
Useful contacts for families

◆ Prisoners' Families Helpline

Offers information and support to anyone with a friend or relative in prison

Daytime: Mon-Fri 10.00am-4.30pm

Evenings: Mon-Thurs 6.00pm-8.00pm

Weekends: Sat 10.00am-3.00pm

Call free on 0808 808 2003

◆ Action for Prisoners' Families

Unit 21 Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road
London SW15 2NQ

Tel: 0207 3841987

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Can give details of support groups and visitors centres throughout the UK

◆ Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)

APVU, PO Box 2152, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 1SD

Tel: 0121 626 2797

www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

Can provide help with the cost of visiting. Contact them for more information

◆ H.M. Prison Service website

Gives information on prisons in England and Wales

www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

◆ Parentline Plus

Offers support and information to parents

Helpline: 0808 800 2222

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

◆ Childline

Provides a free confidential phone counselling service for any child with any problem, 24 hours a day, every day

Helpline: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

What shall I tell the children?

Talking to children about their parent's imprisonment

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A photocopying pack for the complete leaflet series of My Dad's/Mum's in Prison is available from the address below

Price: £4.00 per set, OR

These can be downloaded free from www.ormiston.org

Leaflets are free to families

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Ipswich IP3 9BU

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Registered charity no: 1015716

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What shall I tell the children?

One of the hardest things to face when someone goes into prison is what to tell the children, but it is important that you talk about what is happening.

If children don't know where their parent is they can become confused as they often sense that something has happened which they don't understand. They may think that they aren't allowed to ask questions and imagine things which will worry them more. There is also the danger that they will find out some other way.

By talking together you can reassure them. You may still see changes in their behaviour as they come to terms with what has happened, but they will know that it's okay to talk about it.

When is the right time?

There is no right time or way to tell a child. However it is best to get things out into the open as soon as possible. The child may already know and understand more than you realise.

If you have to tell more than one child you will need to speak to each in a way that they understand. Every child is different and you need to plan when and how they are told.

The most important thing is that you have time, when you won't be disturbed, to answer their questions and perhaps to comfort them.

It may be difficult for the child or young person to take in all that you have said. You will probably need to explain things several times *and* talk about it again on other occasions.

It may be helpful for the child to have a second person who they feel they can trust—a relative, friend or teacher. Sometimes children want to protect the people closest to them and may not want to cause more upset by sharing their own worries and fears.

What do I say?

Most children will want to know where their parent is and why. It is important that they do not see them as a bad person, even if they did something wrong. They may need reassuring that they are safe and that they will be able to see or talk to them. Children often think they are to blame. They need to know that they are not.

Try not to give children too much information in one go. They are bound to have questions and will need time to take in what you have said.

It may be helpful to share what you are feeling, as the child is likely to experience lots of different emotions and they need to know that's okay.

Babies and very young children obviously won't be able to understand what has happened, but you can still talk to them about their parent. As they begin to understand more you can talk about what has happened, using simple words.

After you have told the child, the most important thing is to listen to them. If they don't want to talk about it, don't force them. Offer reassurance and let them know that you are there for them.

How do we deal with the future?

Even though their parent is absent try to give the child a sense of the future. Count days to special events like birthdays, the next visit, even school holidays! Older children may like to keep a diary; younger ones can tick off days on a calendar.

You need to talk to the child about keeping in touch with their parent. By using letters, telephone calls and visits, the child can choose how much contact they have. They will need your support and encouragement in what they choose.

Do other people need to know?

Unfortunately you may not be able to stop other people knowing about the situation. There may be times when you will have to help the child deal with people saying or doing things which upset them. It may be also helpful to choose to tell some people, including the child's school.

Living with the truth is not easy and there will be times when you may need someone to turn to. If you want information or someone to talk to, the list overleaf gives details of organisations who are there to help.
