

**Are you a young person with
a family member in prison?**



We hope this leaflet will help teenagers who have relatives in prison. You might feel isolated, alone, not sure how to get support or talk to other young people in the same situation as you. You may have questions or are looking for a little more information on what happens when someone is arrested, appears at court or goes to prison.

"I think the best way to find out is through your own family, not in the papers or anything."

12-year old, brother in prison.



Arrest and the Offence

True stories

You might be upset at seeing a relative being arrested, be worried about what to tell other people, angry that no one is telling you anything or even relieved that your relative has been arrested.

"The police raided our house to arrest my brother but no one was there. We got home to the house smashed up from the police raid. It was a mess. It was horrible. It's not a pleasant thing to find out about at all. It was all in the papers and on the news as well. They even put our address in, which was really out of order. It was really hard. I wasn't sleeping, didn't know what was going on. It felt like it was a dream."

16-year old, brother in prison

"When he got arrested it caused loads of fights in the family. People were really upset with him again. Mum didn't know at first until someone told her. I felt upset at first, and I missed him all the time. But I was ashamed and didn't want to tell people. We never got any information from anyone – where he was or telling us what was happening."

15-year old, father in prison





On remand

"She was on remand for 6 months before she went to court. I didn't go to court because I wasn't allowed, because I was too young. I wanted to go because I should know all about it because I was closest to mum. It would have been a support for mum. I felt that they thought it had nothing to do with me – I wasn't considered."

16-year old, mother in prison



Telling family members or friends

What should you tell people? Is it better to keep it secret? Should you tell your friends? They may find out anyway through Facebook, Twitter, the television or newspapers so maybe it is better to be up front. They may have a relative in prison themselves, and they may be completely sympathetic.

"I told my mates but I didn't tell people at work. I have now – I'm not ashamed of it. But you have to be careful who you do tell. Some people look at you funny. But now if they think bad of me, I don't care what they think anyway. But I am still careful who I tell. I'm cautious. I have to get to know someone first. I had all the support I needed off my mates and family. It was all right."

18 year old, father in prison

"None of us know why he's in prison. They have told us we are too young and that they will tell us when we are older. They can't discuss it with us yet. And they are worried that if they tell us we will tell the little ones, so it is better if we don't know anything at all."

Siblings aged 13 and 14, father in prison

"Mum told me and my big sister that he had gone down for three years. She told the younger ones that he'd gone to work for the Queen! The family helped a bit."

12 year old, father in prison

Keeping in touch

Keeping in touch with someone in prison can be hard. You can't just pick up the phone, text or go on Facebook and communicate with your relative like you would usually. They can receive letters and some prisoners can be e-mailed, but not all. Your relative will also have access to a phone, but only when they are out of their cell and it may not be easy to get on the phones if there are big queues or not enough phones. It is also very expensive for them to phone you.

"She mustn't think we don't love her... if we don't keep in touch she will think we don't love her and she will harm herself again."

Sisters aged 13 and 15, mother in prison

"I'm his son – he tells me that I'm the one that makes him hang on. I feel that I'm keeping the family together – 'head of the family'. I'm the only one visiting my brother."

18 year old, father and brother in prison

Why you may not be allowed to maintain contact

Sometimes it may have been decided that it won't be good for you to stay in touch with your relative for your own safety and protection. This might only apply to visits, but it could also apply to writing letters and receiving phone calls or sending e-mails. This decision will have been made by an adult who is responsible for your safety.

"We were worried about him inside though. That he wouldn't look after himself. It didn't really cause any bad feeling in the family. We all stood by him. It was great when he was at home but awful when he went back."

18 year old, father in prison

"We miss him; we want him to know what we think of him. We have to let him know in case he does anything stupid – you know, suicide or that. Have to make sure he doesn't do anything like that. If he knows we love him and miss him he won't do anything like that."

Siblings aged 13 and 14, father in prison



Visiting

A visit to the prison has to be booked by an adult. Young people under the age of 16 are not allowed to visit on their own. If you've never visited a prison before you might find it a bit scary and daunting. The prison may be a long way away and you may have to wait outside the prison until you are allowed in.

It is also likely you will be searched and you won't be allowed to take your phone or food in, though you will usually be able to buy food for you and your relative on the visit. The seating arrangements might make physical contact difficult. Searches and other restrictions will depend on the level of security of the prison your relative is in. There may be family days when you can visit in a more relaxed environment.

"It makes you feel horrible, like you have done something too. They watch you and make you feel guilty just for being there. They search you and make you take your shoes off and you feel stupid and it is horrible. You don't get used to it. You sit there waiting for them to call you. And you feel ashamed."

14 year old female, brother in prison

"It is a bit scary being searched and having to take your shoes off. It makes you feel horrid. We didn't talk when we saw him. There were too many other people around. I couldn't think of anything to say in case anyone else was listening. It is just too embarrassing. They know why you are there, what you are doing there and it is just too horrendous."

17 year old, brother in prison



What about school or college?

You may be unsure about whether to tell a teacher or other staff at the school or college. However, the school or college may have a counsellor or other support staff who can talk to you in confidence about what has happened. If you don't want anyone at school or college to know, talk to someone else you can trust – a grandparent, aunt or uncle, youth worker, or a friend. You may not want to tell your school or college friends, but they may find out anyway.

"I wanted to visit all the time – I wanted to go with mum, but I was at school. Now I'm not at school, it's so much easier. I took a couple of Wednesdays off school and said I was going to see my dad. Some teachers knew because mum had told them."

18 year old, father in prison

"I only told my two best friends. The school still doesn't know because I don't feel they will be sympathetic. Now I am doing my GCSEs I really wish they knew."

16 year old, both parents in prison

Coming home

You may not have much warning of your relative being released. They may be released on 'Tag' also known as Home Detention Curfew (HDC) where prisoners can serve the last part of their sentence at home. They will be on a curfew and not allowed out from their home address between certain times. They will wear an electronic tag on their ankle.

Some young people look forward to having a relative home and the possibility of things improving. However, it is probably fair to say that for many, it may be a time of mixed emotions. For some young people, release of a family member from prison is not always easy.

Who can help?

Strains on the whole family might have an affect on you – particularly not being given information in your own right and being kept in the dark.

If you would like to talk to someone and don't quite know how to get started, show this booklet to someone – it doesn't have to be an adult, it could be a friend. You are probably finding it difficult to know where to go for support but there are helplines and websites which can help. Many of these organisations offer live chat as well.

“Dad won't be able to come home when he's released because he's a bad influence on the family. Mum is standing up to him at last. I do miss him though – he's quite funny and quite smart – he was studying for a law degree. He's got to prove himself to be a good dad and come back to the family.”

15 year old, father in prison

“We got stressed by not knowing the date he was coming out. We thought we did and then it would change again and then he would just turn up... He was just sitting at home there one day when I got home from school. He looked different and talked different. It took time to get used to him again and I felt left out by my mum.”

15 year old, father in prison

Useful organisations

Bully Watch

Bully Watch website provides information on how to deal with bullying.
www.bullywatch.org.uk

Childline

If you need to talk to someone in confidence call Childline: 0800 1111.
www.childline.org.uk

Family Lives

Family Lives offer support and advice 7 am to midnight
www.familylives.org.uk
0808 800 2222

Get Connected

Get Connected offers free, confidential help, advice and support to young people under 25
www.getconnected.org.uk
Helpline: 0808 808 4994

Kidscape (UK wide)

Kidscape works with children and young people under the age of 16 to provide support and prevent abuse and bullying.
www.kidscape.org.uk

Muslim Youth Helpline

0808 808 2008
www.myh.org.uk

Offenders' Families Helpline

Information and support to anyone with a relative or friend in prison
Helpline: 0808 808 2003
www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org

On the Inside

This website will be helpful to you if a parent or carer of yours is in prison.
www.ontheinside.org.uk

The Samaritans

7 days a week, 24 hours a day, free confidential service if you are in crisis, despairing, or suicidal
0845 790 9090

Talk to Frank

Free and confidential support to anyone concerned about or affected by drug or solvent abuse
www.talktofrank.com
free helpline: 0800 776600

Voice

Independent and confidential advocacy service for young people
www.voiceyp.org.uk

Young Minds

Young Minds offer information and support to children and young people about mental health and emotional well-being
www.youngminds.org.uk



@prisonerfamily

Action for Prisoners' Families works with its members to improve policy and practice for prisoners' and offenders' families and to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment and offending on families across statutory, private, social enterprise, community and voluntary sectors. Action for Prisoners' Families publishes free information and children's books for prisoners' families.

Go to our website: www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk to find out more.

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