

Families Outside - Support & Information Helpline

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5. Visiting someone in a Scottish prison

There is no standard procedure in Scottish prisons for visiting, and each prison can operate differently. This information sheet provides general guidance, and you will need to check any specific details with the prison, the prison Visitors' Centre, Family Help Hubs, or Family Contact Officers (FCOs) who are based at the prison itself. FCOs are prison officers who have a special responsibility for ensuring that families have access to correct information

✚ How is a visit arranged?

The Scottish Prison Service website www.sps.gov.uk tells you how to book a visit at the prison you wish to visit.

✚ Visiting a person who is remanded/untried:

In most Scottish prisons, the visitor telephones a dedicated booking line to book a visit. In order to book a visit, the visitor's name must be on a visit sheet completed by the prisoner. Remand visits will normally take place at a different time from convicted visits.

✚ Visiting a person who is convicted:

In almost every Scottish prison it is the responsibility of the convicted prisoner to book your visit and to let you know what day and time you can visit. The prisoner will be informed how to do this. Most prisons have a list of visit times for visitors.

✚ Questions you may have:

How soon can I visit?

Some prisons offer admission visits where you can visit your partner or relative on the day they are taken into custody. However, most 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.

How many visits is a prisoner allowed?

This will depend on the prison your partner or relative is in and whether they are on remand or have been convicted. Remand prisoners can usually have visits up to six times per week; convicted prisoners are more likely to have weekly visits.

How many people can visit at once?

Up to 3 adults are usually allowed at any one visit in most Scottish prisons. In most prisons there is no restriction on the number of children, within reason, who can visit with the adults. Anyone attending who is not listed on the visiting list will be refused entry.

What time do I have to be there?

In some prisons, such as Edinburgh, Cornton Vale and Kilmarnock, you are required to be there 30 minutes before your visit begins, otherwise you may not be allowed in. In other prisons this time may be 15 minutes. It is always advisable to contact the prison or Families Outside if unsure. If you have any special requirements regarding access to the prison, please contact the prison before your visit to inform them of any adjustments or support you require. The prison will make every effort to accommodate your request.

What identification do I need?

All visitors over the age of 16 need to take some form of photographic identification, such as a passport, driving licence, or government approved identification. You can ask at the prison or contact the Families Outside Support & Information Helpline for further information. You will also need proof of address - this could be something like a utility bill (gas, electric or landline telephone), council tax bill or letter from an official source.

What about my own belongings?

Some prisons allow visitors to take in loose change to purchase refreshments, but all other possessions must be left outside the visits room and stored in the lockers provided.

Is there anywhere I can wait?

All prisons have a waiting area. Some prisons also have Visitors' Centres or Family Help Hubs, where you may be able to purchase some light refreshments and leave your valuables. Most have a play area for children, toilet and baby changing facilities and you will have access to a range of information. At Edinburgh and Cornton Vale visitors book in at the Visitors' Centres or Family Help Hub. Staff there will be able to assist and answer any questions you may have.

Are there any facilities for children?

Prisons with Visitors' Centres will have play areas, baby changing facilities, vending machines and/or hot and cold food. Some of the larger prisons may also have specific areas within the prison visits room for a small play area.

Can I hand in money?

Rules vary, but some prisons will allow you to hand money in for the prisoner before your visit. Information regarding dates and times when money can be handed in is available from the prison. Money may be posted by using a postal order, cheque or sterling draft, but there are rules about this. HMP Addiewell and HMP Kilmarnock also accept electronic payments.

What about property and clothing?

In most prisons if you wish to take in property or clothing for the prisoner you must have a proform. This is a form which is completed by the prisoner and authorised by prison staff. It lists the items you can take, and only these items can be handed into the prison. The prisoner will then send the proform to you. Alternatively, the prisoner may telephone you to let you know what items are on the proform. The items being received by the prison will be checked against the proform. Electrical equipment must be safety checked, and all items handed in will be searched. Most prisons will supply an authorised list of what electrical goods can be handed in.

Will I be searched?

Before entering the visits, all adults will be searched in accordance with the Prison Rules 2011. This is done by a member of the same sex and may involve visitors emptying their pockets and opening their mouths for examination. Visitors may also be asked to remove shoes and may be subject to searching of outer garments and personal possessions. Some other security measures may include:

Metal detecting equipment is similar to equipment used at airports or at court and will involve the visitor walking through archways or the use of hand held metal detecting equipment

Searches for women and children will always be carried out by a female officer

Drug Detection Dogs are used in many prisons to help stop drugs and other banned items coming into the prison

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras are used to supervise visits rooms and other areas within a prison, including car parks

What if I refuse to be searched?

The prison has the right to refuse a visit if visitors decline to be searched, although the visitor may be offered the option of a closed visit (see below). If the prison has reasonable grounds to suspect that something will be attempted to be smuggled into the visits room, the visit will be refused.

What is a closed visit?

This means that the prisoner and the visitor are separated by a glass partition and cannot make physical contact. If there is a reasonable suspicion that security will be breached either by the visitor or the prisoner, the prisoner may be restricted to closed visits for either a specified length of time or number of visits. The position is reviewed at the end of the period and a decision made by prison staff as to whether closed visits will continue.

What if I am asked to take in a banned item?

You may be under pressure from your partner or family member to attempt to take drugs (or other banned items e.g. SIM cards, mobile phones, chargers) into the prison; they may be having difficulty coping with their sentence and you will feel that this can only help. However, the consequences can be huge: involvement of the police, and you may be arrested, charged and sent to prison. There is also a possibility that Social Work will be involved if there is concern about young children and drugs, and the children may be taken into care. If visitors are caught with a banned item, it may result in closed visits for the prisoner for all family members and friends for a specified period of time. **PLEASE: Do not take any items into the visit area or attempt to pass anything into the prison.** If you or a family member are being bullied, or need help with drugs or other addictions, you can talk confidentially to the Families Outside Information & Support Helpline **0800 254 0088**. They will support and signpost you to an agency who will be able to help.

Who can I ask for help?

Visiting can sometimes be a difficult and stressful time. If you are unhappy with the search procedures or in any way upset at a member of staff who may have carried out the search which made you uncomfortable, try to remain calm and polite. If you have a complaint or would simply like to comment about any aspect of your visit, ask to speak to the Visits Manager on the day or ask for a Visitors' Complaints Form. Complaint forms are available in all SPS establishments at the main entrance and visitor waiting areas. Completed forms should be handed to a member of staff at the front desk or put in the complaints box provided.

Family Contact Officers (FCOs)

In almost every Scottish prison it is the responsibility of the convicted prisoner to book your visit and to let you know what day and time you can visit. Each prison has a Family Contact Officer (FCO) who should be available to talk through any concerns you may have about visiting, and they can be contacted at the prison through the telephone switchboard, or they may be available when you visit.

You can also call the Families Outside Support & Information Helpline on **0800 254 0088**.