

# Ormiston Time for Families

## Fact Sheet: children visiting prison

### Children Visiting Prison

The information in this leaflet describes what happens on a visit to a prison. It is intended for teachers and other professionals supporting a child who is visiting prison.

Visiting a parent or other family member can be very stressful for all concerned, particularly the children.

- Many remand prisoners are held at local prisons, but after sentencing prisoners can be sent countrywide, which often means long journeys for their visitors.
- Just over half the prisons in England and Wales have a Visitors' Centre. The facilities vary from prison to prison. Many provide a play area, some a crèche, refreshments, toilets and information for visitors.
- Visitors are not normally allowed to take personal possessions, including children's drawings and favourite toys into the prison
- At local and other secure prisons, children are always searched. The search methods vary and may include walking through an electronic portal, a "rub down" search by a prison officer, removal and checking of shoes, and sometimes being asked to open their mouths and lift their tongues. Children may have to pass a drug dog - which will sit in front of anyone on whom drugs are detected.
- In the visits room, a prisoner meets his/her family and they are usually allowed to hug each other. The family sit opposite the prisoner at a table - in a room full of other tables with prisoners and their families. Visits rooms usually have a refreshments counter, and some have a play area, but the prisoner is not generally allowed to move about.
- Prisons vary in the length of time allowed for visits, which can last from 30 minutes up to 2 hours.
- Many prisons now have Children's Visits, usually once or twice a month. These take place in a smaller more informal setting, and the prisoner can play with his/her children. However where Children's Visits are available, demand is usually very high, and families can wait for some weeks for their turn.
- Prison visiting can often be very tiring for a child or young person.



### resources:

Prisoners Families Helpline can offer advice and support for families: freephone 0808 808 2003

Books: 'Visiting my dad' picture book for children. Priced £3.

Photocopy pack: 'My mum/dad's in prison' Priced £6.

Both are published by Ormiston Children & Families Trust. Tel: 01473 724 517.  
email: [enquiries@ormiston.org](mailto:enquiries@ormiston.org)  
[www.ormiston.org](http://www.ormiston.org)

registered charity 1015716

### Visitors sometimes encounter problems:

- They may not be allowed to visit if they arrive late, even if it's due to travel difficulties.
- Sometimes the prison has to cut visits short.
- Sometimes a prisoner is moved to another prison after a visit is approved.
- Visiting, which should be an opportunity for a separated family to meet together, can be difficult for all concerned.

Teachers will recognise that children visiting prison may be anxious and excited before the visit, and show signs of stress afterwards. Some children may want to talk about the visit – but should not be asked to share more information than they want to.

### About our factsheets:

This factsheet has been produced as part of \*Ormiston Children and Families Trust's work. If you would like more information about supporting prisoners' children in their schools please contact:

Daphne Griffith, Education Lead Worker  
Ormiston Time for Families  
Families House, 125 Ber Street, Norwich,  
Norfolk, NR1 3EY  
Tel: 01603 760458  
Email: [daphne.griffith@ormiston.org](mailto:daphne.griffith@ormiston.org)

Other fact sheets include:

**Supporting Children and young people affected by imprisonment**  
- including recognising signs of stress.

**Issues Relating to School Absence**

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