



# Being a parent in Prison

Being apart can be very hard for both parent and child. Both must come to terms with their loss whilst adapting to a new way of life.

This information sheet can't cover everything that will happen but explores possible difficulties and suggests ways that these may be eased. It talks about a single child because even where there are a number of children in a family, it is best to think about each one individually.

The fact that a person has been sent to prison does not make them a bad parent and the well-being of their child is likely to be the main concern.

If you are a parent in prison, the thought of being away from your child for some time may feel frightening and upsetting.

Many parents talk about feeling guilty, helpless, even in despair. Some think of stopping contact, believing that it will protect their children from further upset. This is rarely the case. Children of all ages need help to understand what has happened and, as their parent, you are one of the best people to do that.

Your relationship will change, but your child needs to know that you still love and care for them. They need to know that they are not to blame for what has happened, so keeping in touch is very important.

## **Keeping in touch**

### **Visits**

Visits may offer the only chance for face-to-face contact, when your child can see how and where you are. Visits can be upsetting by making everyone more aware of the separation. It is important to think of ways to make the time as positive as possible.

Think about how your child may feel, especially if you have to discuss things with the person caring for them. Plan the things you want to say and be ready to listen and respond to what your child wants to tell you. Visits are also a good way to mark special occasions.

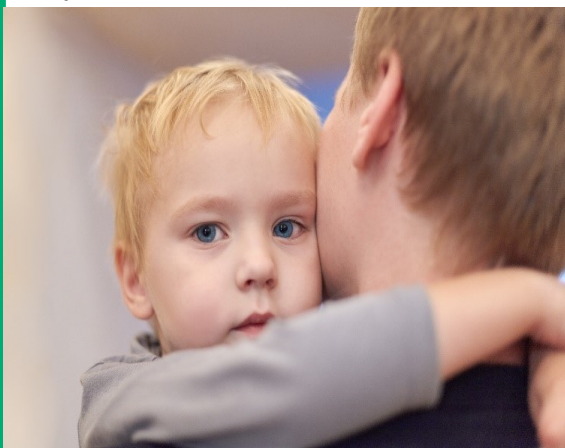
### **Telephone calls**

Telephone calls give you a chance to talk to your child at home, even if they are too young to really chat. If you can choose the time to call, try to make it when it is best for your child.

Make sure you don't telephone when they are too tired or watching their favourite television programme! If you feel your child wants to talk to you alone, see if the person caring for them will arrange for that to happen.

### **Letters**

Letters can be very special to a child as they are something of their own to treasure. Pictures can be very special too.



## **The care of your child**

The way you get on with your child's carer, whoever they are, is very important. However, the relationship may not be an easy one.

As a parent you may want to play a big part in your child's life, yet the person caring for them will be dealing with their upbringing day-to-day. Decide what really matters to you, how it affects your child and then try and agree things with their carer.



You will need to discuss what to tell the child about your imprisonment. It is best to be as honest as possible, as they are likely to know and understand more than you realise.

By being honest you are giving them a chance to talk about things they may be worried about. It is important that the child's carer understands what you want.

### **Dealing with change**

There may be other people in your child's life who you can keep in touch with, for example, relatives, friends or their school. This will give you a fuller picture of their life but do tell your child what you are doing.

However bad things may seem, talking can help. Keep in touch with your child and their carer in every way possible and it is likely to be better for you all.

### **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

#### **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)

#### **Family Lives**

Offers support and information to parents.  
Helpline: 0808 800 2222. [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

#### **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)