

Ormiston Time for Families

Fact Sheet: supporting children & young people

Supporting children and young people affected by imprisonment

The imprisonment of someone close, particularly a parent, can have an enormous impact on a child or young person. The loss may be felt as acutely as in bereavement or divorce.

The unique stigma experienced by prisoners' families often means that friends, schools and others who could provide support are unaware of events.

Children themselves are frequently not told what has happened and may have been given another explanation for the parent's absence.

A prisoner's child may be affected by many changes to family life. They may need to take on more responsibility at home, there may be financial hardship or mental health issues within the family.

Every prisoner's child should be considered sensitively and non-judgmentally:

- The child has not committed a crime
- Every child is an individual, each will react differently to a parent's imprisonment
- He/She should feel supported, not over-protected
- If a child doesn't want to talk, that is his or her right, but
- If they want to talk while at school, make sure they understand the school's agreed practice in confidential matters
- All information concerning the family's situation needs to be handled sensitively and used in a way which safeguards the child's best interests.

Often the most difficult times for a prisoner's child are:

- The arrest of a parent or close relative
- Learning that a parent has been imprisoned
- Visiting the parent in prison
- A home visit by the parent from prison
- The release of a parent from prison

Signs of distress or stress in children and young people may include:

- Showing distressed or challenging behaviour at home or school
- Becoming withdrawn and not wanting to go out
- Having eg. nightmares, disturbed sleep patterns, or disordered eating problems

The child may need professional support if the signs of stress:

- Are new, or change in intensity, frequency or presentation
- Continue for a significant period of time
- Interfere with social and academic interactions and performance
- Are routinely disruptive at school
- Are beyond the child's control, or present a danger to themselves or to others



About our factsheet:

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:

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Other fact sheets include:

Issues Relating to School Absence.
Children Visiting Prison.

*Supported by: Eastern Region Families Partnership (Lankelly Foundation, The Prison Service and Ormiston Trust).

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.
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