

# My dad's in prison

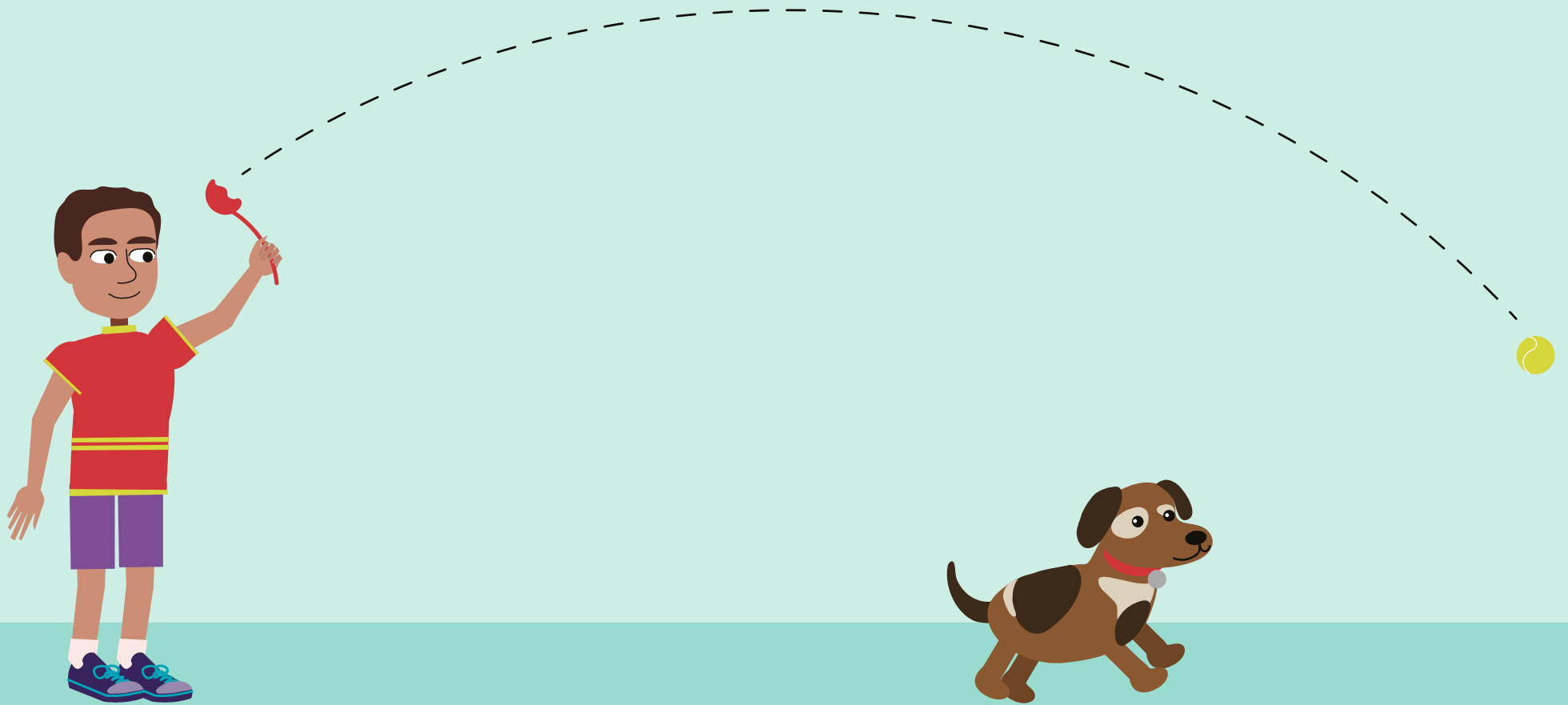
## Dylan's story



# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Big Give, Ormiston Trust and our donors and supporters for making this book possible.

We would especially like to thank all the children and young people who shared their own experience's and helped us to tell Dylan's Story.



# Hi, I'm Dylan

Here is a picture of me, my mum, dad and my awesome dog Lola. I want to tell you my story to show you are not alone and help answer questions you might have about your family member in prison.

I will take you on my journey from how I felt when dad got arrested, to what it's like visiting him in prison to how I am now. I hope that by the end you feel a bit better too! Your story might be different to mine but I'm sure you'll see some things that happened to you too.

I was so confused and shocked when dad went away but I have learned a lot with the help of my mum, my friends and from adults I can trust like my teacher Mr Green and my Breaking Barriers worker Lucy. I now feel less confused and know dad is ok... and so am I.

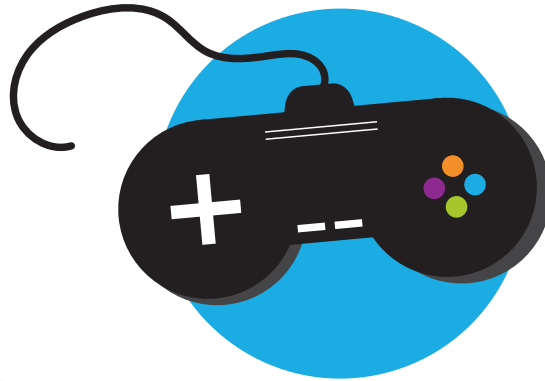


Before he went to prison, my dad was my best friend. We would...

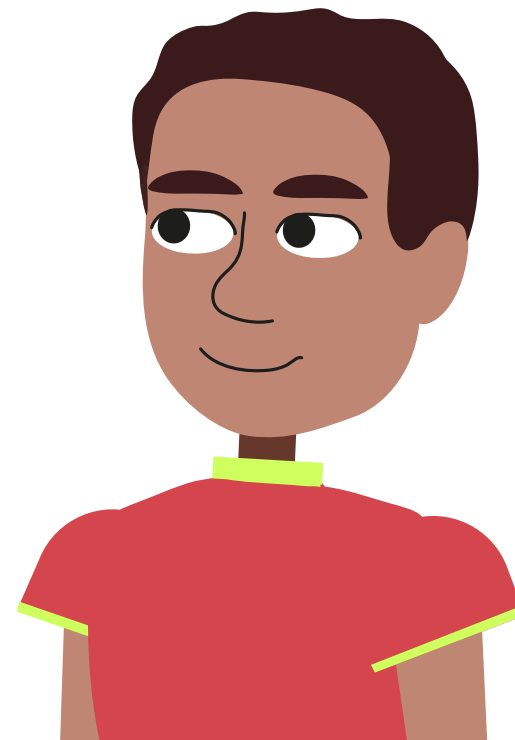
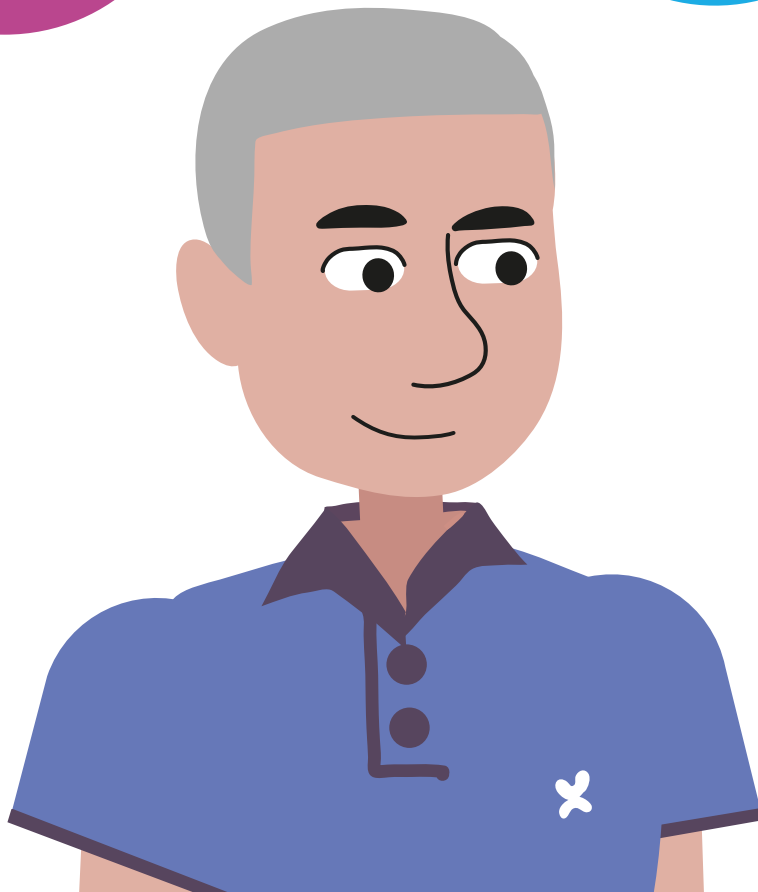
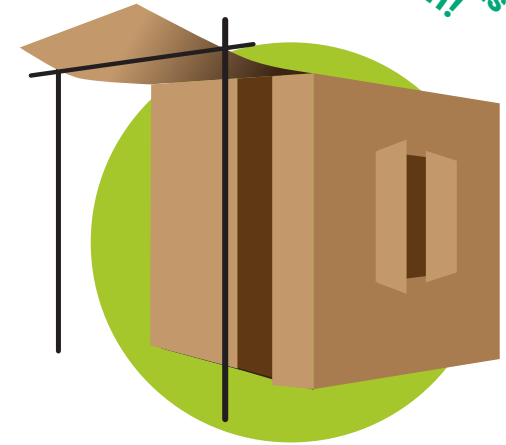
Bake cakes together as  
my dad loves to cook.



Play computer  
games together.



And build huge forts  
in the garden!



But one day, dad made a mistake  
and was arrested. Early one morning I  
woke up to the sound of banging and  
shouting. I didn't understand what had  
happened at first but I knew dad was  
gone and I missed him so much.

I didn't know what he had done wrong.



My mum came to check I was ok because Lola was barking so loudly. Mum told me not to worry, that the police had made a mistake, and that I should get ready for school even though I didn't feel like going. When I went downstairs the house was really messy. Mum told me that the police had been searching for something.



$1+4=5$   
 $2+4=6$   
 $3+4=7$   
 $4+4=8$

$1+6=7$   
 $2+6=8$   
 $3+6=9$   
 $4+6=10$



School was difficult that day. I was really worried about what had happened to dad and just couldn't concentrate on my work.



My teacher, Mr Green asked if I was ok. I didn't tell any of my friends at school what had happened. I felt so alone, sad, and angry.

When I got home dad still wasn't there. Mum told me to sit down because she needed to tell me what happened. She said he was probably going to prison because the police thought he had done something bad but she didn't tell me what it was.

I was so shocked, it felt like life would never be the same again. I wanted to scream! I wondered what dad had done and wished I could have told him not to go!





Then one day Lucy from Breaking Barriers came to talk to me and helped me understand why dad was in prison. She listened to my worries and explained that dad had broken a law and he had to spend time in prison to make up for it. She also told me that it is ok to feel sad, angry and worried but it is also ok to have fun – dad would like this.



It felt like a long time before I was allowed to visit dad in prison.



I was nervous the first time as I didn't know exactly what to expect and was scared that if I went into the prison I wouldn't be allowed to leave!

Lucy helped me a lot before I went. I thought the visiting hall would be like in films, but it was quite different, and my dad was wearing the same clothes as all the other men waiting to see their families.



I wasn't the only kid visiting their dad either, this made me feel better, not so alone.

Now I enjoy going to visit dad.  
It's like an adventure. There is a lot of travelling and waiting but it's worth it.

The staff at the visitor centre are kind and the prison officers are always friendly.

When we arrive, we put all our things in a locker and buy some snacks from the tuck shop. We need to be searched, I don't like this very much but I do like the sniffer dog.

Sometimes I get to go on a special family visit when my auntie and cousins come too!

These visits are my favourite because we have extra time where dad can move about and we get to play games together.



But after I visit dad I usually feel sad so seeing Lucy helped me to understand my feelings about dad and how much I missed him. We did lots of activities like making a feelings jar, writing a letter to dad, playing games, reading books and we watched a video about life inside prison. It helped me understand a bit more about what it's like for dad there. I asked dad what it was like and he wrote me a letter back!



Do you think he gets lonely?

What food does dad have in prison?



Is he safe?

After talking to Lucy, I felt a lot better. I finally understood what had happened and knew it wasn't my fault. I also learned that it was ok to still love dad, even if he had done something wrong.

As my chats with Lucy were coming to an end, we made a box of things that helped me to relax and talk about the people I could talk to if I was feeling lonely or sad about dad. Lucy helped me find new ways to cope so that I know what to do if I start to feel frustrated in the future.



Although dad is still in prison, and I still miss him and wish he was here, now I feel happier and enjoy time with mum, Lola and my friends. I have found ways to manage my worries and thoughts and feel like me again!





Having a parent or brother or sister in prison is hard and it's ok to sometimes feel alone, sad or angry. But now I know what to do if those feelings become too much for me. I know that others are there to help and that dad's ok and he knows I feel better to.

So that's my story I hope that helps you.

# A workbook with activities and advice

Useful information and resources for supporting young people whose parent is in prison





# What does being arrested mean?

Police can arrest someone if they have committed a crime. This is when a person is taken to a police station and asked questions to help police understand what has happened.

The arrest might happen at home, in the car, at work or on the street. Sometimes police will use handcuffs to keep everyone safe.

Sometimes police will need to look for extra information to work out what has happened. They might search the house, or car, and have to take some things away with them too.

**How did the arrest make you feel?**

## Who are the police?

It's normal to feel angry at the police and confused as to why they have taken your grown up away. The arrest can be scary and hard to understand. Their job is to keep everyone safe and make sure everyone follows the rules. There are lots of rules adults have to follow and these rules are known as laws. It is important everyone follows these rules so no one gets hurt and to make sure everything is fair.



## Remember

- You haven't done anything wrong.
- Your grown up is safe.

**Draw a picture or write about what happened to your grown up.**

# What does going to court mean?

When it seems that a law has been broken, the person has to go to **court**. The court is a place where people try to work out if a law has been broken. Your family member will be able to explain what happened. There will be people there who can say what they think happened and / or show pictures or videos that prove that a law was broken. The judge might ask people who were there to say what happened. The things that prove if a law has been broken or not are called **evidence**.

## A law

A **law** is a rule which adults have to follow. There are many laws in order to keep everyone safe. It's a bit like the rules at school.



You might have heard the words '**court**', '**judge**' or '**law**' when it comes to your family member going to prison. It can be confusing hearing new words which don't fully make sense. This can lead to feelings of uncertainty and worry.

# Judge or jury?

The judge listens to all the evidence and then decides if the law was broken. Sometimes a group of people — called a jury — decide if the law has been broken. If they decide a law has been broken they then decide if your family member needs to pay some money, do some free work or go to prison. Sometimes people have to go to prison to learn not to break that rule / law again.

## Guilty

When someone is '**guilty**' it means the judge has decided that the person has broken a law.



Do you have any questions about laws, court, the judge or what guilty means?

# What is prison?

It can be difficult for your parent or guardian to tell you about your family member going to prison as they won't want to upset you.

But not knowing the reasons for it can leave you feeling confused, angry and misled.

By talking, your parent / guardian can reassure you.

You can ask questions and although they might not know the answer, they can listen and help you to understand.

They might also be feeling confused and sad — that's ok. This is a big change.

It is important to have people you love and trust around you, to help you to manage how you are feeling.

**Have you got a question about prison?**

**Write them here:**



# Preparing for a prison visit

Visiting a parent in prison is an important way of coping with being separated from them.

There is no easy way to prepare for the visit and it will take time and thought.

We all need reassurance but we may have different questions and worries.

You may not want to visit – talk to your Breaking Barriers worker about why you feel like that.



## Questions you might want to think about before a visit:

- Are there any play facilities in the visitors centre or prison?
- Are there refreshments on sale?
- What type of visits are available — Is there a better time to bring children?
- Is there anything for older children to do?
- Can the children touch their parent and move around?
- What about pushchairs, nappy changing and feeding?



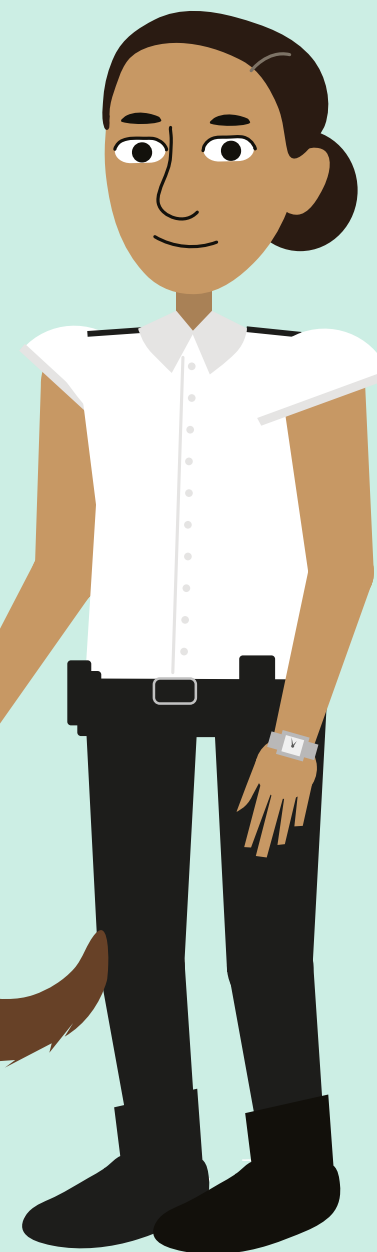
# What happens when you visit your mum or dad in prison



After you enter the prison, there will be a security area to go through. This is to help keep restricted items out of the prison – such as mobile phones and other technology. This is called the search area.



There will be a dog who will sniff you and walk around you. This is to keep everyone safe when entering the prison.



# Games to play before / during a prison visit

## I spy...

You take it in turns to look around where you are and pick out something. The other person / people can then guess what you have seen. All you can tell them is the first letter of the object, thing or person. For instance if you saw a hat, you would say 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with... 'h'.'

h?

## Would you rather...

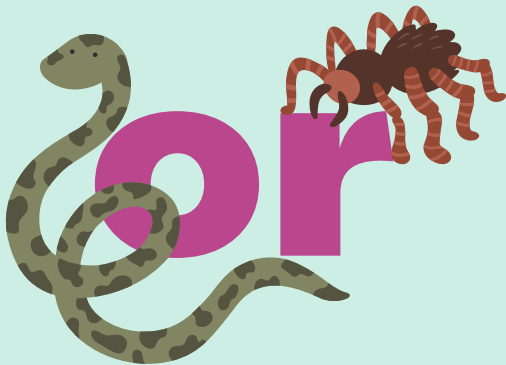
This game can be as silly or as funny as you like. You think of bizarre things like 'would you rather eat a whole jar of mayonnaise, or have a bath of mushy peas'. Players take it in turn to ask each other a 'would you rather'. There's no winner, it's just funny thinking of the different questions.

## The memory game

One person starts by saying "I'm going out on a picnic and I'm bringing..." followed by whatever item comes to mind. The next player has to remember that item and add something. You then take it in turns adding things to your imaginary picnic, but you must remember all the things that have been said before. The first person who forgets one of the items loses.

## The humming game

Take it in turns to hum a song and the other person / people have to try to guess which song you are humming.





# What's going on in prison?

Some people might make comments which upset you and this is often because they don't understand or do not realise how upsetting it is for you. Make sure to ask for support if class mates or anyone says anything which upsets you. It will help to talk to someone you trust about how this makes you feel.

Your family member isn't a bad person and although they made a bad decision, it doesn't make them bad. It's ok to be disappointed or angry in their decision, but to still love them.

Your family member isn't going to be in prison forever — the judge will decide how long they think they need to stay in prison, in order to learn not to break the law again.

It's important to remember that it is not your fault that your family member is in prison — we all make our own decisions and make mistakes. Your family member loves you and is learning not to make the same decision again.



It's ok to be angry, to feel upset and to have worries. It's ok if you need to cry or don't know how you feel.

There are people around you who care and who want to listen. Maybe you can speak to a family member, a friend, a teacher or your worker. They can listen and help you to find ways to manage all these feelings.

Your family member is safe and being cared for — they have a cell where they have a bed, TV, toilet, sink, desk, chair. They get 3 meals a day and can have a cup of tea / coffee when they want one.

When someone goes to prison, you usually can stay in contact with them through letters, calls, video calls and visits. You might feel sad you can't see your family member all the time but visits and calls can help you to still feel connected.

It's important to know it is not a secret and although it can feel hard to share, and you might not want everyone to know, you might feel better telling close family / friends / teachers what has happened so that they can support you and look out for you.

# Everyone has feelings

It is important to understand that everyone has feelings, and we all experience different feelings at different times.

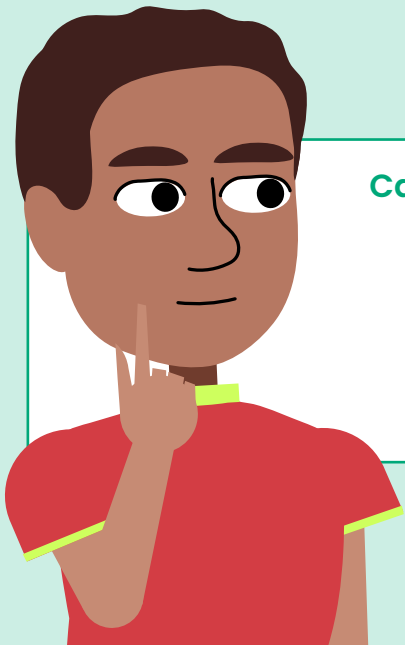
Feelings are simply feelings, there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Some feelings may feel unpleasant, that doesn't mean they are wrong.

Some feelings makes us laugh, smile, and feel good.

Sometimes our feelings can be so strong it causes us to behave in ways that are not always helpful to us or other people.

We can all learn to recognise and control our own feelings, so we feel better and we avoid upsetting people we care about.



Can you make a list of feelings?

# Activities which might help if you are feeling **worried**

## A handful of help

It is good to talk about feelings, no matter what age we are everyone needs to be able to ask for help sometimes and that's ok. In this activity you can make your own handful of helpful people.

- On a sheet of paper or card draw around your hand, (you may wish to cut it out).
- On each finger write the name of a person you trust; this can be family or an adult at school or other community group like a football or dance coach.
- On the palm of your hand put the name of something else that you like to talk to. For example, a special toy like a teddy bear or even a diary.

Your handful of help is there for you when you need it, but you may want to let your chosen people know they are lucky enough to be included so they can be ready to listen when you need them.



## Helpful recommendations

Worry Monster, Worry Doll and The Huge Bag of Worries book



When my dad went to prison I felt scared and worried and sometimes at bed time I struggled to sleep because I had a funny feeling in my tummy. My Breaking Barriers worker helped me to talk about my worries and we did some of these activities to help manage them.

## A worry jar

Sometimes it can feel as though our worries are so big that we can feel overwhelmed by them, and it can be hard to explain them to your trusted person. It may be helpful for you to write each one down when as they pop into our mind and put them in a jar. You can then get them out when you are ready to talk about them.

- You will need a jar (this can be a recycled jam jar or similar).
- Paper, this can be scraps of plain paper or post-it notes etc.

You may want to decorate your jar using stickers, ribbon and maybe glass pens to draw a pattern etc.

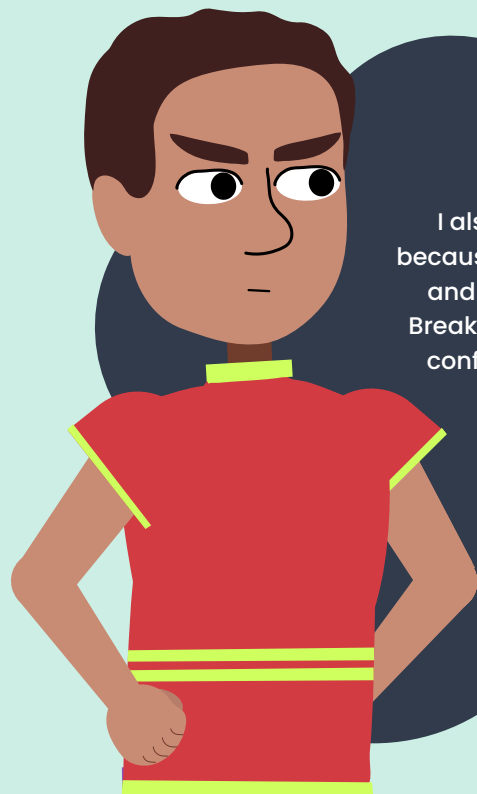
There is no limit to how many worries you add to your jar but what is important is that you and your trusted adult/s set aside the time to talk about the worries. Once you feel happy that you have resolved or feel better about the worry you can tear it up and throw it in the bin which is a good feeling.

# Activities which might help if you are feeling **angry**

## Physical activity

Sometimes when we feel angry our bodies can react in ways that make us want to move, stamp our feet or wave our arms about. Physical activity can be helpful to release some of the feelings that our body experiences when we are feeling angry. Here are some ideas to help you manage those strong feelings in a healthy way that will keep you and others safe.

- Dancing to your favourite music.
- Singing at the top of your voice.
- Running and jumping.
- Physical exercise, like running or walking.



I also felt quite angry because I didn't understand and before I spoke to my Breaking Barriers worker I felt confused and everything made me feel like steam was coming out of my ears. My teachers said my behaviour had changed and I didn't know why. I just felt like I wanted to scream.

## Mindfulness breathing

Is a useful way to feeling calmer and reduce feelings of anxiety and stress which often lead to anger is to complete a breathing exercise. The great thing about mindfulness breathing is it can be done anywhere. Here is a breathing exercise that you can try, the actions can be carried out as described or by visualising them using your imagination.

- Spread your palm out in front of you.
- Pretend each finger is a birthday candle.
- Inhale a deep breath and with a slow exhale blow out the candles one by one – slowly lowering one finger down at a time while you exhale.
- Then repeat on the other hand.
- You can do this exercise as often as you need to.



## Calming bottle

A good way to help you feel calmer when you need to do this in a settled way, like when you are at school is to use a calming bottle.

- You will need a plastic bottle or container with a screw on lid.
- Glitter and glitter glue (you can mix glitter with PVA glue to make your own).

Put some warm water, glitter glue and glitter in a plastic bottle or lidded container and shake up it up to watch the glitter slowly float to the bottom. It is incredibly soothing and relaxing to watch and you can use it at home after a difficult or stressful moment. Smaller versions of the calm down jars can be made by using small travel bottles and can be kept in the car or in your pocket for a quick relaxation tool on the go.

### Tip!

It is also a good way to show someone how you may be feeling inside sometimes.

# Activities which might help if you are feeling **loss / sadness**

## Memory box

You can make a box of special things that remind you of the person who has gone to prison, just like the one Dylan made to remind him of all the good memories he shared with dad. You will need an empty box of any type, then you can have fun decorating it with stickers, crayons, markers, or pictures. Whatever you like. You can look at the items in the box anytime you need to remember times you shared with your loved one, and special things about the person that you always want to keep close, then find a safe place to keep the box.



I felt so sad and hopeless sometimes, especially at bedtime, and on special family days like birthdays. Sometimes it felt like I'd never see him again. I couldn't talk to mum about it because it made her cry too. My teachers said I had stopped joining in, my nanny said I'd lost my sparkle.

I spoke to my Breaking Barriers worker about how I felt and she understood. We did some activities to help me keep my dad in my mind and to remember happy times. I still miss my dad, but feel more hopeful again now.



**You can put anything you want in your box as it is special to you but here are some ideas you may find helpful:**

- Photos.
- Drawings.
- Items of clothing.
- Books you and your person used to read together.

# Activities which might help if you are feeling **loss / sadness**

## My strings are forever

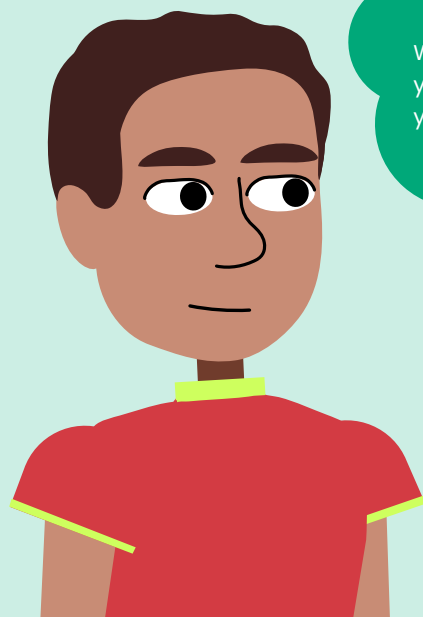
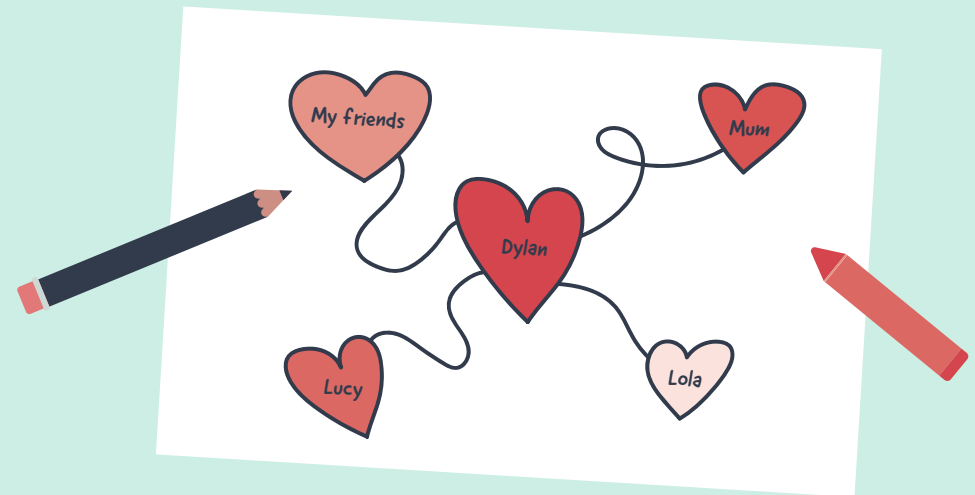
Can you think about all the connections you have to other people and even a pet like Lola Dylan's dog. Connections are like an invisible string connecting you to others, you can't see it but its always there and they are endless. All of us need to connect as it helps us to feel safe and happy, but when we lose someone, or they go away it can feel like the connection is broken which can cause us to feel sad.

This activity is to help you to remember that the connection is always there even though the string may be invisible it is possible to feel it.

You will need.

- A piece of paper with a small heart drawn in the middle.
- Marker, crayons, coloured pencils or pens.
- Sticker hearts, fabric hearts or pictures of hearts.
- Glue or glue stick.

1. Think about all the people with whom you have a connection. E.g mum, dad, grandparents, brother, sister, teacher, friends or a pet.
2. On the paper draw or use a sticker of a small heart in the middle, this is your heart.
3. Draw a string / wiggly line to the other hearts you have added to the page to represent each person / pet you feel connected to.



Whose heart did you place closest to your own and why?

Which connection feels the weakest?

Whose heart is the farthest from yours?

Is there someone who is not connected to your heart that you wish were connected?

Which connection feels the strongest?

## About this book

This book was developed with the help of children and young people who have a parent or close family member in prison. We hope by telling Dylan's story and providing information and activities it will help you understand more about the law, visiting a prison or some of the feelings you might be experiencing and who you can go to for support.

This book has been co-produced with children and young people who have received support from Breaking Barriers and Ormiston Families Breaking Barriers team.



## About Ormiston Families

Ormiston Families exists today because of one family's tragedy.

A young woman, Fiona Ormiston Murray, died while on her honeymoon. Fiona loved children and it was no secret that she was excited about starting her own family. Her family, devastated by their loss, wanted to do something to honour her memory. They created a charitable trust devoted to helping children and families in need. That trust is now known as Ormiston Families.

### Our Vision

"Safe, healthy, resilient families."

### Our mission

We support families in the East of England to build resilience and make choices to improve the life chances of their children.

### Our values

Everything we do is guided by our values of collaboration, compassion and effectiveness. Whether you're working with us as a family, a colleague, a funder, a volunteer or a supporter you'll see us demonstrating these values every day in everything we do.

### We're collaborative

We work 'with', rather than 'for', families. We build supportive partnerships, communities and networks. We value each other's strengths and we work together to drive results.

### We're compassionate

We listen so that we understand the issues people face. We treat people with respect – always supporting, recognising and reinforcing their achievements.

### We're effective

We monitor how our work, which focuses on prevention and early intervention, leads to the people we work with living safer, healthier and more resilient lives.

# About Breaking Barriers

Ormiston Families' Breaking Barriers service supports children and young people up to the age of 19 who have been affected by the imprisonment of a close family member.

Children and young people can be affected by this in many ways, including experiencing feelings of separation or loss, fear and anxiety, loss of self-esteem and the change of dynamic in the family home.

By providing a safe space to talk and express themselves, Breaking Barriers enables them to explore their feelings through activities and play to come to terms with any emotional trauma and maintain positive ties with the family member in prison.

Through tailored one-to-one sessions, our practitioners will support children and young people to improve emotional wellbeing and feel more confident, to build relationships with others and to believe they can make a difference.

