

# Being a carer

When a parent goes to prison things can change for everyone in the family. We can't cover everything that might happen, but this information sheet will explain some of ways that things might be helped.

It talks about a single child because even when there are a number of children in a family, it is important to think about how each one is being affected. If you are caring for a child whose parent is in prison, you have an important part to play in their lives.

Being apart is hard for the child and their parent. There can be lots of different feelings. The child might behave differently. They might be upset or very quiet and not want to talk about things.

They will need you to talk to them. Try and understand what they are feeling. This can be hard as you may be trying to deal with other things in your life at the same time.

## **Keeping in touch**

Make sure that the child can keep in touch with their parent through visits, letters and telephone calls.

If the parent's time in prison is likely to be short, you will need to prepare the child for their return home. Talk to them about what will happen.

A longer term will mean helping the parent to be involved in the child's life. Keep them up to date with what is happening at home. It is often the everyday things which everyone misses most.

## **Coping with your feelings**

You may be feeling different things. If you feel angry about what has happened try to keep that from the child. It can confuse them and may make them think they are to blame.

It is important for the child that your relationship with their parent is as good as possible. Try to find a way to agree on things so the child isn't caused extra upset.

It won't be easy to balance the needs of the child, parent and other people in your life. If you would like to talk to someone or want to find out more about other help please see the details on the next page.

## **Supporting the child**

They will need lots of support. They might have all sorts of different fears and worries. They might be frightened that other things are going to happen. Some children might even feel relieved but are afraid to say so.



Younger children are often comforted by familiar things—favourite toys, contact with relatives or friends, even a particular routine.

Older children can react in many different ways. They may not want to talk about things. They might feel that they have to care for others in the family. Try to keep talking to them and think about the things which will comfort them.

## **Dealing with change**

Life for the child may change. Often children find that people, even friends, treat them differently.

If they are at school things might get difficult there. Talk about letting the school know about what is happening. If the child has had to move home or school they might be missing friends or family. Try and help them to keep in touch with people who are special to them.



## **Useful contacts**

### **Prisoners' Families Helpline**

Offers support to anyone with a friend or relative in prison.

Mon-Fri 9am—8pm, Sat 10.00am-3.00pm

Call free on 0808 808 2003

### **Family Lives**

Offers support and information to parents.

Helpline: 0808 800 2222. [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

### **Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)**

Mon-Fri 9am—5pm Tel: 0300 063 2100

Can provide help with the cost of visiting.

[www.gov.uk/helpwithprisonvisits](http://www.gov.uk/helpwithprisonvisits)

### **Childline**

A free confidential phone counselling service for any child, 24 hours a day, every day.

Helpline: 0800 1111. [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Ormiston Families** runs services for those affected by imprisonment in the community and in many prisons in the East of England.

**Email:** [enquiries@ormistonfamilies.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ormistonfamilies.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 01473 724 517

**Address:** Ormiston Families, Unit 17, The Drift, Nacton Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP3 9QR

**Website:** [www.ormiston.org](http://www.ormiston.org)