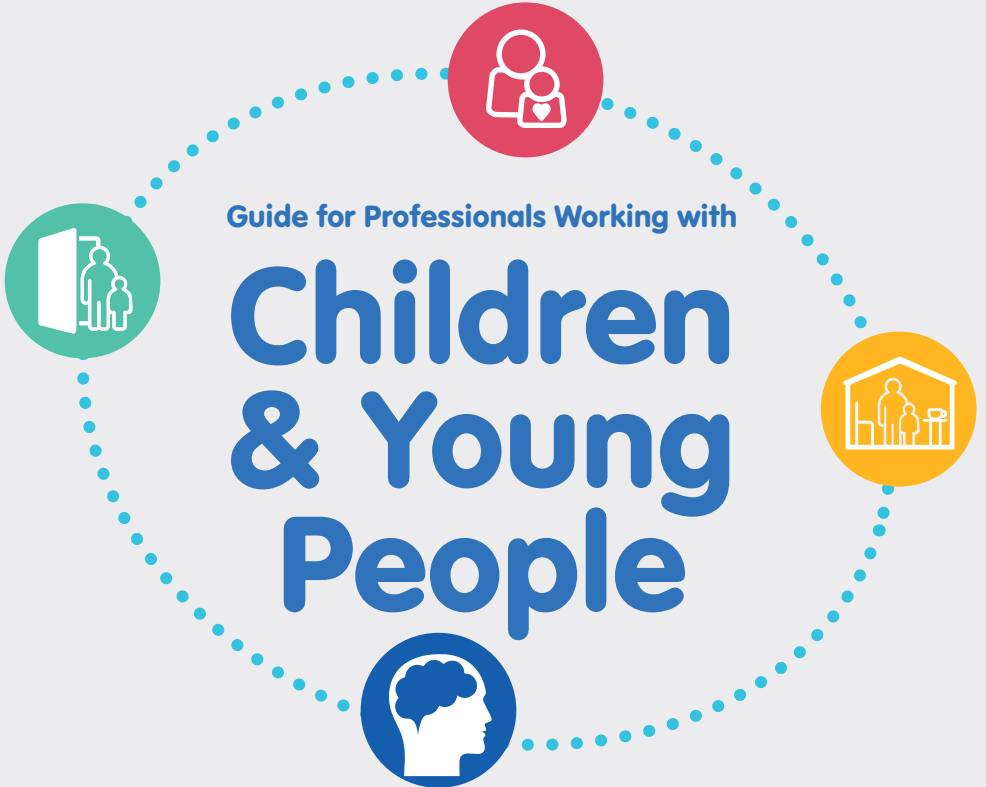


supporting families affected by imprisonment



Guide for Professionals Working with

Children & Young People

Children and young people with a family member in prison often face even greater challenges than other family members, and have emphasised the importance of having one or more trusted adults that they can turn to during a family member's imprisonment.

This booklet is aimed at those trusted adults and highlights the issues that young people face and the steps that can be taken to support them.

Children and Young People

Families Outside is the only national charity that works solely to support the families of people affected by imprisonment in Scotland. Our purpose is to improve outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment so they can live lives free from stigma and disadvantage.

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Our Values:



Responsive



Accessible



Independent



Knowledgeable

The impact of imprisonment on children and young people

An estimated 20,000 – 27,000 children each year in Scotland are separated from a parent by imprisonment.

This means that, each year, more children in Scotland experience a parent's imprisonment than a parent's divorce.

Issues facing children and young people:

- Imprisonment of a household member is one of the 10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) proven to increase the risk of poor health and wellbeing
- Many children who witness criminal behaviour and/or the arrest of a parent suffer significant trauma
- They are often isolated and judged for an offence they did not commit
- They often feel so ashamed of their situation that they do not tell others about their family member's imprisonment to avoid the risk of being bullied
- Not having contact with an imprisoned parent can have a detrimental effect on children and young people's emotional wellbeing
- In an attempt to protect children, adults may choose to lie to them, saying that their family member is 'working away' or similar, which can lead to confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety



"They said he was just going away on a wee holiday for a couple of month, that was basically it... like I knew he was in jail and all that, but they tried to sugar it all up for me, cos I was just a kid basically...."

Young person with a parent in prison

How you can help

Responses to parental imprisonment include externalising or 'acting out' behaviours such as anger, aggression, conduct problems, truancy, sexual promiscuity, and underage smoking and alcohol consumption. (Schlafer and Poehlmann 2010)

Due to the significant number of children with a parent in prison in Scotland, almost every professional who works with children, including health care professionals, teachers, and social workers, will come into contact with young people affected by imprisonment.

Raising awareness with professionals – understanding the issues

- Recognise children and young people with a family member in prison as a group with unique needs
- Reach out to children, young people, and their carers and ask how things have changed for them
- Discuss the child's or young person's needs with their carers
- Attend Families Outside training and share the learning from this
- Write an article for your intranet, newsletter, and website about the effects of imprisonment
- Display Families Outside literature on notice boards and information points
- Develop an organisational policy for identifying and supporting children and young people impacted by imprisonment

"My colleague and I felt confident enough to speak to one of our parents and ask her about the issues that she faces relating to her partner being in prison. It really opened up a useful and valuable dialogue with the mum, and we found out more about the family circumstances and specifically about how we could help her son's understanding of what was happening." Teacher

Supporting Children and Young People

Supporting children and young people

- Maintain a non-judgmental attitude
- Focus on the child or young person's needs and changes in their life, not on the offence
- Provide a safe place to listen
- Allow space and time to deal with emotions
- Let the child or young person know they are not alone and that it is not their fault
- Encourage the child or young person to keep a scrapbook/ memory box to share with their imprisoned family member
- Consider involving children and young people in peer support groups
- Check in regularly, as the child's or young person's needs may change at different stages



Maintaining contact – in discussion with child / family

Regular contact with an imprisoned parent, where appropriate, is a crucial element for maintaining children's and young people's emotional wellbeing. When contact is restricted, children and young people may need extra support, and reassurance that the situation is not their fault.

- Recognise, in most cases, that it is beneficial for children and young people to maintain contact
- Authorise absences from school to visit prison (if required)
- Send school reports to the imprisoned parent
- Encourage the child or young person to write to their imprisoned parent
- Consider contacting the imprisoned parent to discuss the child's or young person's developmental needs (if appropriate)

Support from the experts:

Children experience a diverse range of negative emotional reactions to parental imprisonment including feelings of rejection, sadness, despair, confusion, depression, withdrawal, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Hissel et al. 2011; Bocknek et al. 2009; Murray and Farrington 2008).

Helpline

The Families Outside Helpline, **0800 254 0088**, provides impartial information and support and is often the first port of call for families and professionals looking for help and guidance.

To contact the team:

Call **0800 254 0088**

Visit **www.familiesoutside.org.uk**. Our Webchat Service can translate most modern languages

Email **support@familiesoutside.org.uk**

Text **Famout** followed by your message to **60777**

Regional Support

If family members require more in-depth support, our Helpline Team will refer the case to our Regional Family Support Coordinators who are on hand throughout Scotland and provide local, face to face support.

Peer Support

Families Outside also hosts a number of peer support groups throughout Scotland, bringing children, young people, and adults together to support each other through their shared experiences.



"Looking back, I hoped for a point of contact from the court to explain what was ahead of me, where to go to for help. Like a social worker, someone, somewhere to give direction to prisoners' families... we are all different and have different needs. I didn't have this until I found the guts to walk in to the prison, and then I found Families Outside, but in between those stages, I was in no man's land."

(Family member speaking at Scottish Parliament, Nov. 2017)

We support families through our helpline, training, visitors' centres, events, direct support, research, publications, policy, campaigns, and donations.



For information and support:

Freephone 0800 254 0088

Text FAMOUT followed by your message to 60777

Email support@familiesoutside.org.uk

Visit www.familiesoutside.org.uk



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