

Voicing the needs of families affected by imprisonment

families  
outside



# Supporting Prisoners' Families

**What can Health Professionals do?**

**“No-one explained anything. I knew he was getting kept in but I don’t know where. Who can I ask?”**

**“...would like to raise the subject of elderly family members of prisoners. My Mum visits her son (my brother) in prison. She is 72 and her mental health is not great, so during a visit and especially afterwards, she gets very distressed and confused.”**

**“Not sure whether I am strong enough to do this.....”**

**“When I leave the prison and go home on the train on my own, I break down. I get home and I go to bed no matter what time it is. My skin feels like it is burning all the time and I just feel so ill with it all.”**

# Introduction



Imprisonment can be a traumatic experience for families, and its impact is often significant and enduring. Families can feel punished and stigmatised and find it difficult speaking to relatives and friends about it. Families are often not given the information they need to cope and make sense of their situation and, as a result, they can feel unrecognised, unsupported, and disempowered.

This booklet offers information and guidance to health professionals including GPs, midwives, health visitors, school nurses, community nurses, occupational therapists and the many others who work in the health field so they can better support prisoners' families and children. They may be aware of the issues some of their families face but not sure of the support available to either the family or to them as professionals.

## Key Facts



- An estimated 27,000 children lose a parent to imprisonment each year.
- More children in Scotland each year experience a parent's imprisonment than a parent's divorce.
- Children of prisoners suffer from mental health problems up to three times the rate of their peers.
- Children of prisoners are at a high risk of not meeting the SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included) outcomes.
- Children respond to a family member's imprisonment in the same way as to a bereavement but without the social support to deal with this.
- There are 2½ times as many children of prisoners as there are children in care.
- Two-thirds of women in prison have dependent children.

**“Our relationship and lifestyle went from being stable with good jobs and a nice home to being a total wreck”.**



### **Families affected by imprisonment may be vulnerable to:**

- Poverty
- Separation
- Health problems, including poor mental health
- Unemployment
- Isolation/breakdown of extended families
- Stigma

### **Families affected by imprisonment may face difficulties such as:**

- Obtaining information
- Transport/accessing prison
- Managing emotions (shock, distress, stigma, loss, grief)
- Financial problems
- Unstable housing
- What to tell children and the impact on children  
(problems with behaviour, difficulties at school and with peers etc)
- Knowing where to go for help and support
- Accessing support

# Health Professionals



## **Health professionals can:**

- ensure that all staff are aware of and trained in how to recognise and deal with issues around imprisonment;
- create a community that is aware and supportive of families affected by imprisonment;
- actively build positive relationships with families affected by imprisonment and help carers to access additional forms of support;
- provide information for children and families affected (posters, leaflets, helpline numbers);
- liaise with partner agencies (sharing information appropriately and sensitively whilst bearing in mind the family's right to confidentiality);
- be aware of current policies that relate to the needs of prisoners' families.

## Information and Support for Families



- **Staff awareness:** Ensure that all health care staff are aware of how imprisonment can impact on families and where to access sources of information.
- **Posters and leaflets:** You can support the needs of prisoners' families by prominently displaying up-to-date support and information, including Families Outside materials.
- **Prison Family Contact Officers:** Many prisoners' families do not know where to go for help and support when they are worried about a family member. Health professionals can help by being aware of the role of Family Contact Officers, based in most Scottish prisons.
- **Wide range of support:** Make sure families are aware of the full range of services available to them including those that support families affected by substance misuse, domestic abuse, or physical or mental health problems.
- **Other agencies:** Discuss with family members if they are involved with any other agencies in the community: children's centres, schools, Women's Aid, and third sector organisations can all help to support families of prisoners.

## Liaising with the Prison Health Centre



The imprisoned family member may be your patient, or their family member may have expressed concerns to you about their relative. The delivery of health care in prisons is the responsibility of the NHS health board in which the prison is located, and the health services available in the prison should be the same as those offered within the community. Serious health concerns could be reported to a health care professional within the prison, who will take appropriate action.

The prison may also be involved in family work and support for parenting and relationships. A family may also ask you or your team for advice and information on alcohol or drug issues in preparation for their family member's release from prison. You may have concerns about undisclosed domestic abuse and child protection that may have implications for the family when the prisoner is released. There may be additional issues for families of those convicted of a serious or sexual offence. Ensure you are aware of national and local support groups you can refer families to, or contact the Families Outside Helpline to find these.

## **Prison Health Centre Contacts**

Main Establishment No

<b>Addiewell</b>	<b>ext 3056/3058</b>	<b>01506 874500</b>
<b>Barlinnie</b>	<b>0141 770 2053</b>	<b>0141 770 2000</b>
<b>Castle Huntly (Open Estate)</b>	<b>01382 319333</b>	<b>01382 319333</b>
<b>Cornton Vale</b>	<b>01786 832591</b>	<b>01786 832591</b>
<b>Dumfries</b>	<b>01387 274324</b>	<b>01387 261218</b>
<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>0131 444 3052</b>	<b>0131 444 3000</b>
<b>Glenochil</b>	<b>01259 767308</b>	<b>01259 760471</b>
<b>Grampian</b>	<b>01779 485600</b>	<b>01779 485600</b>
<b>Greenock</b>	<b>01475 883321</b>	<b>01475 787801</b>
<b>Inverness</b>	<b>01463 229068</b>	<b>01463 229000</b>
<b>Kilmarnock</b>	<b>01563 548901</b>	<b>01563 548800</b>
<b>Low Moss</b>	<b>0141 7629694</b>	<b>0141 762 9500</b>
<b>Perth</b>	<b>01738 458118</b>	<b>01738 458100</b>
<b>Polmont</b>	<b>01324 722233</b>	<b>01324 711558</b>
<b>Shotts</b>	<b>01501 824000</b>	<b>01501 824000</b>

## Further information



Families Outside can provide access to a wide range of reports and documents that address the impact of imprisonment on children and families. These can be downloaded from our website at [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk).

### **Health Professionals might also find the following publications of use:**

- Perspectives of Children and Young People with a Parent in Prison ([www.sccyp.gov.uk](http://www.sccyp.gov.uk)) SCCYP, March 2010
- Hands On Scotland Toolkit ([www.handsonscotland.co.uk](http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk)) 2008
- Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: Policy and Action Plan 2009-2011 ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)) Scottish Government, May 2009
- A tool to tackle health inequalities in the families of people in prison? Evaluating the Families Outside Family Support Worker role from a health perspective ([www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)) Liz Brutus, Families Outside, July 2012
- Better Health, Better Lives ([www.scotphn.net](http://www.scotphn.net))
- National Parenting Strategy: Making a positive difference to children and young people through parenting ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)) Scottish Government, October 2012

We can also provide CPD training to staff teams. Contact 0131 557 9800 for further details.

## **National Support:**

Families Outside Support & Information Helpline	0800 254 0088
Breathing Space	0800 83 8587
Parentline Scotland	0800 028 2233
Carers Scotland	0808 808 7777
Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs	08080 101011
Dementia Helpline	0808 808 3000
Health in Mind	0131 225 8508
SAMH	0800 917 3466
Relationships Scotland	0845 119 2020
Cruse	0845 600 2227
NSPCC 24 hr Child Protection Confidential Helpline	0808 800 5000
Assisted Prison Visits Unit (for financial assistance with travel to prisons)	0845 300 1423
Women's Aid (Freephone 24 hr National Domestic Violence Helpline)	0808 2000 247
Stop It Now (a dedicated resource for adults concerned about the sexual abuse of children)	0808 1000 900

## **Local Contacts:**

Local Children & Families Social Work Departments – contact details can be found online or in the telephone directory

NHS Inform	0800 22 44 88; <a href="http://www.nhsinform.co.uk">www.nhsinform.co.uk</a>
NHS 24	0845 4 24 24 24



**Families Outside Support & Information Helpline**  
**0800 254 0088**

**Email: [support@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:support@familiesoutside.org.uk)**  
**Text service: text **Famout** followed by your message to 60777**

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