

Visiting Prison

Enabling a child to visit their parent in prison is an important way of helping them to cope with being separated from them. There is no easy way to prepare a child and it will take time and thought. If you are caring for more than one child, they will all need reassurance, but may have different questions and worries. Some children may not want to visit, and they should not be forced, but talk to them about why they feel like that.

If you are worried about visiting yourself, try and find someone who will go with you. If you definitely don't want to visit, but the child does, you will need to arrange for someone else to take them.

Talking about the visit

There will be a lot to explain about the visit. This may be the first time that they have a real sense of where their parent is. It is best to be as honest as possible as they may already know and understand more than you realise.

Children of any age need to be prepared for what the prison is like. Explain about the security measures: searches, locking doors, people in uniforms and sniffer dogs. Visit rooms are all different, but they can be very noisy and busy places.

Once the child starts to think about the visit they could write down things they want to tell their parent.

Preparing a child for the visit



It can be helpful to visit on your own first so you know what to expect. You can also get the information you will need for planning the child's visit.

Questions may include:

- Are there play facilities in the visitors centre or prison? Are there refreshments on sale?
- What types of visit 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?

If you have other questions you should contact the prison, or its visitors centre. You should try not to take your child out of school to visit. However if you do, it is a good idea to talk to the school about the situation.

The journey

It is important to plan your journey, especially if you have a long way to go. Pack any favourite toys, books or games. Drinks and snacks are important too. It can be an anxious time for everyone as the visit draws near. It is important to try and make the journey as relaxed as possible.



The visit

Visits are different at each prison. Some can be very short, and it is important that the child knows that.

When you arrive in the visits room take time to settle the child. It can be very noisy. If there is a play area, make sure they know where you will be sitting.

Try to make sure that the child gets special attention during the visit. They will need time to talk about their news, ask questions or just to sit with their parent. It is important that they can share their thoughts and feelings too.

The time may go very quickly and leaving their parent at the end of a visit can be very difficult.

Reassure them about the next time they can be in touch perhaps another visit, telephone calls or by letter.

After the visit

Every child reacts differently after a visit. Some may need to talk, others may become quiet. You may see other changes in their behaviour which are more difficult to deal with. This is likely to be a sign that they are having to deal with different feelings sadness, frustration, even anger. They may get cross or irritable with you, but this is probably because they are confused. Try to comfort them and talk to them about what they are feeling.

As a parent or carer facing a difficult situation you may need support yourself. If you do not have anyone close you can turn to, the list on the right shows organisations who are there to help and listen.

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

Family Lives

Offers support and information to parents.
Helpline: 0808 800 2222. 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

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

Telephone: 01473 724 517

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

Website: www.ormiston.org