families, often supporting with complex enquiries and liaising with internal and external services to provide a rounded body of support.

A bus stop is situated outside the prison and a train station (Fazakerley) approx 1 mile away; further travel information is available from the staff in the Visitors Centre. A visitors car park and disabled (Blue Badge) parking bays are directly outside the Visitor Centre and the team work with security to provide reasonable adjustments for visitors, where appropriate.

The Family Service team will work collaboratively with security and the visits teams to ensure those visiting our establishment have a safe and child friendly experience.

We provide:

- Toilet and baby change facilities – with disability access



- An internal and external play facility
- information/advice/guidance leaflets and scrolling TV info
- Lockable possession holders
- Property drop off
- Confidential support service
- Range of child/family interventions
- Visitor Feedback forms and QR code

The Visits Hall

Our internal Visits Hall is ran by our Visit Managers who have extensive experience of working within HMP Altcourse. They have a clear understanding of the prison population, the visiting process and work to ensure the visiting experience is as simple and stress-free as possible.

We provide facilities for new mum's to enable a safe and private environment to breastfeed their baby, a facility which has been recognised and awarded a mayoral charter mark of accreditation, the first prison in the country to provide this service.



Facilities include:

- Café, serving hot and cold food and drinks during every visits session (£30 cash maximum)
- Play facilities and activities for children
- Gender neutral, disability compliant toilet facility
- Full disability access to all areas for wheelchairs, pushchairs
- Parenting Room for breastfeeding, baby changing
- High chairs and additional / alternative seating
- All staff are fully trained in First Aid and Emergency First Aid
- De-fib' unit, and multiple first aid kits
- Purple Visits- Virtual visits for those who cannot attend visits physically

Family Days

We provide monthly Family Days, a special extended visit, providing an opportunity for family and friends to spend some quality time together. The visits have less restrictions for the men in custody, and there are lots of opportunities to take part in creative and interactive family activities.

Family Days aim to:

- To build healthy family & social relationships
- Provide an opportunity for the men within the secure setting to spend quality time with their children.
- To encourage play and creative interaction between families



- Provide a sense of normality in times of high stress.

SIG Safe Ground also work in partnership with the **Give A Book** scheme through Prison Reading Groups who provide a selection of books for each Family Day event. Each child at the event is invited to choose a book to encourage reading with parents and at home, supporting our prison wide reading strategy. We also take feedback from families at the end of each event and share with the wider teams to help us shape the service.

Family Counselling Service

We will build a new Family Counselling service, a first here at Altcourse, consulting with prisoners and their families and significant others to shape a new needs-led service.

The Family Counselling Service will:

- Deliver a consultation period with both men and families and significant others to identify areas of need, evaluating current support offers within Altcourse, providing a needs-led service.
- Work alongside OMU and other internal teams to identify families in crisis and provide bespoke family counselling.
- Provide tailored supporting specifically responding to the needs of families and significant others, providing 1-1 and group sessions in the Outside Visit Centre
- Work with men participating in our programmatic work, supporting them to develop new behaviours and coping strategies.



Family Service Intervention Programmes

As part of our family service offer SIG Safe Ground provide creative, trauma informed learning and reflective spaces for men in custody. Our family service intervention programmes allow men to explore, reflect upon themselves and their behaviours, find new ways of interacting, engage with arts and culture, learn new coping strategies, and move forward positively.

Safe Ground are experts in designing and delivering arts-based therapeutic group work, and their approach enables and responds to the needs and priorities of participants.

Their programmes work by:

- Developing and supporting personal development through an arts-based methodology
- Using therapeutic group-work techniques to explore and develop ideas around identity, values and attitudes to support attitudinal shifts and mental health provision.
- Developing and supporting family relationships to support desistance, resettlement, intergenerational bonding and kinship networks.
- Developing education, training and employment progression routes and engaging learners who traditionally struggle in a classroom setting.
- Improving staff-user relationships towards a whole institution approach
- Consistently monitoring feedback and engagement to ensure best practise.

Man Up

Man Up is an arts-based groupwork programme, designed to support groups of young and adult men in prison. The groups consider the values, attitudes and thinking so often informed by those cultural norms and the associated pressures and expectations of being a 'man'.

The programme supports men in custody to:

- Identify the role masculinity plays in criminal behaviour.
- Explore how the concept of masculinity influences individual and collective identity in correctional institutions.
- Address negative masculine attitudes.
- Provide a 'safe space' for men to develop social skills that can be embedded into their daily lives.

Father's Inside

Father's Inside is Safe Ground's flagship family relationships programme, the first of its kind to be delivered across prisons nationwide. Facilitating an arts-based methodology supports the participants to understand better the drivers of their criminal activity and its impact on family relationships.

Father's Inside helps participants to:



- Discover others' experiences of parenting and reflect upon personal life stories, considering the ways in which significant events have impacted and formed current attitudes.
- Understand the value of clear communication in the context of family relationships.
- Develop an understanding of the importance of supporting a partner/co-parenting.
- Develop new perspectives and coping mechanisms for family reengagement.
- Develop an understanding of the different skills a child uses when learning to read and the importance of fantasy, storytelling, creativity, and imagination.

The Thing Is

The Thing Is focuses on working with men in secure settings on a remand sentence, using arts-based methodology. The space enables participants to think around the systems that are already in place within the secure setting, explore what works well, what challenges there are, and what solutions could address and support their needs.

The Thing Is programme will:

- Raise awareness of men's responsibilities towards others (family members, staff, peers, community)
- Increase capacity for dealing with difficult situations demonstrated by attitude, engagement, and achievement across the prison.
- Improve relationships inside the establishment between men and staff.
- Discuss responsibilities, excuses, support available and issues related to accessing that support.
- Think about how people can create relationships, alternatives, and practical support systems even in the most difficult settings.



Family Intervention Unit

At HMP Altcourse we are committed to supporting those prisoners who wish to develop, strengthen, and maintain healthy family ties both throughout their sentence and post release. Our Family Intervention Unit is a 60-bed single cell accommodation which offers access to various interventions enabling men at Altcourse to create a more stable relationship with their family & children.

Over half of those serving sentences lose contact with their families whilst in prison. Considering the current prison population, the implication for families is immense. Our Family Intervention Unit encourages, supports, and helps prisoners and their families maintain healthy positive relationships through open dialogue thus reducing conflict, family breakdown and alienation. The unit works with babies and new parents providing vital opportunities to develop strong physical and emotional relationships from an early age.

Liverpool City Council along with MVRP funded a secondment for a Family Link Worker, assigned to Liverpool Childrens Centres/Family Hubs, to facilitate parenting programmes for Fathers on the Family Intervention Unit in HMP Altcourse.

The Nurturing Programme

The Nurturing Programme is a 10-session parenting programme created by Family Links which aims to help parents and children live emotionally healthy lives, focusing on four main constructs: self-awareness, appropriate expectations, empathy, and positive discipline. Children are rewarding, stimulating and fun but looking after them can be stressful and challenging. The Nurturing Programme helps deal with those challenges helping them to access new and sustainable approaches parenting. The programme is accredited through Open Awards and address the following.

- Understanding why children behave as they do
- Recognising the feelings behind behaviour (ours and theirs)
- Exploring different approaches to discipline
- Finding ways to develop co-operation and self-discipline in children.
- Learning the importance of looking after ourselves

Reducing Parental Conflict

Not all conflict is harmful but it's important to help families to think and talk about the quality of their relationships before they reach a crisis point, that will then negatively impact children physically, socially, or emotionally.

This half day awareness session helps gain a greater understanding of what is meant by parental conflict and how this is very different to domestic abuse. It explores the importance of the voice of the child and sees that conflict is normal and a part of everyday life, but that harmful conflict has a significant impact on children and young people. Fathers will have a better understanding of the possible stressors that can trigger parental conflict in parents/carers that are together or separated as well as being able to identify signs that a relationship may be in distress.



The programme helps men's.

- Understanding of conflict
- Effects on parenting
- What causes conflict?
- Role's children take on.



Baby Programme

The baby programme is a 5-session programme facilitated in the visits hall which promotes fathers being able to bath their baby followed by 4 sessions of baby massage which is accredited through Open Awards. These sessions support fathers with bonding and attachment with their babies whilst in prison. It helps them to get to know their baby in a warm and welcoming environment alongside mum who is encouraged to access services in her local children's centre to help support her role as a new mum.

The baby programme was initially open to fathers on the family intervention unit but has now been opened to fathers across the rest of the prison.

Dads Stay and Play

The Dads Stay and Play is a 3 session Programme for Fathers with children aged 18 months – 5 years and is facilitated in the visit's hall on Thursdays 12-1. The sessions include time for dads and their children to play, learn and explore. The environment includes art and craft, story books, building and imaginative play with snack time for families to eat together. Mum is sign posted to her local Childrens' centre where the family can access activities and services for the family to access help and support if needed.

Understanding Anxiety

Understanding Anxiety is a 4-session programme for prisoners on the family intervention unit. The programme came about after it was found that a number of men on the unit were experiencing anxiety. The programme gives men an awareness of their anxiety and the tools of how they can manage it positively. The sessions include practical ways of dealing with anxiety with a session focusing on "Lego Serious Play" which is a methodology developed 20 years ago using exercises with Lego bricks to help promote creative thinking, fostering empathy, connection, self-awareness, confidence, and fun.

Supporting Care Leavers in our Prison

Care leavers represent a growing number of young people currently residing in the prison system, many of whom have experienced significant events at a young age making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The term care leaver identifies those individuals who have spent some time in the care of local authorities i.e. accommodated or those young people on full care orders (now extended to their 25th birthday).

It is estimated that a quarter of people in the prison system, have at some point in their lives, experienced time in the care system. A number have entered the Criminal Justice System at an early age having spent time in children's homes, secure units, young offender institutions and adult prisons. A proportion of these young people will also have been removed from mainstream education.

It is not uncommon for looked after children to have been moved around placements during their time in the care system, often these placements including Children's Homes, Secure Units and Foster Carers have been located far away from the young person's home and support networks. As a result of this many young people have experienced isolation and separation with their family ties being eroded. Quite often the only form of positive contact a young person will experience whilst in the care system is from their own Personal Advisor.

HMP Altcourse is committed to developing a policy and strategy to support care leavers in our establishment, this support will be available to men both during their time in custody and beyond. By introducing a wraparound service supported by internal/external agencies we will endeavour to provide a specific range of interventions to cater for the needs of these men.



Partnerships

We're committed to building our capacity and best practise models by working in partnership with external agencies. We recognise how partnership working allows for collaborative learning, helping us to consistently review and strengthen our best practise. For families and significant others it's important that they have access to a diverse range of support whilst in times of crisis.

- We will work towards developing and maintaining links with partner agencies to offer a diverse range of family support services.
- We will communicate with internal departments to coordinate services between residential units, resettlement teams, visits and programme providers. This will enable us to share information and address the needs of the men and their families.
- We will encourage better information sharing in relation to family issues between staff and external agencies.
- We will work in partnership to develop visiting schemes for isolated offenders, those without dependants and the families of sex offenders.
- We will provide opportunities to restore family relationships prior to release working in partnership with internal and external agencies.



Final Statement

This strategy will be the framework, in which we will deliver our Family and Significant Other Strategy; we believe it is important to include families at every stage of the process from committal to release. The reasons for offending are multi-faceted and therefore we should seek to use the skills and experiences not only of professionals but families alike.

If we are to reduce offending and the negative effects upon offenders their families and the wider community, then we must respect, and value the positive role families can play in supporting prisoners both during their period of incarceration and upon release back into their communities.

Research clearly shows that those men who maintain positive family ties throughout their sentence have a greater chance of rehabilitation than those who don't. The benefits to society therefore include, greater family cohesion, reduced emotional and physical harm to children, a reduced prison population and a reduction in offending behaviour. Overall, there would be less pressure on community resources including the judicial system, Police, Probation, Social Services, Mental Health agencies and Drug/Alcohol services.

We also recognise the need to provide bespoke, one-to-one support for families and significant others. In the current climate there is often limited support and to achieve rehabilitation for men in custody we need put families and significant others at the centre of the service, supporting them through their prison experience as effectively as possible.

Director
Steve Williams



Head of Offender Management Services /
Reducing Reoffending
Dave Davies



Useful contacts:

HMP Altcourse Switchboard
0151-522-2000

HMP Altcourse Safer Custody Helpline
0151-522-2021

Altcourse SIG Safe Ground Family Service Team
Phone switchboard & ask to be put through to Visitors Centre or press '5' and use extension 2234.

HMP Altcourse Safer Custody helpline portal

[HMP Altcourse | Prisoners' Families Helpline \(prisonersfamilies.org\)](https://www.prisonersfamilies.org)

