

Sent to Prison

an Outsiders guide for the partners and families of prisoners

Sent to Prison

“Someone I knew came and told me my husband had been nicked.”

This Outsiders booklet is for individuals experiencing the imprisonment of a family member. It explains the impact on the family from the point of initial arrest to imprisonment itself, providing helpful information ranging from visiting prison to becoming familiar with prison jargon.



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Action for Prisoners' Families
Unit 21
116 Putney Bridge Road
London SW15 2NQ
Tel: 020 8812 3600
www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

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This booklet 'Sent to Prison' is one of a series of information booklets for families of prisoners and offenders called 'The Outsiders' published by Action for Prisoners' Families (APF).

Action for Prisoners' Families is a membership organisation which works for the benefit of prisoners' and offenders' families by representing their views and those who work with them, and promoting effective work with those families.

The Outsiders

Sent to prison
Living with separation
Telling the children
Preparing for release

Designed by Nicola Kenwood (nikki@hakoonaamatata.co.uk)

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Unit 21

116 Putney Bridge Road
London SW15 2NQ

Tel: 020 8812 3600 Fax: 020 8871 0473

Email: info@prisonersfamilies.org.uk

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Freephone support helpline offering information, advice and guidance to prisoners' and offenders' families

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Arrest

“ Someone I knew came and told me my husband had been nicked. It was nearly midnight, but I went down to the police station. They told me what had happened but I couldn't see him then, so I went home. I was shaking. Later the police came round and questioned me. We were all in total shock. The oldest boy just cried and cried - I don't think it really hit the younger ones. It was total chaos and it was all sort of hazy. There are still parts of those early days I just can't remember. This was the start of a nightmare. I just kept thinking it can't be true! ”

This is how it was for one partner at the time of arrest. Although the circumstances can vary, people's first reactions are often very similar. Some partners have been living in dread of this happening, whilst for others it comes as a complete shock. For some it isn't a new experience.

Being arrested at home

Many arrests take place in the home. This can be very traumatic, especially if children are present.

“ It was a complete shock when the police came early that morning and arrested him. They raided the house and woke up the kids and took them from their beds during the search. When they took their daddy away they went into hysterics. The oldest tried to drag his daddy back. ”

How are children affected?

It is hard to imagine that this experience doesn't affect children. Even very young children and babies who don't understand what's happening will be affected, because they may pick up the anxieties and emotions of the adults in their lives and subconsciously know that all is not well.

“ My middle girl wanted to know where they were taking her daddy and she sobbed her heart out. My oldest was 8 years old then and it wasn't the first time her father had been arrested. She'd been through it all before and she comforted her sister. ”

“ The children now have panic attacks when they see the police - it was very upsetting for them to see their mother being dragged away. ”

Older children may be just as traumatised, especially when news of the arrest is in the papers, on television, or on social media, and their friends get to hear about it. Kirsty was 16 when her brother was 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 horrible. 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. ”

Sometimes both mother and father are arrested together. When this happens, neighbours may come in and look after the children, relatives are called on, or sometimes the children will be taken to the police station until care arrangements can be made by social services.

Some children may however be perfectly comfortable with the facts of imprisonment and may even bring it up at inappropriate moments, something that parents need to be prepared for.

Dealing with a family member's offence

For some families, the nature of the offence is a source of shame. This particularly applies to offences of a sexual nature or other violent crimes though it can go across the board. Action for Prisoners' Families has produced a booklet for older children called *'Someone in My Family has Sexually Abused Children'* which is free of charge to prisoners' families. Contact APF to find out more.

It is very difficult for some families to cope if there has been social media, newspaper, radio and television coverage of the case and the sentence. Some partners and parents feel a great sense of guilt, as if the offence was somehow their fault:

“When they came that morning into the house and arrested him it was awful. I felt so guilty – and so embarrassed too. Then I thought to myself, come on, pull yourself together. At first I just wouldn't go out at all – but now I make sure I get out once a week. You do need to get out.”

“The emotional strain was unbelievable. Because of the nature of the offence there was a lot of distrust on my part.”

Other families report being harassed by neighbours, or getting anonymous abusive phone calls, being harassed on Twitter, and offensive notes pushed through their letterbox. Some high profile cases involving paedophiles, have meant that families have had to move house and make a fresh start elsewhere where they are not known. If you find that you are being harassed, then it may be useful to keep a record of exactly what happens. If you then require assistance from the police or the housing department to move home, a dossier of events will be very helpful for your case.

If you feel angry, let down, disappointed and ashamed, you need to remember two important facts:

1. *These feelings are perfectly normal.*
2. *You are not guilty.*

What should you tell people about your relative being in prison?

It's up to you how much or how little you tell your family, friends and neighbours about your relative being in prison. If you have children, they are bound to ask questions that you will need to deal with, and it is usually better to tell them the truth, explaining it in a way that they can relate to. One of the other Outsider booklets – *'Telling the Children'* – will be useful to you.

Here is how a mother told her daughters about their elder brother being in prison:

“When he was on remand he was in a secure unit which wasn't really like a prison. It had comfortable chairs and nice tables, so we told the girls it was a hotel and Philip was working there. But when he was convicted and sent to a young offenders institution it was much more like a real prison, and we had to tell them the truth. We'd decided to tell them anyway when the younger one wrote a letter to Father Christmas asking for her big brother back. At first when I told them they cried, but then they got used to the idea.”

This mother's decision to tell the truth seems to have been the right one. Her elder daughter, who was nine when her brother first went to prison, now has quite happy memories of her visits to him:

“I remember there was a children's corner with lots of Playdough and me and my sister made penguins and Gary used to help us.”

For more information about telling relatives about the imprisonment of a relative see the Outsiders booklet *'Telling the Children'* – available free of charge from **Action for Prisoners' Families: 020 8812 3600** or www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk.

Practical considerations

After the first shock of the guilty verdict there are some practical things you need to think about. Getting to grips with money problems and transport to the prison for visits can be very difficult when you are still trying to cope with the emotional trauma of seeing a close relative being sent away.

You will inevitably feel a sense of panic:

- Which prison have they gone to?
- When do I get to visit?
- What do I tell their siblings?

This leaflet will give you some helpful advice on these matters.

What happens when a pregnant woman or someone who has a young baby is sent to prison?

Being pregnant or having a young baby has no effect on sentencing policy. If a woman is pregnant when she goes to prison, she will normally

be given the option of keeping her baby with her in a prison mother and baby unit. She will be able to keep the baby with her for up to 18 months, depending on the prison. She may, however, prefer to send the baby out to be cared for by relatives.

One young mother in prison said:

“ I was heavily pregnant and everybody said they d never send me to jail, but they did. I had Jake two weeks before I came into prison. I got two years for drug offences, so I should be out just before his first birthday. When I first went into prison I lost him for a while because there were no places on any units, so my sister had to have him. But after three days I got into a mother and baby unit. ”

Women in the mother and baby units have to work in the main prison during the day, while their babies are cared for by trained nursery nurses. At night they can have their babies in cots in their rooms, and the room doors are not locked, as it is not permitted to

lock a child in a cell at night. The mother and baby units are self-contained secure units within the prison.

Supporting your children when they are sent to prison

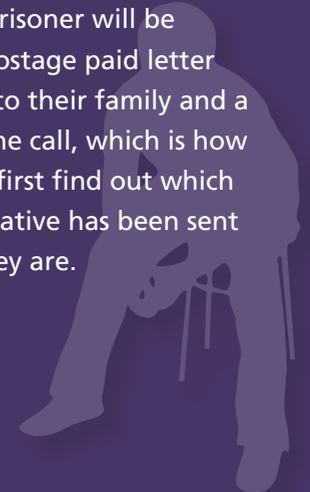
If your daughter or son is a sole parent and has been sent to prison you may find yourself as the main carer of your grandchildren and the one taking the children to visit their parent in prison. Sometimes there seems to be no alternative, and without your support your grandchildren may have to be taken into the care of the local authority. If you do make the decision to take on the care of grandchildren, **Grandparents Plus** – www.grandparentsplus.org.uk. Advice Line 0300 123 7015, and **Grandparents Association** – www.grandparents-association.org.uk. Helpline 0845 4349585 and Benefits Helpline 0844 3571033 may be able to offer you information and support, and there may be projects running in the prison your son or daughter

is in which involve grandparents who are carers.

Which prison will your family member be going to?

Most courts do not allow any visits from the family members to the court cells.

In most cases legal representatives will be allowed to visit the cells and they will be able to pass on information to families, e.g. about which prison your relative is going to. If you phone the court after 4.30pm and ask to speak to ‘cells’, they might also be able to say which prison your partner is going to. However, when arriving at prison the prisoner will be allowed one postage paid letter to send home to their family and a reception phone call, which is how many families first find out which prison their relative has been sent to and how they are.



What to do if you are worried about your family member's mental health

If you are concerned about your family member's mental health or how vulnerable they are, you should speak to the barrister or custody staff. If you are concerned that the prisoner may be at risk of possible acts of self-harm or suicide, it is important that court cells staff are made aware of this. They can alert the prison escort service and reception staff at the prison.

If you think that a prisoner is at risk from suicide or self harm, or from other prisoners, telephone the prison, explain that you think there is a risk of suicide or self harm and ask to speak to the Duty Governor. The number of the prison can be found at www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder or call directory enquiries. If you do not feel confident enough to do this, please call the **Offenders' Families Helpline** free on **0808 808 2003**. Helpline staff will try to get through to the Duty Governor for you and call you back.

When will you next be able to speak to your family member?

- Every prisoner is supposed to be allowed one free reception phone call within the first 24 hours after s/he arrives in the prison.
- In practice, there is such high demand for the use of prison phones that a prisoner new to that prison may not manage to get to the phone in time before they are locked in their cell for the night, so you may not hear from them until the next day at the earliest.
- Remember prisoners can't receive incoming calls.



Visiting a Prison

Reception Visit

Presuming your family member wants a visit, you will receive a 'reception visit' within the first few days of them arriving at prison. This visit does not require a visiting order, but does need to be booked and you should tell the person answering the phone that you would like a reception visit.

What is a visiting order (VO) and do I need one?

A visiting order or 'VO' is a form completed by the prisoner and sent to the people they want to visit them. A visiting order will have on it the name and address of the people visiting, and a unique reference number for booking the visit.

When can I book my first visit?

A prisoner will not appear on the prison system until the first working day following a court appearance. This is the earliest that someone will be able to book a visit. All visits need to be booked 24-48 hours in advance (depending on the prison) so there is usually a day or two delay before you can make your first visit. Visits to 'Category A' (high security) prisons may be further delayed due to the need for security clearance by the police.

How often can I visit?

Visitors to a remand prisoner do not require a visiting order but visitors to a convicted prisoner do. All visits, whether to a remanded or convicted prisoner, need to be booked.

If your family member is on remand, awaiting trial or sentence, you will be able to visit more frequently than if they are convicted. Remanded prisoners are allowed a minimum of 90 minutes visiting per week up to a maximum of seven visits per week.

Convicted prisoners are generally allowed at least two visits of 90 minutes a month but this can increase as the prisoner progresses through the system and they will be given extra visits if their behaviour is good.

It is always best to check with the prison how many visits a prisoner is allowed. Contact details for all prisons can be found on the website www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder.

How do I book a visit?

Most prisons allow bookings to be made by phone and an increasing number also use email. Some prisons, however, only allow bookings to be made by the prisoner. The prisoner books the visit for their visitors and it is the prisoner's responsibility to notify their visitors of the date and time of the booking.

When booking a visit via phone or email you will need to provide details of all the people listed on the visiting order. Only the people named on the visiting order will be allowed to visit. The details required will include names, addresses and dates of birth. People named on the visiting order can choose not to attend but no one can attend in their place. Anyone attending who is not listed on the visiting order will be refused entry to the prison.

How many people can visit at once?

A maximum of three adults will be allowed to visit at any one time. The number of children allowed can vary from establishment to establishment but a child is classed as an adult for seating purposes at 10-12 years old (depending on local policy).

Family visits

Some prisons organise regular extended family or lifer visits, where the prisoner is allowed longer, more relaxed visits, with activities organised and refreshments available. Extended visits are dependent on a prisoner submitting an application and being subject to the appropriate security clearances.

What happens when I first arrive at the prison?

Facilities at prisons will vary but generally on arrival visitors will be expected to go to the prison's visitors' centre. Where this facility is available it will generally be a small building situated outside of the prison grounds. On arrival at the visitors' centre, (or prison reception where this facility is not available), visitors should have their visiting order checked by staff. Visitors who do not have a visiting order, or who forget their visiting order, will not be allowed entry to the prison regardless of circumstance or distance travelled.

It is important to arrive at the prison at least half an hour prior to the visit time. This allows visitors time to check in with staff, hand any property in, use the facilities (toilets, baby changing, refreshments) and put personal belongings into a locker. No personal belongings can be taken into the visits hall by visitors except for a small amount of money and essential baby items. **Visitors should take a pound coin with**

them for the lockers. Visitors may need to show their identification to visitors' centre staff, although in most prisons it is prison staff that must see the identification.

What identification do I need?

It is a Home Office requirement that all visitors to prisons, including professionals, must have identification and if visitors don't have it they won't be allowed in.

Some prisons now operate a biometrics system to help identify visitors to the prison. New visitors to each prison will be required to have their photograph and fingerprints taken which will then be entered onto the prison computer system. From then on, visitors' finger prints will be scanned as part of the identification process. Finger prints taken in this way are not used for any other purpose.

In addition, every visitor, including babies and children, must also provide another form of approved identification.

The identification documents required for visitors vary from prison to prison: its best to contact the prison to check what ID is needed before booking a visit.

Will I be searched?

From the visitors' centre, visitors will make their way to the main prison. Before arriving at the visits hall all visitors will be searched, including babies, children and disabled visitors. Searches will include a pat down/ rub down search. Female visitors will only be searched by a female officer but males can be searched by either sex. Male visitors who object to being searched by a female officer on religious or cultural grounds can ask to be searched by a male officer. The search process will also involve metal detectors (similar to those seen at the airport) and sometimes the use of a passive drug detection dog. The dogs used in the detection of drugs at prisons are trained to detect the smell of drugs on a person. They are kept on a lead at all times and will not bark at visitors. If the dog detects the scent of illegal substances it is trained to sit quietly next to the visitor. Visitors who are 'sat on' by the dog may be subject to further searches. If no drugs are found then the visitor may be offered a closed visit. If drugs are found the police will be called and the visitor will be arrested. Anyone caught trying to smuggle drugs into a prison will face a ban from the prison and potentially a prison sentence themselves.

What happens in the visits hall?

Once visitors have been searched they will make their way to the visits hall. In some prisons the prisoner will already be seated waiting for their visitors. In other prisons the visitors will be seated first. Seating is dictated by prison staff and security. Prisons will generally only allow minimal physical contact at the start and end of each visit, long or passionate

embraces or kisses are not allowed and may mean the visit is cut short. Once seated the prisoner is not allowed to leave their seat and move around the visits hall, although visitors can go to the tea bar, toilet or play area. If a visitor needs the toilet, they will be accompanied by an officer and searched before and after they go. If a prisoner needs the toilet then many prisons will end the visit. The prisoner will often have to wear a bib on visits so he is identified as a prisoner and not a visitor.

What facilities are there in the visits hall?

Many prisons provide play facilities for children under 12 years old. Some prisons simply provide a few toys, others have fully staffed and equipped play areas.

Restrictions

If a child is visiting then they need to be accompanied by an adult. Governors do have the discretion to allow young people aged 16-18 to visit unaccompanied by an adult and with parental consent.

For more detailed information about specific prisons in England and Wales go to: www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder

If you have any questions about visiting arrangements or you are unsure, you can call the **Offenders' Families Helpline** on **0808 808 2003**. All calls are free, from landlines and mobiles, and confidential. Callers can also access a translation service. See www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org for further information.



Sorting out money

If your partner has been claiming benefits for the family it is important that you transfer this claim to yourself as soon as possible after your partner has been sent to prison, as you will now be treated as a 'One Income' family. As a partner or relative of a prisoner you may be entitled to benefits to cover various costs. The **Offenders' Families Helpline** freephone **0808 808 2003** or **www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org** will be able to give you general information. If you are in any doubt about what you are entitled to, seek advice from your local Jobcentre. Plus, **Turn2Us** **www.turn2us.org.uk**, your local Citizens Advice Bureau or phone the benefits advice line **0800 882 200** or see **www.gov.uk/browse/benefits**.

Paying the bills

Bringing up a family without a partner to share the financial burden can put a lot of strain on your finances. For some families this can mean going into debt and this is an enormous source of stress. Partners left at home have to manage and make choices, such as:

- How can I avoid spending more than I have?
- Should I risk going into debt?
- Where can I make savings?
- How can I afford to pay for the children's food, clothes and school uniform as well as everything else?



Debt and loans

You can get information about dealing with debt from the national **Debtline** – freephone **0808 808 4000** or see the website **www.nationaldebtline.co.uk**. They will be able to advise you on loan sharks, that is illegal moneylenders charging very high interest rates. If you come across a loan shark report them anonymously to **Stop Loan Sharks** – freephone **0300 555 2222**, text **LOANSHARK** with the lender details to 60003 or email **reportloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk**.

However, you may be someone who feels they are doing better at managing money without their family member, especially if they had an alcohol, gambling, or drugs problem:

“I manage fine – I'm very good with money. I'm better off now to be honest, though he'd be raging if he heard me say that. We always had less when he was here.”

Carrying on alone

When your partner is away through the enforced separation of imprisonment, the children lose one of their parents and many aspects of day-to-day life will change.

You become a one parent family. Not only do you have to accept the absence of your partner, but you also have to adapt to a whole new way of life – taking on new responsibilities, looking after the children on your own, keeping in touch with your partner and visiting the prison. Action for Prisoners' Families Outsiders booklet *'Living with Separation'* is available free of charge and will give you useful information on how to cope.

Taking on the responsibility

There are inevitable emotional pressures for people whose partners are prisoners. You might feel that you always have to be strong for your children and that it is unfair to burden your partner with the harsh reality of what it is like to cope on the outside without them.

“On the visit we’d talk about how we felt. I would tell him I was fine, but really I was telling him a pack of lies, because more often than not, I wasn’t coping. But I didn’t want him worrying.”

Another woman gradually changed her attitude:

“At the start I used to keep things back from him, because I knew he had to sit there and think about all those things and there was nothing he could do about it. But then as time went on, I started telling him everything that was happening, because I was the one having to cope and I had no one else to turn to.”

Even though your partner is in prison, many families have found that resuming the family roles following release from prison is made easier if the prisoner has been involved as much as possible with responsibilities and changes taking place on the outside (see the Outsiders booklet *‘Living With Separation’* for ideas on how to help this process).

Who to turn to for help?

You may be lucky enough to have supportive family and friends, or you may make friends with the partners of other prisoners when you go to visit. However, you may also find it helpful to speak to somebody outside of the family who is a removed from the situation.

There are a number of local prisoners’ families support groups around the country. To find out if there is one near you call the **Offenders’ Families Helpline Freephone 0808 808 2003** or, if you have access to the internet, check the Google Map on APF’s web site: www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk to see if there is one in your area. You could also join **PrisonChatUK** – an online forum for family members (www.prisonchatuk.com). There is also information on the APF website about how to set up your own support group.

Prison jargon

The official language of prison life is confusing enough, and then there's all the prison slang. Your relative will soon slip into using this language quite naturally. Here are a few words and phrases that often crop up:

Adjudication – daily process when governor deals with disciplinary offences.

App – prisoners have to put in an app (application) for anything different from normal daily routine e.g. for things to be brought into prison.

Association – time when prisoners are allowed out of their cells to meet, talk, play pool, make phone calls etc.

Basic – there are three levels of prison regime: Basic, Standard and Enhanced, based on behaviour in prison. The higher the regime, the more privileges, such as increased number or length of visits.

Block or 'seg' – prison segregation unit where prisoners are sent for bad behaviour or sometimes for their own protection.

Canteen – this is the prison shop, where your relative will be able to order extra food, toiletries, tobacco, etc.

Category A, B, C and D – Prisoners are categorized and allotted to prisons by categories. Women and young offenders are categorized as suitable for open or closed conditions, but adult males are given one of the above categories (or 'cats'), with A being those whose escape would be regarded as highly dangerous to the public, down to D for those who can be reasonably trusted to serve their sentence in open conditions.

Closed visit – visit supervised by officers where the prisoner and visitor are separated by a screen. A prisoner can be put on closed

visits if under suspicion of smuggling drugs. Where there is proof, a prisoner may be put on closed visits for up to 3 months. However, this often means 3 months worth of visits, i.e. 6 visits, rather than 3 calendar months. Therefore, if you choose not to visit for 3 months you will still have to have 6 closed visits before going back to normal.

In possession – prisoners are allowed a strictly limited number of articles 'in possession' to keep in their cells. Anything above the limit is usually kept in 'private property' or handed out on a visit.

IMB – Independent Monitoring Board. These are lay people appointed by the Home Secretary to act as watchdogs.

Knockback – a setback such as losing an appeal, being refused parole etc.

Legal letter – confidential legal correspondence to or from solicitor is covered by prison rule 39. If a letter has 'prison rule 39 applies' written on it, it cannot be opened except in the prisoner's presence. Both correspondents need to write Rule 39 on the envelope.

Legal visit – lawyers are allowed to visit clients in prison without using a visiting order.

Listeners – prisoners trained by Samaritans to listen in confidence and offer emotional support to other prisoners.

Personal officer – each prisoner should have a personal officer to look after their interests.

MDT – mandatory drug testing – random urine testing for drugs.

'On the rule' – a prison rule under which some prisoners are segregated for their own protection.

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Private spends – money sent in by relatives or friends – small amounts which can be spent in prison canteen (shop).

PVO – privileged visiting order, sent out to visitors at the prisoner's request. Prisoners can be allowed these extra visits in return for good behaviour.

Shipped out – moved from one prison to another, often without warning (when it is known as being 'ghosted').

Tariff – minimum term – the part of a life sentenced prisoner's sentence, which must be served 'for retribution and deterrence'.

Town visit / community visit – some prisoners will be regarded as suitable to go out for the day to a place within a certain radius of the prison (usually 20 miles) in the company of family or friends.

VPU – Vulnerable Prisoners Unit – where prisoners at risk are held (see 'on the rule' above).