

A RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS

working with  
children of  
prisoners



Save the Children

HRE/ADM/4R/2



working with  
children of  
prisoners

Written by Sally Ramsden in  
collaboration with a steering group  
made up of Save the Children and  
other voluntary organisations that  
support prisoners and their families



with financial support from  
BBC Children in Need Appeal

**Save the Children** 

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The artwork in this publication was created by London schoolchildren who were asked to draw a picture of their idea of prison.

Front cover artwork by Gideon Forbes, aged 8.

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# Preface

## Identifying the Need

This handbook has been put together as a shared effort by a group of individuals and organisations whose work brings them into contact with prisoners' children. Its origins lie in the following activities:

- Save the Children's work with children visiting mothers at Holloway Prison in London, which has acted as a model for other prison visiting projects. This initiative has resulted in support for the project to take its research outside the criminal justice system to find ways of assisting prisoners' children in their everyday lives. Lina Fajerman, Development Officer, Save the Children, and Ann McTaggart, Holloway Children's Day Visits co-ordinator, were appointed to manage the project, which was part-funded by Children in Need.
- Conferences which brought together practitioners working with families and children affected by imprisonment, where delegates repeatedly drew attention to the lack of information about and support for such children, particularly in a school context. This was notable at 'The Child and the Prison' conference organised by NEPACS, 1996, and 'Living in the Shadows – Tackling the Difficulties Faced by Families of Prisoners in the Community', the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups conference, 1996.

## Gathering and Organising the Information

The following people were asked about their views and experiences through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews:

- Fifty teachers in different parts of the country and teaching different age groups in inner city, suburban and rural settings were asked, through a written questionnaire, how they would support children whose parents were in prison. Teachers have been chosen as a target group because they work with large numbers of children in groups which, considering the rising prison population, may include prisoners' children.
- A number of children who were visiting parents in prison were asked what they thought about schools and teachers helping them.

- A small number of partners of prisoners were asked what they wanted from the education system for their children.

A steering committee was formed to oversee the production of this publication; this included teachers and representatives from organisations supporting prisoners' families.

Members of the steering committee set up two focus groups bringing together 20 teachers from the London area and from Yorkshire and Lancashire to discuss and advise on the subject.

A basic approach and overall structure for a publication was debated and agreed by the steering group on the basis of what teachers said they would find useful to know.

A writer, Sally Ramsden, was commissioned to bring different contributions together and integrate information gathered through the questionnaires and focus groups. Save the Children's Publications Unit published this handbook, advising on and co-ordinating the project.

### **The Steering Group**

The following individuals and organisations made up the steering group who took part in planning, researching, writing and testing this handbook:

Lorraine Atkinson, The Howard League  
 Jenny Bibby, Ormiston Children's and Families Trust  
 Cathy Caldwell, The Bourne Trust  
 Lina Fajerman, Save the Children  
 Alison Fisher, West Yorkshire Probation Service  
 Lucy Gampell, Federation of Prisoners' Families  
 Support Groups  
 Veronica Kilroy, West Yorkshire Probation Service  
 Helen Mitchell, The Bourne Trust  
 Ann McTaggart, Save the Children  
 Stephen Moore, Oldham Primary Needs Service  
 Mica Mullin, prisoner's child  
 Richard Nicholls, Ormiston Children and Families Trust  
 Una Padel, London Prisons' Community Links



We would also like to thank the following individuals for their invaluable help and advice:

Kate Button, Kirklees Education Department

Margaret Winter, Kirklees Education Department

All the teachers who filled in questionnaires and attended the focus groups.

Special thanks to Stephen Moore for information provided, including from an unpublished study, and to Mary Nixon, All Saints High School, Huddersfield.

The artwork in this publication was created by the following London schoolchildren who were asked to draw a picture of their idea of prison:

Gideon Forbes

Joanna Hooton

Alysa Hulbert

Fergal McTaggart

Rosie McTaggart

Morag Padel.

### Note on Terminology

#### Child

According to British law and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, a child is someone under the age of 18. In this handbook the terms *child*, *pupil* and *student* are used interchangeably to cover the range of different ages and experiences involved for a person of school-age who has a parent, relative or carer in prison.

Terms such as *children of prisoners* or *prisoners' children* are used to cover all children with a close relative or carer in prison.

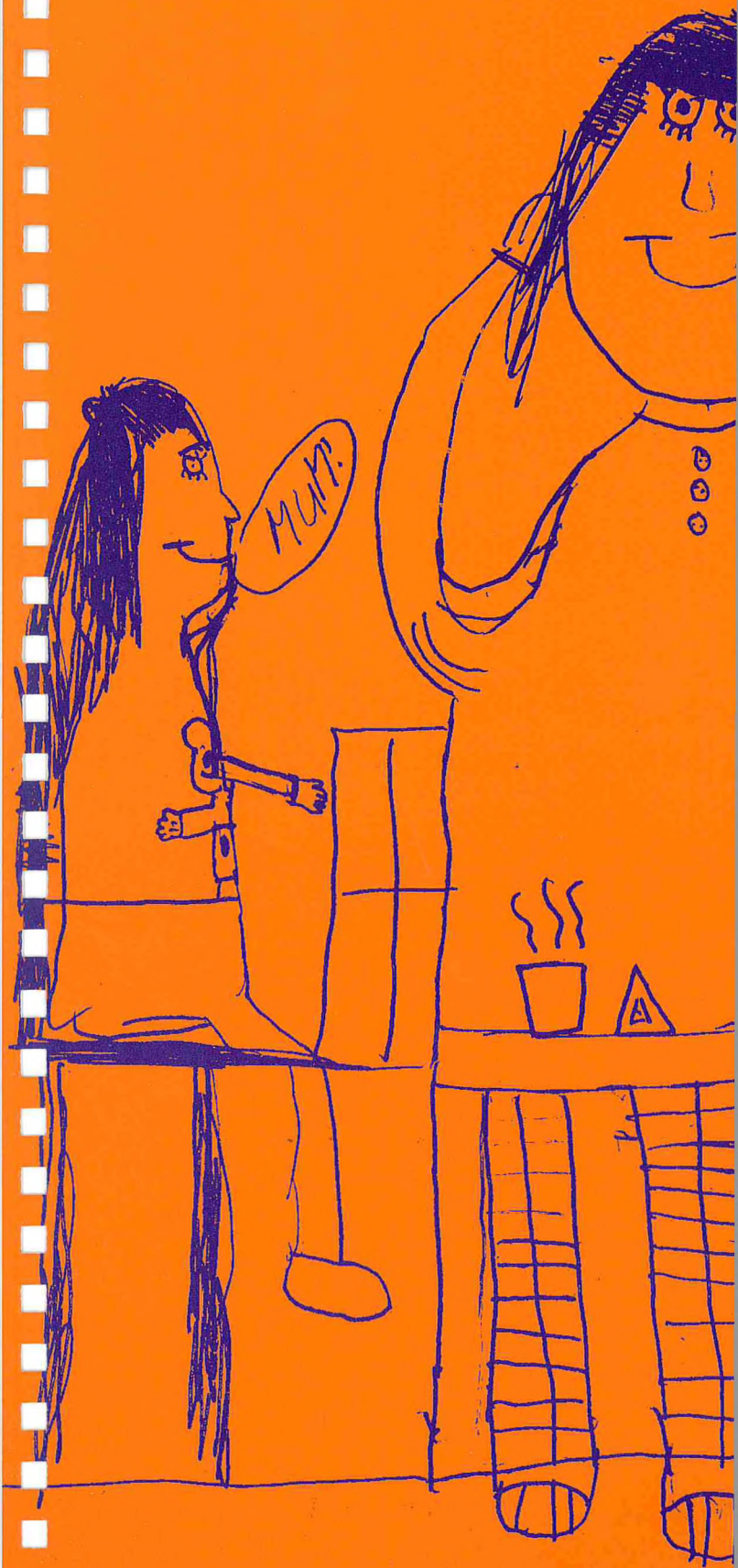
#### Parent/Carer

When the term *parent* is used, meaning is not restricted to only the biological parent. There are many people acting as parents such as grandparents, foster parents, siblings and friends. For some children, parenting does not come from a single source but from several, as, for example, within the extended family.

In this publication, the terms *parent* and *carer* are used interchangeably to cover the range of people, including schoolchildren, who take on parental responsibilities when a family member goes to prison.

#### Prison

Where reference is made to a parent or carer in prison, or a child or family affected by imprisonment, the terms *prison* and *imprisonment* cover those who have been arrested and are being held in prison before going on trial (held on remand) as well as those serving prison sentences after being convicted for an offence in court.





# Introduction



Morag Padel,  
aged 7

# Introduction

## Invisible Children

The children of prisoners do not enjoy any special rights in the UK; children's needs are not considered when a parent is sent to prison except in the case of a baby or unborn child of a female prisoner. Yet, when a parent is sent to prison, the child's life is turned upside down. Children may suffer as much, if not more, than the offender; although they have done nothing wrong, they are – in effect – also punished.

Prisoners' children are largely invisible both within and out of school. When teachers do find out, they tend to hear about the crime for which the parent has been sent to prison, and not the effect on the child. There is no official system nor any special services for passing on information about their situation and providing support. Those who could usefully be made aware of their needs – Social Services, educators and health workers – usually do not know. There is practically no research on the impact on a child's education, and issues concerning prisoners' children are not covered in teacher training or through in-service training (INSET) materials.

## The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UK has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which commits it to implementing a comprehensive set of rights for all children, including, therefore, the children of prisoners. The Convention states the importance of listening to children and taking their views into consideration in establishing their best interests (Articles 3 and 12). It also sets out the rights of all children to protection from abuse and neglect (Article 19) and their right to education (Articles 28 and 29). This is not just empty rhetoric but practical advice for ensuring that actions and decisions involving children contribute to their well-being.

These principles are also laid down in the Children Act 1989. However, such rights cannot be translated into reality for prisoners' children, who have historically been ignored, if there is a basic lack of information and awareness about their needs. This publication aims to help increase awareness of the needs of prisoners' children in the education sector and to provide teachers with a practical tool for working with such children in the classroom and beyond. The handbook is designed to be dipped into as a quick reference or to be read through sequentially by those whose roles and environments bring them into regular contact with prisoners' children.

**Chapter 1** looks at some of the basic issues involved, including the number of children affected, the lack of official recognition of their situation, and vital support networks for prisoners' families.

**Chapter 2** gives an overview of the criminal justice system, highlighting the stress and uncertainty involved, and also covers prison visiting and release.

**Chapter 3** examines the practical changes and emotional impact on the child and how to assess the principle of their best interests.

**Chapter 4** covers important issues in the classroom from identifying a child to practical teaching tools.

**Chapter 5** looks at the situation of the carer and how teachers can usefully communicate with them about the child in school.

**Chapter 6** offers ideas and suggestions for staff and policy development in school.

The **Conclusion** summarises the kinds of support this handbook aims to offer teachers and schools.

The **Resources** section offers some relevant resources and materials for schools and a list of useful organisations, together with suggestions for further reading.

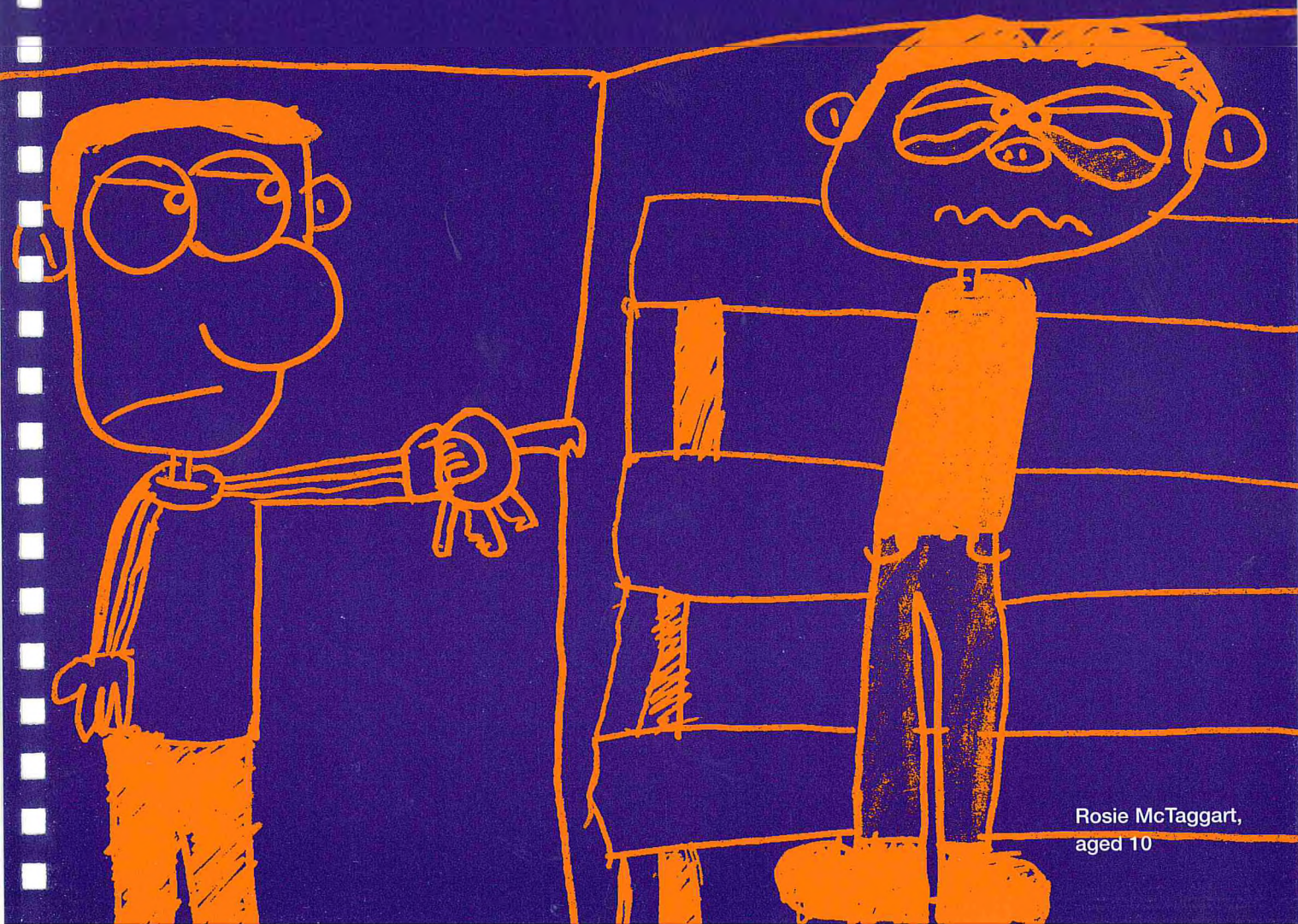
There is also an **index** for easy reference.

This handbook therefore constitutes a basic step towards ensuring that the needs of prisoners' children are met and that they can enjoy the same basic rights as other children, including the right to education.



# 1

## The wider context



Rosie McTaggart,  
aged 10



# 1 The wider context

*"The response is to get tough, be a survivor. Don't mess with me. The problem is that the kids act out, truant and end up excluded."*

TEACHER, SECONDARY SCHOOL

## Equality and Awareness

According to British law and international human rights conventions, all children have a right to education regardless of their age, gender, class, culture, race or ability. Much has been written in education about inequalities between different groups of children and it is widely accepted that schools' responses to different children take into account a complex range of social, educational and contextual factors.

The impact on children of situations involving the loss of a parent or family break-up, such as bereavement and divorce, have been well researched and documented. Yet there is almost a complete absence of research or policy on school children affected by the loss of a parent through imprisonment, despite that fact that large numbers of children are involved and that the total number affected is currently growing each year.

School can easily become part of the problem for children and young people whose lives have been disrupted through a parent being sent to prison. However, schools can only respond sensitively to the needs of prisoners' children if they are aware of those needs and their context. Stigmatisation and discrimination mean that children and their carers are often reluctant to make their needs known.

## A Double Punishment

When a parent is sent to prison, it is not just the offender who is punished. In many situations, the child may suffer more than the person who has been sent to prison. The practical and emotional impact and repercussions affect all family members; however, there are no standard responses. Close relatives may feel relieved that the person has been taken away or, alternatively, experience shock and guilt for not realising what was happening or for feeling deceived.

**Numbers of Children Affected**

It is estimated that in 1997 the mothers and fathers of more than 125,000 children in England and Wales were sent to prison. This number is greater than the whole of the special school population in England and Wales which currently stands at just over 82,000. Approximately one-third of these children of prisoners are experiencing the imprisonment of a parent for the first time.

The overall number of children affected is rising due to the current trend of increasing numbers of people sent to prison, many for minor, non-violent crimes such as non-payment of fines. By the end of January 1998, the prison population in England and Wales had reached just over 64,700, compared to just over 40,600 in December 1992. Some prison reform groups predict that the total will reach 73,000 by the year 2000.

A large proportion of prisoners are young men with young children, although women now make up five per cent of the overall prison population. When a mother goes to prison, the impact on the child or children can be particularly devastating as the mother is usually the primary carer. There is also a disproportionate number of ethnic groups represented in the prison population.

**Lack of Information and Awareness**

There is a lack of information and educational materials in schools and libraries for work with this group of children in a school context.

No statutory agency or service is responsible for the children of prisoners or for the wider family affected by imprisonment. There is, for example, no statutory obligation for Social Services or the Probation Service to provide support to a family when a member has been sent to prison. There is also no legal requirement or system for a school to be informed when a child's parent goes to prison.

It is only when other factors come into play such as Child Protection issues or a fostering that a school may be informed or become aware of a situation involving a parent in prison. A school is much more likely to hear indirectly about the situation of a child through gossip or the local newspaper – if they hear at all.



### Support for Prisoners' Families

A number of voluntary agencies offer support and advice to families affected by imprisonment, although the absence of local support in many areas means that people are often unaware of what is available.

There are currently approximately 25 prisoners' families support groups in Britain, most set up by relatives of prisoners who found there was no specialist support available. The majority of such groups are located in large cities although they can provide telephone support to families elsewhere.

Other voluntary agencies such as Childline, Gingerbread, Parentline and Home Start schemes (if one child is under the age of five) can provide some assistance, as do prisoner support and prison reform organisations. The Probation Service also facilitates a small number of weekly drop-in family support groups in limited areas. The **Resources** section contains more information on useful organisations and publications.

An important change achieved by organisations concerned with prisoners and their families has been the growing recognition of the importance and value of prisoners maintaining links with their families. It is now widely accepted that positive family ties increase the prisoner's chance of successful reintegration into society on release, and lessen the damage caused to children by separation from the parent.

In particular, prisons have become more committed to improving visiting conditions, especially for children. There are now play areas in many visits rooms and some prisons have a Visitors' Centre with play and baby changing facilities where families can prepare for the visit and obtain support and useful information.

Under the Assisted Prison Visits scheme, families on low income and receiving benefits can now claim the cost of two visits a month to UK prisons. Anyone escorting a child on a visit is eligible to claim under the scheme. **Chapter 5: The carer** contains more information on practical support for prisoners' families.

**Building Links with the  
Education Sector**

Despite the number of children affected by imprisonment and the importance of education and school life in their development, no formal links exist between work with prisoners' families and the education sector. Individual teachers, heads and schools usually work with prisoners' children – whether knowingly or not – in isolation and without support themselves. They have a wealth of experience but, until now, nowhere to bring it together and share it with others.

This handbook is a move towards exchanging information, gathering together practical advice and building links between schools and organisations supporting prisoners and prisoners' families.



## 2

### The criminal justice system



Gideon Forbes,  
aged 8



## 2 The criminal justice system

*"When the police came, I thought I was never going to see her again"*

PRISONER'S CHILD

### Stress and Uncertainty

For a child, the arrest of a parent means a central figure in their lives has suddenly been taken away and locked up without access. An arrest witnessed can be a very disturbing experience and many children think that they are never going to see the parent again.

The involvement of a family member in any stage of the criminal justice process can be upsetting for children. It is a complicated and often lengthy experience, characterised by uncertainty. This makes it very stressful, and the quality of family life and relationships can be adversely affected.

Those going through the process often hope for the best possible result – an acquittal or a non-custodial sentence – even when the signs are that this is unlikely. Other family members and particularly children may not be told what is happening until it becomes essential, if at all.

For many children – unless they were present at the arrest – the first they hear of the situation is that their parent has been sent to prison. Some are not even told that. The carer may seek to protect them by saying that the absent family member is away working, in hospital or on holiday.

### The Criminal Justice Process

#### Custody

If bail is denied, a person arrested will be held in custody on remand throughout the process until either conviction or release by a court of law. Subsequent bail applications can be made in certain circumstances. Time spent in custody before conviction counts towards any prison sentence imposed if the defendant is convicted. See chart on page 17: *The Criminal Justice Process*.

#### Sentencing

Once a person has been convicted of a crime, a range of sentences are available to the sentencing court. These include:

- *Absolute or conditional discharge*. An absolute discharge results in no further action, although the conviction is



recorded on the defendant's criminal record. A conditional discharge means that no further action is taken as long as the defendant does not re-offend within a set period of time.

- *Fines.* This is the most commonly used sentence for criminal offences. People on low incomes can usually arrange to pay fines off in instalments. Failure to pay can result in imprisonment for default.
- *Compensation Orders.* The court orders the offender to pay compensation to the victim of the offence.
- *Community sentences which include:* Probation orders – the offender has to report regularly to a probation officer and may have to undergo treatment for any drink or drug problems, attend group work designed to tackle offending behaviour or live in a hostel for part of the order. Probation orders last between six months and three years.

Community Service Order – the offender has to undertake a certain period of unpaid work for the benefit of the community. Orders are made for between 40 and 240 hours.

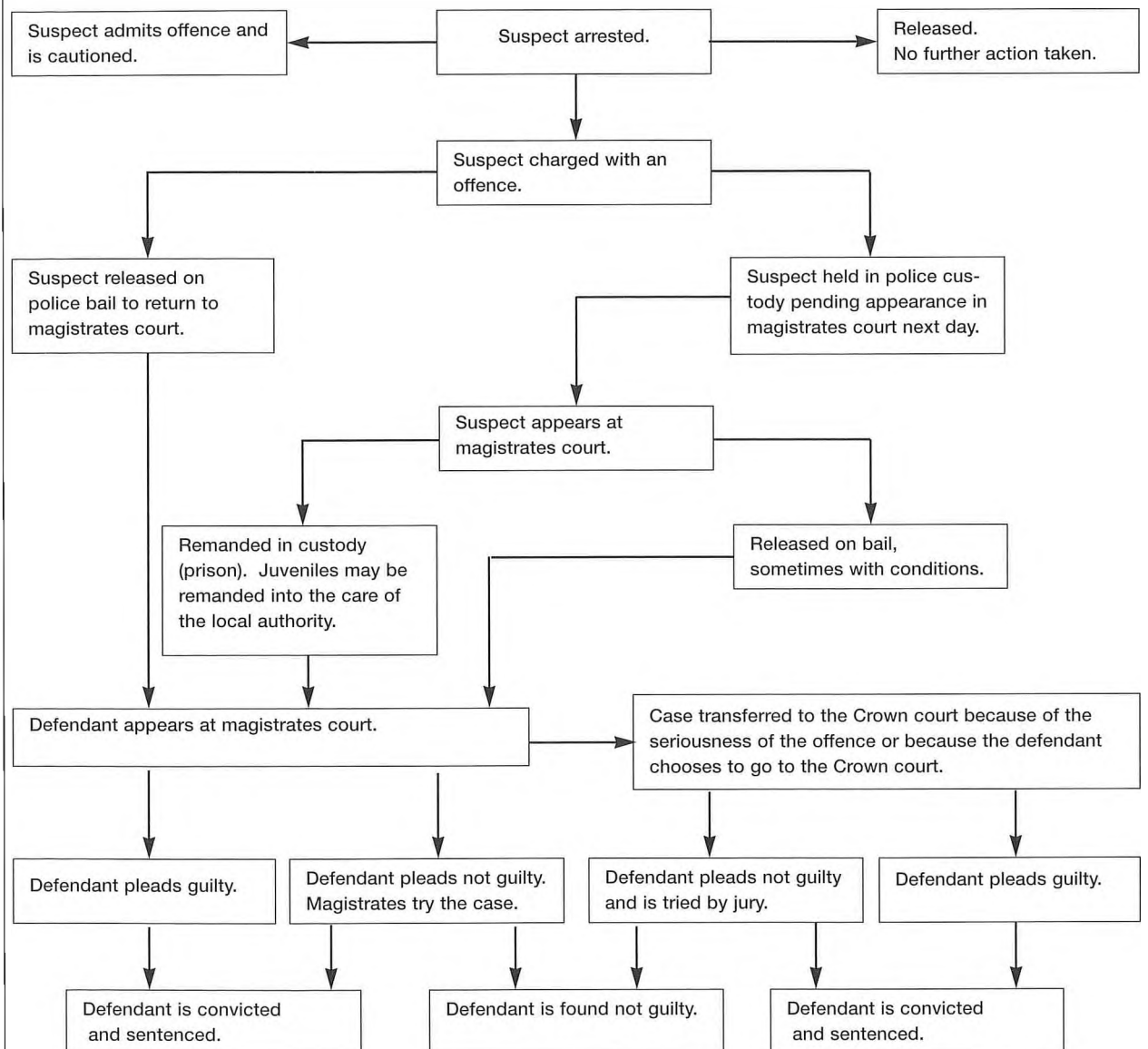
Combination Orders combine probation and community service orders; offenders can be sentenced to between one and three years' probation combined with 40–100 hours of community service and any other requirements the court deems suitable.

Curfew Orders, often linked to the electronic monitoring of offenders' whereabouts, are being used to control the movement of offenders without imprisoning them. The offender is required to be at home between certain hours and, if they leave the house, an alarm is triggered via the telephone system by an electronic bracelet fastened to the wrist or ankle.

- *Imprisonment.* The length of the sentence is determined by the nature and circumstances of the offence, and the age and any previous criminal record of the offender.

The above orders are currently being reviewed under the Crime and Disorder Bill 1998.

### THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS



## **The Prison System**

There are about 140 prisons in England and Wales catering for different groups within the prison population. See chart on page 19: **Prison Statistics England and Wales 1996**.

### **Young Men (aged 15–21)**

Male prisoners aged 21 and under are held in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). There are several particularly large YOIs with very wide catchment areas which means that young men are often held far from home.

### **Young and Adult Women**

Female prisoners can be held in women's prisons or in separate wings of prisons also occupied by men. As there are relatively few prison facilities for women compared to men, women prisoners are often held far from home.

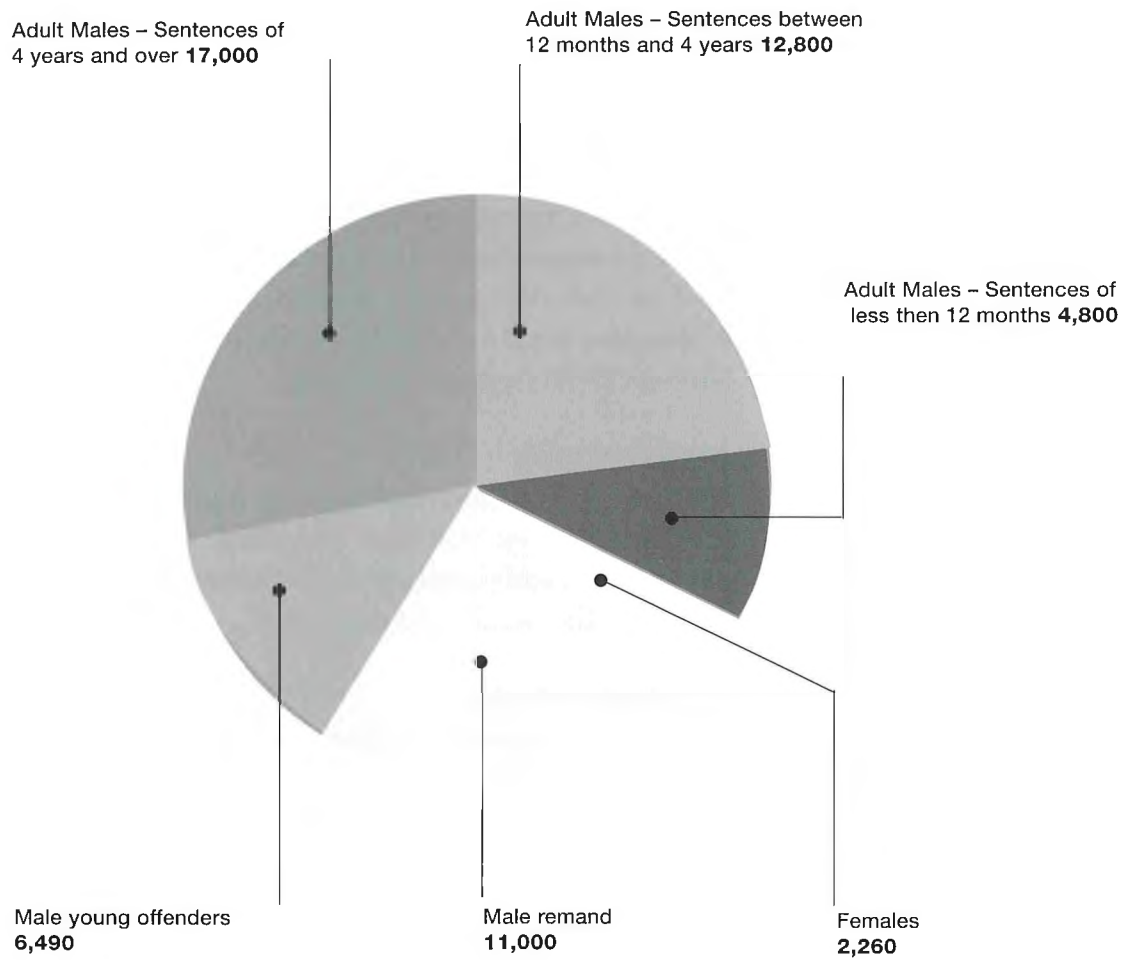
### **Adult Men**

Adult men, mostly under 30 years old, make up the majority of the prison population. Unconvicted and newly-convicted and sentenced men are held in local prisons. These tend to be old Victorian jails often located in city centres, although a handful of new prisons have been built in more rural locations during recent years as the prison population has rapidly increased.

Once sentenced, the local prison will allocate the prisoner to another prison (unless there are only days remaining to serve) according to the stage of sentence, offence and the likelihood of the prisoner causing difficulties or trying to escape.

## PRISON STATISTICS ENGLAND AND WALES 1996

Main components of the prison population 1996  
Average during 1996



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### **Visiting Prison**

#### **Remand**

While on remand awaiting trial, prisoners are more likely to be held near to their homes. Unconvicted remand prisoners are entitled to visits at least three times per week; this often places great pressure on their families. Prison visits take place in a visits room which has a limited capacity. Many prisons require visitors to book their visit in advance, and there is always greatest pressure on the facilities at weekends. Inevitably, some children are kept off school to visit on weekdays.

#### **Conviction**

Once a prisoner has been convicted, they are only entitled to two visits per month, although additional visits can often be earned through good behaviour. At this point, prisoners are often moved to prisons further away from their local area. Many prisons offer longer visits or even more frequent visits to those able to visit on a week day, and parents have to balance the need for visiting the imprisoned family member with the child's educational needs.

#### **Children Visiting**

Most women's prisons now provide improved opportunities for contact between mother and child. A limited number of prisons offer additional visits for children to see their parents on top of the usual visits allowance.

#### **The Visitors' Centre**

When a child arrives at a prison to visit, they may go to a Visitors' Centre first. These Centres exist at about half of all prisons in England and Wales. There is usually a play area in the Visitors' Centre, and refreshments and information about the prison; there are also often staff able to answer questions and provide emotional support to the adults and children visiting.

#### **Personal Possessions**

Most prisons no longer allow visitors to take any personal possessions with them when they go into the prison. This generally includes children's drawings, although these can usually be sent in by post. However, collages and models made by children will almost certainly not be allowed in, even if posted.

As a result of the rules on personal possessions, children visiting most prisons will not be allowed to take a favourite toy or even a comfort blanket in with them.

### **Searches**

Children are always searched at local and other secure prisons. This usually involves passing through an electronic portal which detects metal; shoes may have to be removed and scanned like luggage at an airport, and an officer will then conduct a 'rub down' search.

Rub down searches are always carried out by a female officer if the child is under 11 years old, and must be carried out by an officer of the same gender as the child if they are 11 years old or over. The officer passes their hands over the child's body outside the clothing, looking for anything unusual. The child may be asked to open their mouth and lift their tongue. A hand-held metal detector is also used at the most secure prisons.

Unfortunately, there have been instances of adults smuggling drugs into prisons in children's clothing. This means that children are also increasingly likely to have to pass a drug dog trained to sit in front of anyone on whom they can detect drugs. Some children find this frightening.

### **The Visits Room**

Once inside the visits room, the visit takes place at a table or counter. Visitors and prisoners are usually allowed to embrace, but high-security prisoners and those suspected of using drugs sometimes have 'closed visits' which take place with a glass screen between visitors and prisoner. This is particularly difficult for children.

Prisoners at most prisons are not allowed to stand up and walk about during the visit. They are unlikely to be able to play with the child during the visit, except with a game which can take place at the table. Most visits rooms have refreshment counters where drinks, chocolate, etc. can be bought. Some have staffed play areas and this provides the adults with some opportunity to talk to each other while the child plays.

Visits usually last at least 30 minutes and in some prisons up to two hours. This is a long time to sit across a table from

someone having a conversation and can be difficult for all involved – the visiting child, the carer and the prisoner.

### **Release**

Losing regular contact with a parent or sibling when he or she goes to prison can be traumatic for a child. The return of the imprisoned family member on release on temporary licence (a short visit home), or at the end of the sentence, can be equally difficult.

During their absence, families learn to cope, and roles and relationships are reordered to cope with the loss. The returning family member often strives to reassert themselves and this can involve new 'rules' about conduct for children, and sometimes harsh disciplinary penalties. There is often little preparation for the release or support for the family involved.

For some prisoners' families, the removal of the individual to prison is welcomed. For them, release is likely to be a particularly difficult time.

All prisoners released from sentences of 12 months or more are placed under the supervision of a probation officer for at least a short time after release. Any major concerns about the readjustment process after release may be referred to the local probation office by the school.

### **The Probation Service**

The Probation Service is involved with all adult prisoners serving 12 months or more and with all young prisoners aged 21 and below.

Good practice includes maintaining contact with these prisoners during sentence and contributing to discussions and decisions about them. There is also supervision on release and, for those serving four years or more, contribution to the decision about when they will be released. The period of supervision varies.

Good practice also includes contact with prisoners' families but this is often not possible due to funding cuts and changing priorities. However, there remains a need to visit the discharge addresses – that is, the address where the prisoner will be living on release, and at those times families

will also have the chance to talk to the probation officer. Most probation offices offer a daily advice service for all released prisoners and prisoners' families. Other people supporting members of prisoners' families can also make use of the service.

Due to confidentiality issues, it is not always possible for the Probation Service to give information about the prisoner – even to close family members. However, probation staff are able to make enquiries and support families in contacting others, for example, the DSS, and support networks such as the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS) and local organisations.

Where there are particular issues relating to public protection, victim charter requirements or child protection, a probation officer may be intensively involved in decisions about a prisoner that involve contact with their families.

Services offered by the Probation Service vary from area to area as priorities and resources differ.

### **A Basic Understanding**

The criminal justice system is complex, with legislation, policy and practices changing over time and regimes varying from prison to prison. Although teachers and schools do not need an in-depth knowledge of the current system and policies, most have found that a basic understanding is helpful in contact with the children of prisoners and their families.

An awareness of what happens after arrest or knowledge of prison visiting procedures can facilitate positive communication and effective support in many different ways. It may enable the teacher to give an appropriate response in class or to provide an opening for an anxious child or carer to discuss their concerns in private. It may simply enable the teacher to understand a little of what the child is experiencing and his or her attitudes and decisions accordingly.







3

The child

3



Alysa Hulbert,  
aged 6



### 3 The child

*"When a child's parent goes to prison, that child's life is turned around."*

CHILD OF A PRISONER

#### Losing a Parent or Carer

The imprisonment of a parent, carer or someone significant is likely to bring major practical and emotional upheaval to a child's life. Major changes may include:

- moving house;
- financial hardship;
- increased stress and tension in the home;
- taking on more responsibility for family affairs, including care of other children;
- loss of contact with other family members and friends.

The consensus among agencies working in the field is that when a parent goes to prison, the child is also punished.

#### Losing the Father

When a father goes to prison, any partner left behind is suddenly shouldered with all financial and other responsibility for the household. This can be especially difficult in some cultures and homes where the man is the one who usually communicates with the outside world.

The imprisonment of a male partner can also leave remaining family members vulnerable to threats and other pressures related to imprisonment.

#### Losing the Mother or Primary Carer

Imprisonment of a mother or a single parent usually brings greater upheaval in the family than custody of the father. The loss of a mother through imprisonment can be particularly traumatic as, often, she is the child's primary carer and the person who keeps the family unit together.

In this situation, the child will experience one of the following major changes:

● the father, partner or eldest sibling becomes the



**Not Telling and Not  
Being Told**

**The Child**

Many children are not told that their mother or father has been sent to prison. Those who have been told are reluctant to talk about the imprisonment of a carer or family member even inside their own families. They may be ashamed or have been told not to talk about it to anyone by the remaining parent or new carer. They may have tried to talk about it but met with adverse responses and so learnt not to say anything more. Or they may simply wish to protect themselves or other family members by keeping it secret or pretending that nothing has happened.

*"I couldn't tell my mum how I felt about it because she already had enough to cope with. I just kept it to myself."*

CHILD OF A PRISONER

**The Carer**

According to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), prisoners' relatives in Northern Ireland identified 'what to tell the children' as the most important issue they had to deal with when a family member went to prison.

NIACRO point out that there is no way to prevent children from eventually finding out that their mother or father is in prison. Their advice is that if the carer does not tell them, someone else at some stage will.

A significant number of children, particularly those who are younger, are not told the truth about the absent parent. When criminologist and former prison Senior Probation Officer Roger Shaw carried out interviews with mothers for his book *Children of Imprisoned Fathers*, he found that about one-third said they had told their children the truth, a third said they had given the children an excuse to explain the father's absence, and the remainder had told their children nothing. Occasionally children in the same family had been told different things – the eldest the truth, a younger one a lie and the youngest nothing at all.

In many cases the carer may intend to tell the child but does not know how to broach such a difficult subject and so keeps putting it off. As time passes, it may become more difficult to raise the issue and the deception continues.

Common explanations given to children include:

- He's away working on an oilrig or joined the army.
- She's in hospital or on holiday.
- They've gone home to visit the (extended) family (overseas).
- He's at college.

However, children are often more aware of what is happening than adults realise and quickly sense when something is wrong or they are not being told the truth. They may pick up information from overheard conversations and passing comments. In such a situation, they may feel unable to ask questions and imagine things which worry them more than the truth would.

Older children need more information and will often try to find out what they want to know whether they are told or not. Very young children are not capable of understanding what has happened in the same way, as many of the events and concepts involved lie outside their experience. This does not mean, however, that they do not need to be told what is happening in some way. Adults often believe that very young children do not need to know but the children can sense tension and are aware of changes. Lack of information, no matter how basic, generally causes anxiety and fear.

Agencies working with children and families affected by imprisonment recommend that adults tell children what is happening at the earliest possible stage. However, whether to tell a child, when, and how, is the concern of the family.

One of the dilemmas that parents face about telling children is that they have to make a quick decision, especially if the arrest is sudden or the person is remanded into custody immediately. If a parent tells the school first, there may be a role for staff to help the parent think through the consequences of telling or not telling the child. It may be helpful for the carer to talk to other people with similar experiences. See **Chapter 5: The carer** for more information.

Everyone copes in a different way with the effects of imprisonment. Some children may want to know more; others will say nothing. A parent may be relieved to know that the child knows – the parent who tells their child at

least has some control over the type of information that the child receives, as opposed to the child who might learn inaccurate information from other sources.

**SHAUN**

Shaun is seven. His daddy went off in a space rocket. "That one over there," he says looking through the window to a stone tower in the distance, a local landmark he can see from where he lives. He doesn't know when his dad's coming back. He keeps asking his mum.

**Changes in Circumstances**

Some research shows that children of prisoners, who may already be disadvantaged, experience two common difficulties when a parent is imprisoned: poverty, followed closely by stigma. In the case of children from black and ethnic communities, both poverty and stigma are worse.

**Poverty**

Many prisoners already come from low income groups. The imprisonment of a parent is likely to create further deprivation for family members as a result of the following factors:

- loss of income including wages and benefits;
- costs of maintaining contact with the prisoner, including travel expenses for visits and telephone calls;
- costs of purchases to fulfil the prisoner's needs and expectations.

For a minority, the family income may improve because imprisonment may mean, for instance, that less money is spent on drugs or drink.

**Stigma**

Traditional prejudices, mass media stereotypes and lack of information contribute to ideas and images about prisoners and their families that are inaccurate and lead to discrimination. In the case of a trial with media coverage or an offence involving sex crimes, for instance, prejudices and fears within the local community may be strong. As a result, many prisoners' families experience harassment ranging from verbal abuse to boycotting and, in extreme cases, being driven out of the area.



*"People give you a body swerve. They treat you like you are guilty too. Some of them don't know how to respond so they avoid you instead."*

PARTNER OF A PRISONER

### The Emotional Impact

Children are likely to experience a whole range of emotions from pain, shame and guilt to anger, hostility and relief. Some will try to block out their feelings and experience numbness as a result. Their reactions may be unpredictable and they may be confused and even frightened by their own emotions. Many will feel that they are in some way to blame for what has happened or be frustrated by their inability to protect the parent or improve the situation.

Prisoners' children are often afraid that the following may happen:

- they will lose the other parent;
- they will be bullied;
- other people will find out.

These fears are often experienced in a situation where the child is isolated from their community due to poverty and stigma. They may have been told not to tell anyone or may themselves not want anyone outside the family to know.

Children often internalise these feelings with a resultant loss of self-esteem and associated anxiety and depression. Manifestations can include:

- bed-wetting;
- nightmares;
- temper tantrums;
- aggressive behaviour;
- withdrawal;
- refusing to go to school.

It is clear that children need reassurance and support as well as information.

*"So often in the case of a prisoner's child, there is a sudden change at school. It might be homework or general performance or it might be stopping taking part in extra-curricula activities or avoiding sport. For some kids, the reason might be a paper round, but for others there may be something really major going on."*

PASTORAL HEAD, SECONDARY SCHOOL

# HOW PRISONERS' CHILDREN CAN LOSE SELF-ESTEEM



MICA MULLIN

### The Best Interests of the Child

The UK has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which commits it to implementing a comprehensive set of rights for all children, including, therefore, the children of prisoners. The Convention establishes that all actions affecting children should be in the best interests of the child (Article 3), and the principle that children should be listened to on any matter which concerns them and their views given due consideration (Article 12).

Children's confidence and self-esteem are strengthened when they are given the chance to have a say in matters which affect them. Even young children can take responsibility and make decisions. This does not mean that children are always right but it does mean that actions and decisions concerning children are more likely to be effective when a child has been involved in some way. This could involve asking them about their preferences and working out with them which options are realistic in a given set of circumstances.

In the case of the child of a prisoner, they are likely to feel isolated and be suffering from low self-esteem. Enabling them to express their views and contribute to decision-making can help them feel included and supported as well as contributing to their development at a difficult time.

Some of the articles of the Convention relating to specific issues are particularly relevant to prisoners' children in the UK. Article 19, for instance, establishes a child's right to protection from abuse, violence and neglect and the obligation of States Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures needed for such protection. Articles 28 and 29 set out the right to education for all children and the aims of education, including the development of children's personalities, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

## What Children Say They Want at School

Children of prisoners ranging in age from 4 to 14 years old were interviewed at two Prison Visitors' Centres (one men's prison, one women's prison) for this publication. Some of their parents were in prison on remand while others were serving sentences of between two to seven years.

When asked what the worst thing would be that their school could do, the issues of confidentiality and teasing were raised. Children were concerned about "teachers not being confidential", that they might "allow people to spread gossip" and discuss their situation in class and assembly, and "be indiscreet and do nothing about teasing". Many children had experienced teasing and bullying in school: "I can't break friends with anyone who knows because they'll spread gossip about me." One child also expressed concern about prejudice from the teacher and that they might "give me bad marks".

Many children, when asked about the best approach that their school could offer, expressed their wish for confidentiality: children wanted teachers to "talk to me confidentially", "just forget about it. Treat me nice", and "not tell anybody". By contrast, one child wanted their story to be explained to others "to combat prejudice". Many children stressed the importance of support. They wanted teachers to "just be there for you. Take the situation into account", and for teachers to "take time out for you". "They should give extra help with work and have a private chat with you."

The opinions expressed above clearly show a wide range of different experiences. It is therefore important that the individual needs and wishes of a child are taken into consideration when planning a suitable response, and that the teacher discusses appropriate strategies with the pupil that the child feels most comfortable with.



# 4

The classroom teacher





Ferghal McTaggart,  
aged 12

## 4 The classroom teacher

*"Just being aware is the most important thing you can do."*

TEACHER

### Knowing

For a teacher, 'knowing' that a child is affected by imprisonment may be a question of educated guesswork or second-hand information from other staff, pupils or parents.

In some situations, everyone in a class or a school staff room knows that a child's parent is in prison through gossip or because the trial has received media coverage. In other cases, a pupil may volunteer information directly or disclose it indirectly through school work or passing comments. In many cases, a classroom teacher may not know that they are working with the child of a prisoner at the time.

'Knowing' does not necessarily mean that the teacher needs to let the child know that he or she knows. A pupil may be unwilling to discuss the issue with an authority figure or, in the case of those told not to tell anyone, feel unable to talk.

*"In both cases where I knew children in my class had a parent in prison, neither child knew I knew and I never disclosed my knowledge to them. But having that information was vital to me because it did affect to a certain extent how I approached them and their respective behaviour problems."*

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Being Aware of the Situation

Teachers report that they came to know a child's parent was in prison through one or several of the following ways:

- sudden absence of parent;
- remarks by child and other parents;
- information from support staff such as cleaners and lunchtime organisers;
- deterioration of behaviour;
- unexplained absences;
- information from the carer;
- information from the child.



### **Confiding**

For a younger child, the teacher is often the most important person in their life outside home, and children will often confide sensitive personal details about their family life to the class teacher.

Older pupils have a very different relationship with school and the many staff who teach them. They are less likely to confide in a teacher spontaneously. If they wish to raise sensitive issues with a member of staff, they are more likely to know and choose who they want to talk to. This person may not be their class teacher.

Alternatively, a class teacher can spend time and effort referring a student to another staff member or an available service such as counselling, only for the student to fail to attend and return to talk to them.

If a pupil raises issues concerning the imprisonment of a parent during educational activities, the following responses are helpful:

- allow the pupil to express him or herself;
- listen carefully;
- acknowledge what is said;
- provide reassurance;
- agree an action with the child.

Deciding whether to encourage the child to talk further in the presence of other pupils in the classroom, or whether to offer support in a different context, is a matter of individual judgement according primarily to the needs of the child; the response of other pupils, the school environment and the teacher's own experience and preferences should also be taken into consideration.

As with carers, it is important for teachers to make themselves available and give children opportunities to talk alone with them or out of hearing of other pupils and staff.



**Who to Inform – ‘Need to Know’**

If a child does confide in a teacher, it is important to acknowledge their situation and be clear with them about who needs to be told in order to support them. The teacher should try to negotiate and agree with the child what steps need to be taken.

The following factors will effect any decision about whether and how to approach the child and who else needs to be informed:

- school policy;
- the child’s individual needs;
- the existing relationship between teacher and child;
- the carer’s wishes (where appropriate).

Guidelines on who to inform should be laid out in existing school policies. Only those who need to know should be told and all information received and passed on about the child should be treated as confidential. This is essential in order to avoid gossip and rumour spreading around the school as well as to ensure that the child and family are not exposed in the wider community.

For more information on confidentiality see **Chapter 6: The school.**

## Children's Experiences

The following information is drawn from interviews conducted with children aged 4–14 years visiting their parents in prison:

- Prisoners' children stress that confidentiality is their main concern. "They (teachers) shouldn't say anything if you don't want them to." When asked what the best thing that the school could do, one answer was "keep mum".
- The majority said that they preferred no one to know about their situation no matter how unrealistic this might be. "(Teachers should) mind their own business, pretend it didn't happen."
- About half the children that we spoke to said that people at school knew that they had a parent in prison.
- Most thought that their teachers were indifferent to their situation. "I was told to keep it to myself when I tried to talk to a teacher and then they went and told the other teachers about it." "I've had practical difficulties with teachers who haven't taken my situation in to account."
- The majority had experienced some kind of bullying. "At my old school I got teased. I was going to ask the head to explain things to the rest of the school but then I just changed schools." "It's only really brought up during arguments. I don't get teased much apart from that."
- Some wanted a teacher to provide help with school work and emotional support. "The teacher could offer some time and a chat instead of punishment." "Don't go on about it. Offer confidential chats and support." "Pay attention to your school work and situation." "Confidentially talk to you. Offer support."

Other studies show that only about half of children affected by imprisonment tell a teacher but they almost all assumed that the teachers knew anyway.

### Recognising the Signs

#### Changes in Behaviour and Performance

Children of prisoners may exhibit changes in behaviour and performance in the classroom similar to children experiencing divorce or bereavement.

These changes may begin or become more apparent in relation to any one of a number of stages relating to imprisonment such as:

- the arrest of a parent, carer or sibling;
- a visit to a parent in prison;
- a home visit by a parent from prison;
- the release of a parent from prison;
- finding out about the imprisonment of a parent.

In particular, teachers report that changes in behaviour and performance become more acute around the time of a prison visit.

Teachers report observing the following changes in pupils with a parent in prison:

- moodiness;
- aggressiveness;
- chattering;
- bullying;
- difficulty with peers;
- appearing upset;
- appearing withdrawn;
- showing a lack of concentration;
- showing a lack of interest in work;
- antagonism towards authority figures.

It is estimated, however, that for some children, the removal of a parent to prison may be beneficial and both behaviour and performance in the classroom may improve.

#### Unexplained Absences

When a pupil who has previously shown no or few attendance problems suddenly begins to miss school, or when absences show a regular pattern, it is possible that one of the following situations applies:

- the child is at court or visiting the prisoner;
- the child is supporting the remaining parent/siblings;

- the child is having difficulty coping with school or is being teased or bullied about having a parent in prison.

In some cases, particularly with younger children, strange explanations for a parent's sudden disappearance from the child's life may alert teachers to a prisoner's family.

### **Good Practice**

#### **Basic Principles**

It is clear from the views and experiences of the teachers who responded to questionnaires and took part in the focus groups for this publication that there is no one right response or approach to a child affected by imprisonment.

However, many put forward the following as useful guiding principles:

- See the child as an individual with individual needs.
- Be non-judgemental – the child has not committed a crime.
- Avoid treating the child as a victim or being over-protective.
- Acknowledge the child's own preferences.
- Don't ask about the crime.

#### **Classroom Management**

For any child experiencing difficulty in his or her home life, a teacher in the classroom can offer a stable, secure and consistent environment.

A classroom that operates positive behavioural expectations within a framework of clearly-defined rules, consequences and rewards will enable all pupils to feel valued.

For many children of prisoners, maintaining the usual classroom routines is helpful, although the teacher should also be sensitive to any particular events which are likely to have a significant effect on the pupil's ability to cope. It is important not only for the child concerned but for other pupils that the teacher is seen to be fair.

Teachers will need to make individual assessments as to whether educational tasks and classroom organisation need to be adapted to cater for the specific needs of such a pupil.



*"If the kid is blowing up every five minutes, you need to get them away from the classroom – I let one pupil know that I knew that they were unhappy and something had happened at home but that they couldn't act out in the classroom because it upset the teacher and their classmates. So I suggested to them and their teacher that, rather than getting sent out of class, they asked if they could come and see me when they felt particularly bad."*

PASTORAL HEAD, SECONDARY SCHOOL

### **Disruptive Pupils**

In the case of a disruptive pupil, imposing discipline without offering some kind of support may simply result in a further deterioration in behaviour. This does not mean making too many allowances, but trying to discover the root causes, being sensitive to the situation and seeking practical solutions.

Many teachers report that it is helpful to enlist the skills and experience of other staff members in the process of supporting the child. This has the advantage of sharing the problem with other appropriate staff within the bounds of confidentiality so that the teacher can also gain support and is not isolated.

A child who has seen a parent arrested by the police or sent to prison may have difficulty with authority figures, and may associate school and teachers with the 'establishment' that has deprived them of a parent. In situations where a student is acting out against teachers as authority figures, it can be useful to draw on external and, in some cases, unofficial resources such as mentors and self-help groups.

*"How do you juggle 'understanding' the situation with 'letting the child off'?"*

TEACHER, MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Chapter 6: The school** contains suggestions about using resources outside the classroom and, in some cases, beyond the school.

### **Teasing and Bullying**

Many children of prisoners report being teased or bullied at school. Abuse can range from name-calling and jokes to physical violence; this needs to be dealt with through drawing on anti-bullying work within the school. Overhearing teasing or observing bullying can provide an

opportunity for the teacher to approach and offer support to the pupil concerned and to address the issue with the child who is bullying.

### **Attendance Issues**

Missing school often leads to other problems such as poor performance and isolation from peers. It is important to help ensure that prisoners' children do not lose out twice – once at home through the loss of a parent and again at school through the loss of education. Authorised absences should only be granted when essential and 'extra' work can be provided for those occasions. Where possible, offer and encourage emotional support, including thorough discussion with the carer.

*"One student suddenly stopped doing homework and started missing school – getting told off about it wasn't going to do much because her mother had just gone to prison and she was saddled with baby-sitting the younger ones. I informed all her teachers that there was a serious difficulty at home and asked them to report to me whenever there was a problem. Then I asked the student who they would like to talk to about getting support for their school work and, because of the truancy problem, I informed the local education social worker who visited the home."*

PASTORAL HEAD, SECONDARY SCHOOL

### **Children in the Same Family**

All children – including those from the same family – have different needs. There may be a number of children from a family affected by imprisonment who attend the same school. In the case of twins, or stepbrothers and sisters, they may even be in the same class. In such circumstances, it is important not to assume that children's needs are the same; an individual approach needs to be taken for each child.

The presence of siblings may also mean that an older child has increased care responsibilities at home. This may affect their punctuality, attendance and the ability to deliver homework on time.

*"I remember my brother running up the steps shouting, 'Hey! Great! Magic! My dad's back. My dad's back!' I walked into the front room with all the other kids round him and he said 'Hi ya son.' I wasn't particularly pleased to see him."*

CHILD OF A RELEASED PRISONER

### Prison Visits

Teachers report that changes in the behaviour and performance of children of prisoners at school frequently become more acute at the time of the prison visit.

If you are aware of a child visiting a parent in prison, you can give support through facilitating a piece of work in helping them understand and explore the event and any feelings.

While activities which help the pupil prepare for a visit, and debrief afterwards are useful, a teacher may also be able assist communication and help create a focus for contact during a visit through supporting a piece of school work or report that the child can show the parent. It may be helpful to consult with the carer where appropriate to find out what is permitted to be taken or posted in to the prison. Any item using collage materials, for example, is generally forbidden.

*"We always knew when he was visiting his dad in prison because of his difficult behaviour in class. For us his visit lasted the whole week."*

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Useful Approaches and Practical Tools

The following suggestions come from teachers. They are not specifically designed for use with children of prisoners but are either approaches which create a supportive and caring classroom environment or are potential tools which may be adapted to the situation.

#### Younger Children

Activities such as circle time and changing books at the book corner can provide opportunities for a teacher to hear about the child's situation and provide support and reassurance as appropriate.

A wide variety of stories and poems are available which are geared to helping children label emotions and transform frightening or confusing feelings, and which may help support a child who is experiencing difficulties.

Providing children with creative opportunities for self-expression such as painting and role play helps encourage a climate of affirmation and a self-worth in which children are helped to accept their emotions and express them in a constructive way.

A teacher of a six-year-old was presented with a picture drawn by the child showing the face of a person behind bars. At the time, the teacher simply acknowledged the picture and took the matter no further. Upon reflection, she felt that she could have done more. The child was clearly trying to communicate something and wanted to share it with her teacher. She thought she could have asked the child to tell her more about the picture, to explain it to her and follow on from where that led. It might be that all the child wanted was for the teacher to show that she understood the situation but, without talking further to the child, it was impossible to know.

### **Young People**

There are generally greater time and resource pressures at secondary school than at primary and early years' level, as well as less regular contact between staff and pupils, and fewer educational opportunities for work on relevant issues.

At the same time, young people have to cope with intense physiological and psychological changes during their school years, and authority issues with teenagers are more common. Teenagers may look to their own peer group to share information and gain support.

### **Teaching Opportunities**

Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE) or Religious Education classes provide a forum for raising sensitive issues such as drugs and crime. Debating crime as part of citizenship education can be used to introduce the subject of prison and prisoners' families.

Bringing in an outside speaker to make a presentation during class or at assembly can usefully raise the issue in a way that is dissociated from authority figures at school. A contact number of an external organisation or a contact person or support scheme within the school can be publicised during such occasions.

Art, drama and extra-curricula activities may also provide opportunities for self-expression and developing relevant work.

Computerised resources and homework can be used to encourage and support students to work on issues related to



prisoners' families in privacy – unless the pupil chooses to share his or her work with other pupils. Video presentations may be useful for facilitating group work aiming to raise awareness among the whole class.

### **Support Schemes**

Schemes involving peers, older pupils or adults outside the school as well as teachers can be used to help support children of prisoners. These might include:

- listener schemes;
- letter box schemes where students can post anonymous letters asking for advice (often used in sex education);
- role models and mentors;
- self-help groups.

**Chapter 6: The school** contains further information and examples of some of these schemes.

## Teachers' Experiences

"One boy was experiencing great loss and confusion because he had to live with an 'auntie' and his mum had gone away. He was, in effect, grieving and was volatile and tearful in turns. He needed lots of attention – more than we could provide. But kindness and patience made some difference."

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

"One six-year-old girl was quite hardened and desensitised to what had happened due to her mother's past history. She didn't want to be comforted and consoled – she wanted to get on with school life and immersed herself in tasks and actions when she felt particularly vulnerable."

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

"The pupil was extremely disturbed and very disruptive and I coped on a day-to-day basis with each incident, offering support to the child, peers and staff. It became increasingly clear that there would be no long-term improvement. All we were able to do was to offer constant and stable support – probably school was the only stable area of his life."

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

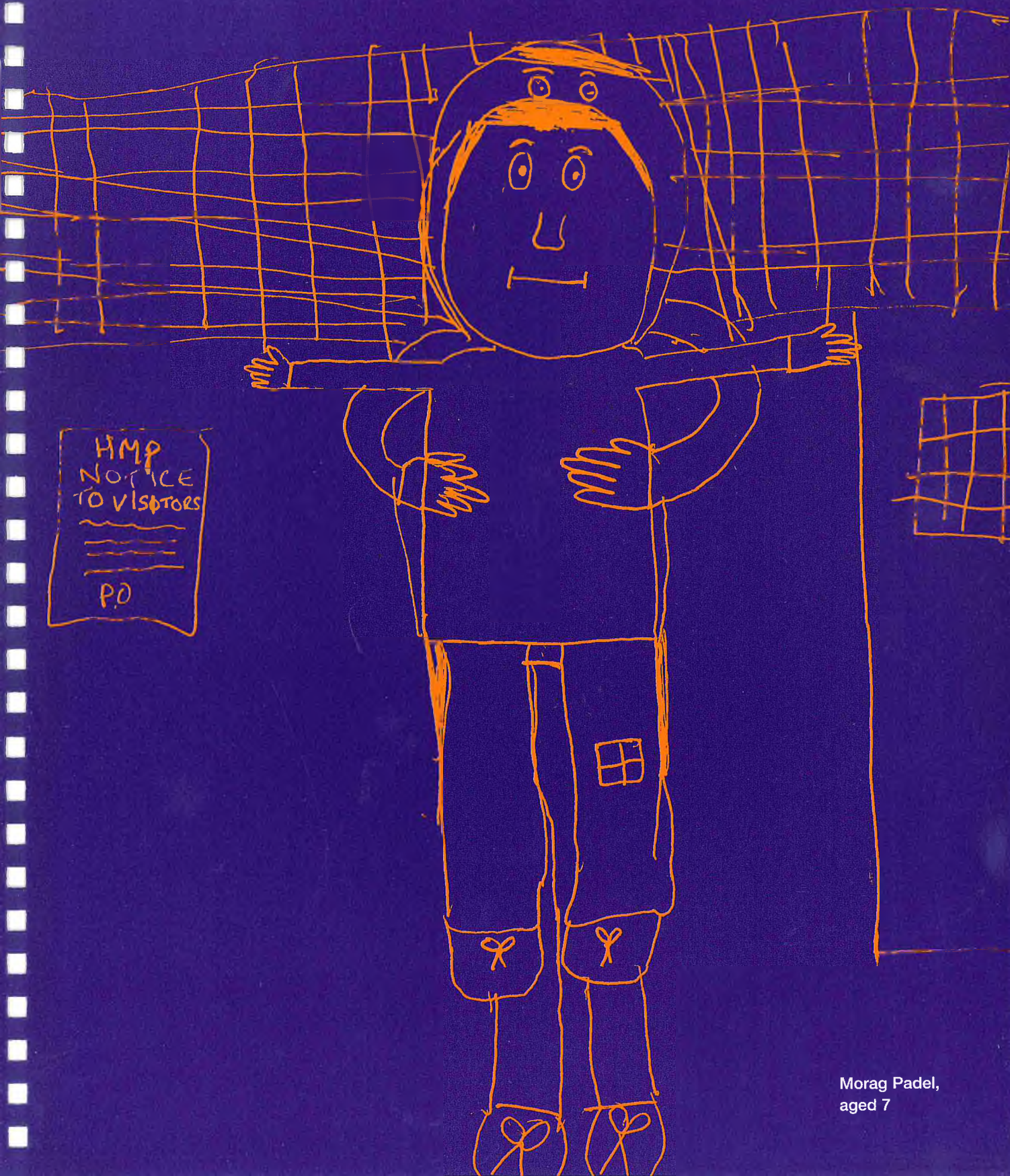
"One student started being loud and aggressive at school, especially to male staff. I asked his mum if anything had happened and the most terrible story came out about the son intervening in an attack by the father on the mother. He'd tried to kill her. The son cried a lot at home, she said, and slept in the same room as her because he was so traumatised. The dad wanted to see his son but the son didn't want any contact with him."

TEACHER, MIDDLE SCHOOL



## 5

## The carer



5



## 5 The carer

*"Parents are usually relieved when I've approached them and given them the chance to broach the subject – once the opening is there, they open up and want to discuss what's happening."*

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Coping with Imprisonment

When adults are sent to prison, the lives of their partners or the people who take on their responsibilities are profoundly affected. In a situation where children are involved, further pressures may be involved in dealing with their experiences and responses at a time when the carer may be least able to cope themselves.

Many carers succeed in making the situation for the children in their care as safe and secure as is possible in the circumstances. They manage their own feelings and the practical problems and demands that ensue from imprisonment, and they cope well with the needs of the children involved. They may find new support networks or they may manage by keeping the situation secret and telling only a few or none at all.

However, most carers are likely to experience at least some of the following difficulties:

- a sudden and/or steep drop in income;
- new financial demands such as travel expenses for prison visits, purchase of items for the prisoner;
- new responsibilities in the home;
- isolation and hostility from within the local community;
- a move of house to a different neighbourhood or new town.

These changes occur at a time when the carer may be experiencing some or all of the following emotions:

- grief due to the loss of a partner or loved one;
- anger at the prisoner and/or with the authorities or local community;
- anxiety for the prisoner, their own future and that of the child/children;
- frustration that they cannot do more to help the prisoner or child/children.



### New Carers

#### Relatives

Since the Children Act 1989, it is less likely that children will be taken into the care of the local authority and more likely that they will be placed with relatives, grandparent/s, uncle and aunt or older brother or sister. This arrangement is often a voluntary one with no reference to the courts. As a result of pressure on local authority budgets, it may also mean that boarding-out allowances that would have been paid to a foster parent are not offered.

#### Foster Parents

Arrest is sudden and even if a foster placement occurs some time later, the children involved may be unwilling, angry and resentful. In addition, an estimated 50 per cent of all foster placements break down. A child who is fostered as a result of a parent being sent to prison may therefore experience further instability in addition to the loss of a primary carer.

Foster parents may be more likely to inform the school of the circumstances of the children. This is because they may feel that there is less stigma attached to the imprisonment because the adult concerned is not a relative. Children who are fostered usually assume that the foster carers have told the school.

### Contact with the Carer

#### Younger Children

In a kindergarten or primary school, there are more opportunities for regular contact and interaction with the carer – from the school gates to the classroom. Many parents bring their children in to school in the early years and this offers the teacher a chance to build up a relationship of trust within which a child's behaviour or performance can be discussed.

**A PARENT**

A parent was told that her child tore up jigsaws in the classroom and threw them about. This disturbed and distressed the parent who realised that her child was acting in a problematic way but felt helpless to do anything about it. For one thing, the behaviour was occurring when she was not there. She did not know what she was supposed to do and felt that she was in some way being blamed.

The teacher then asked the parent whether something had happened at home that was different or had upset the child. By making a connection with the child's experience from the child's point of view, the parent began to identify an incident that seemed a million miles away from tearing up jigsaws. The child had witnessed the partner of the parent being violent and the subsequent intervention of the police.

**Older Children**

In the secondary school context, teachers have substantially less contact with both the individual child and their carer than is possible in the primary and early years. Activities such as parents' evenings and school plays provide an opportunity for communication with some parents. However, for the many parents who do not regularly participate in such occasions, contact is often by letter only.

**Confidentiality**

The overriding concern of carers is confidentiality. Some carers will approach a teacher they trust and initiate a discussion concerning a child affected by imprisonment. They may ask the teacher to 'look out' for the child or request permission for absence on a school day for a prison visit. However, many carers will not raise the subject unless given a suitable opportunity to do so.

It is vital that the teacher makes clear to the carer what will happen to the information exchanged in any conversation about the child from the outset. What needs to be said will depend on the policy of each school and who needs to know. The teacher is obliged to work within the child protection framework of the school and therefore cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality.

Some teachers have reported that most parents were relieved when given the opportunity to discuss the child's situation with a caring professional in a supportive and non-judgemental way.

Further information on confidentiality can be found in **Chapter 3: The child** and **Chapter 6: The school**.

*"I said that I thought I needed to tell the head teacher and possibly the Welfare Assistant but that if any serious issues arose, then others would have to be informed to make sure the child got the support she deserved."*

TEACHER, SECONDARY SCHOOL

*"One of my pupils had a grandad in prison. His mum had given evidence in court about the grandad abusing someone in the family. And she asked me to make sure that the child was to wait for her to arrive at the school to pick him up and not to go off with any other relative. She was very worried about the uncle who was on the grandad's 'side' but she didn't want the child to know there was a problem."*

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Communicating with the Carer

It is important to be aware of the stigma and discrimination that many prisoners' families experience when approaching a carer. This may mean that the carer has not talked to anyone else or has not told the child what has happened. Equally, a child may try to protect a parent by not telling them about problems experienced at school related to imprisonment such as bullying or poor performance.

Teachers report that by simply making themselves available and approachable, many carers confide in them. Once a carer understands that a teacher is concerned about the child, rather than criticising the child's behaviour or their parenting, it becomes much easier to raise issues and offer solutions such as setting extra work for the child to help them 'catch up' or for the carer to take the child with them on a prison visit.

*"His mum told me that his dad was in prison but that the son thought that he was in the army. This meant that I could help the child send letters and a card on Father's Day to the dad but was able to make sure collage wasn't used and there were no enclosures."*

TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

## A Checklist for Teachers Talking with Carers

### Useful questions for teachers to ask themselves before approaching a carer:

- How can I let the parent know I know without embarrassing him or her?
- Has the carer told the child or is he or she trying to be protective?
- Has the child told the parent of any related difficulties at school or is he or she trying to be protective?
- What practical support can the school offer?

### Useful questions to help open dialogue with the carer:

Questions that relate to actual events and make comparisons and contrasts are useful because they help assure the carer that the teacher is interested and concerned for the well-being of the child, but is not being judgemental.

- Has the child always been like that/always disliked something?
- When did it start?
- What was happening at the time? Was it a good time for the family or were there difficulties?
- What do other members of the family think?
- Have there been any changes in the child's routine/at home?
- Has the child had an accident/been frightened or upset by something?

### Useful questions to help support the child in school

It is not advisable to ask the carer about the nature of the crime committed. They may choose to volunteer this information, if appropriate, as a dialogue develops and trust is built, but may feel judged, or the subject of curiosity, if the teacher wants to know about an offence by an adult rather than the welfare of the child.

- Does the child know?
- Who else knows?
- How long is the sentence?
- Is the child in contact with the parent in prison?
- If so, how does the child maintain contact?
- If the child visits the prison, when and how often?
- What school materials can be taken into or posted to the prison?



### Practical Support

#### Financial Support

A school may be able to help through providing the following support:

- free school meals;
- clothes grants;
- subsidies for school trips.

#### State Benefits

The benefits system is complex and carers should be encouraged to seek advice on the latest situation and available benefits from a support group as well as their local Benefits Agency.

All social security benefits are affected when a person is in prison but families of prisoners can claim benefits for themselves under normal rules. Families not already receiving benefits may become eligible due to the change in their circumstances. Currently, benefits such as Income Support, Family Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit may all be applicable in the case of a carer on a low income.

Help may also be available under the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). Those who qualify get the travelling costs for two visits every four weeks. Anyone visiting a close relative (parent, son, daughter, brother, sister or partner), and who is in receipt of the following benefits, automatically qualifies:

- Income Support;
- Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance;
- Family Credit;
- Disability Working Allowance;
- a AG2/AG3 certificate for help with NHS charges.

Carers escorting children under 18 years old are also eligible. If a carer is not in favour of taking a child to a prison for a visit (it might be that relations have soured between them and the prisoner), then fares can be reimbursed for someone else to escort the child there.

Many people do not know of their entitlements under the scheme and may find information about it helpful. See the **Resources** section for where to find out more.

**Trusts**

In exceptional circumstances, some trusts may be able to provide financial assistance. The Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups or other local support groups can be contacted for further information.

**National Organisations and Local Support Groups**

There is a wide network of national and local voluntary organisations providing information, advice and support for families affected by imprisonment. Details can be found in the **Resources** section.





6

The school



Ferghal McTaggart,  
aged 12



## 6 The school

*"All the students concerned were very different and reacted in very different ways to the imprisonment of a parent. What they shared in common was the need for awareness and understanding of their family's situation."*

HEAD OF SCHOOL

### Awareness in Schools

The size of a school and its catchment area are two factors influencing the occurrence of children of prisoners and the numbers involved.

Although staff working in certain schools may be more aware of the needs of prisoners' children than in other environments, this cannot be assumed because most teaching staff have no experience of prisons or prisoners, and the difficulties facing children of prisoners. The issue is not covered in teacher training courses or existing in-service training materials (INSET).

### Staff Development

The following suggestions come from teachers in primary and secondary schools, including heads of year, pastoral heads and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs).

#### Benefits for All

Senior staff working with children of prisoners report that it is useful to emphasise to colleagues the benefits to the 'majority' when offering support to a 'minority'. This helps to ensure whole staff support which is vital if initiatives are to succeed. It may also be useful to locate work with prisoners' children in the wider context of work with other groups which are more familiar to many teachers, such as children who have experienced bereavement or divorce or those who have come from single parent families.

#### Staff Meeting

A useful starting point is to raise the issue of prisoners' children in a staff meeting and ask staff to describe their own experiences, and think through how they might identify pupils and provide support in this situation. Asking staff to think through what their own needs and fears would be if a family member were sent to prison also works well.

Teachers who took part in the focus groups organised as part of the production of this publication were themselves surprised at the amount of information and ideas that emerged from reviewing their own experiences. As a result of participating in the focus group, some teachers realised that they had worked with prisoners' children but were not aware of it at the time.

### **Information, Advice and Training**

Support through provision of information, advice and/or training support can be provided through a variety of approaches including:

- visiting speakers from local or national organisations and support groups, e.g. a senior teacher from a school experienced in dealing with such situations, a local Probation Officer, a representative from a family support group;
- participation of key staff members in external events and activities, for example, conferences and training;
- a video presentation followed by discussion;
- distribution of written information, including the development of school guidelines, materials from national organisations and local support groups.

For further information, please see the **Resources** section.

### **Key Contacts**

Time and resource demands on schools mean that, in many cases, not all staff will wish or be required to participate in such activities. Informed staff with key roles to play in working with children of prisoners and others with high motivation can serve as role models, 'cascading' good practice through the school.

### **Important Steps**

- Raise awareness of issues concerning prisoners' children and recognise that they may have specific needs which may be immediate or sudden.
- Build links with useful external agencies in your area.

### Confidentiality

There are particular issues surrounding confidentiality for a prisoner's child which need to be taken into account by the school:

- Prisoners' children and their carers consistently stress that confidentiality is the key issue for them due to stigma and discrimination.
- Within the criminal justice system, some people's names and addresses are saleable commodities and prisoners' families are vulnerable to intimidation, threats and pressures from inside as well as outside prison.
- Some prisoners' children will be the subject of child protection measures made by a court which stipulate that the child should not be named.

However, confidentiality in school can never be absolute but on a 'need to know' basis. Schools experienced in dealing with child protection issues are likely to have systems and policies in place which can be usefully drawn on with the children of prisoners.

One approach is to inform all staff or all relevant staff that a child may be experiencing difficulties at school due to changed family circumstances. It may be helpful to state that the parent is no longer at home. However, staff do not necessarily need to know that the parent is in prison. This is a question of professional judgement according to the individual needs of the child, carer, teachers and school.

In some situations, only key staff who are actually able to contribute to helping improve the situation – such as the pastoral head or head of year – need to know the specific circumstances of the child.

However, informing some or all permanent staff but excluding supply teachers and support staff may deprive some members of the school of useful information and may lead to resentment if they find out through other means.

### **School Records**

- Be careful what is committed to writing and in what context.
- Be non-judgmental and record only facts that all potential readers need to know.
- Some current concerns can be better conveyed verbally than recorded which may risk of labelling the child.
- Computerised records are open access except in cases such as the 'at risk' register where access is restricted.

### **Human Resources**

#### **Staff Members**

The extent and kind of involvement of various staff members will depend on a range of factors including the age of the child, the wishes of the child (and where appropriate, his or her carer), the length of the parent's sentence and the amount of publicity surrounding a case.

When a child is experiencing difficulties at school, it is often useful to link up with key people in and outside the classroom to support them and their teacher, such as:

- head of year or pastoral head;
- special educational needs co-ordinator – SENCO;
- designated teacher for child protection;
- school counsellor.

Such staff may find using the pro forma for local information provided at the end of this section useful in their work.

#### **Support Staff**

Such staff are often overlooked but can play a very useful role in developing strategies: the school nurse or first aid person, the lunchtime/playground helpers, classroom helpers or school crossing helper are often the first to notice the disappearance of a parent, or teasing and bullying. A child may choose to talk to them precisely because they are not a teacher or authority figure in the way that other staff may be perceived; also, they are present in less formal roles outside the classroom. Support staff can both provide a listening ear and a watchful eye and can also point the child in the direction of other members of staff.



*"I found out the pupil concerned was staying with relatives because I kept getting different signatures on forms. Some of them were forged by the pupil. I asked Education Welfare to check out the situation and they came back and reported that his mum was dead and the father was a well-known local criminal back in prison for the nth time. The problem was that the relatives weren't providing proper parental care. The kid was only attending half the time because they didn't bother to get up in the mornings and get him off to school. He was a very bright lad but his academic achievement was going down the drain. After exhausting most other possibilities, I've decided to put him in touch with a mentor – a young man not much older than him from his own community – someone who's been in prison himself and now works to support kids in difficulty."*

TEACHER, SECONDARY SCHOOL

### Assistance from External Sources

All schools have access to Education Social Workers or may refer students to Behaviour Support or Pupil Referral Units. However, there are a range of other services and initiatives outside the formal system which may prove useful. These include:

- *Child Guidance.* Parental approval is required for a referral to the Child Guidance service provided by the local authority. In the case of family therapy, the active co-operation of both child and carer is needed if therapeutic work is to succeed.
- *Spiritual and Community Leaders.* A school chaplain or spiritual leader from the local community can provide support to the individual child and family. In some cases, such a figure may also provide support to the prisoner and help mediate and maintain family relationships through prison visits, letters and telephone calls. Some senior staff suggest making a room available at school during school hours which local leaders can use, with different days allocated to pupils from different cultures and faiths.
- *Self-Help Groups at School.* Voluntary self-help groups allowing students to talk in an open and supportive forum with others can be helpful in breaking down isolation, and building mutual support and acceptance among peers. Such groups, which are facilitated by an adult volunteer from outside the school, provide a confidential and safe environment for pupils to express themselves and share feelings. They may meet during the lunch hour or after school.

- *Preventative Work.* In some situations there may be a need to deglamourise prisons and criminality. This may be the case with groups of teenage boys surrounded by a culture of criminality from the mass media to the street. It is important for such students to understand the reality of prison and to be helped to manage the aggression that they may display. Presentations by figures such as probation officers and ex-prisoners who have direct experience of the criminal justice system are one method of trying to reach students who often regard teachers as lacking authority on such matters.

- *Community Involvement.* Developing events and facilities which involve a wide cross-section of the local community helps to build an environment of trust and social expectation for all students. This, in itself, is a useful foundation for support work with prisoners' children and for preventative action.

Details of useful organisations and resources can be found in the **Resources** section.

## Useful Prompts for Supporting Children of Prisoners

The questions below show how one school identified its policies in helping to support prisoners' children. These were then incorporated into existing policies.

### All staff

- How many children of prisoners do you estimate attend the school?
- How many do you know of? How many do you teach?

### Head of year/SENCO/Pastoral head

The following may apply to one or more of these staff roles:

- Whose job is it to pick up on behavioural problems early?
- Who picks up on concerns from parents, children and other staff at stages one and two of the Code of Practice for Special Needs?
- Who on the staff has particular learning skills?
- When you give advice to others about sudden changes in behaviour or performance, do you encourage people to be aware of factors which may surround a child rather than looking only for causes within the child?
- What input do you have into school policies on bullying, divorce, bereavement, and where would colleagues look for advice and information on such issues?
- Are there useful publications available for colleagues to refer to which go beyond the school's outline policies on bullying and children with difficult circumstances?
- Do you keep an up-to-date list of useful outside agencies and contacts? (You may like to use the pro forma outlined on page 61.)
- What kind of contact does the school have with the Probation Service/Social Services/the Police? Do you have contact names and numbers in the relevant departments?

### Support for the Classroom Teacher

- Who do colleagues go to if they feel that they are not equipped to deal with a situation?
- In what ways are staff encouraged to seek help?
- Where would a colleague find information and advice on dealing with situations such as divorce and bereavement? How are the policies of the school introduced into the professional practice of newly-qualified teachers?

### Involvement of Support Staff

The following questions relate to support staff such as lunch-time organisers and classroom support assistants:

- How are these colleagues involved in the practice of school policies?
- How is the knowledge and experience that they have of each child utilised?
- How can they be used to help positively build the self-esteem of pupils?
- Is there a system of reward and recognition that involves them?
- What training is available for such staff?

## Useful Prompts for Supporting Children of Prisoners

### Communication with Parents and Carers

- When are parents informed about and involved with the child at school – only when there are difficulties or through a continuing dialogue?
- How does the school measure contact and communication with carers?
- In what ways are parents important sources of information and how is this information used?
- What procedure is used to investigate an unauthorised absence?
- What steps can help make the school more accessible and welcoming to parents, including those who may not have had a positive education experience?
- Where is information available for parents about external agencies and assistance such as clothing grants and welfare benefits?

### Developing a Whole-school Policy

- Do the school's policies reflect actual professional practice or are they a statement of what is hoped to be achieved? How are policies put into practice?
- How can current policies be amended or developed to make them relevant to prisoners' children?
- Could the topic of prisoners' children be added to the action plan attached to a school policy so that it can be reviewed with their needs in mind?

### Confidentiality

- What do you do when contacted by a previous school, social worker, doctor's surgery or clinic? Do you check and ring back?
- Are support staff such as clerical workers involved in the development of good practice on confidentiality?
- Do you question what needs to be committed to paper or stored on the computer?
- How often are records reviewed and information no longer relevant destroyed?

### The Children Act

- Does your LEA have effective procedures for considering whether a 'child in need' under the Children Act is also a child with Special Education Needs under the Education Act?
- Does the school know how many pupils are registered as 'children in need'? Who would you contact in the local authority and in which department to find out?
- How do you refer on problems of children who may be in need under the terms of the Children Act? How can you check that such referrals have been taken up?
- How do you reconcile the differing priorities of the education system with those of the local Social Services and other Council departments?



## Pro Forma for Local Information

### Education Welfare Service

NAME (S):

TEL/FAX:

ADDRESS:

### Behaviour Support Service

NAME (S):

TEL/FAX:

ADDRESS:

### Special Educational Needs Support Service

NAME (S):

TEL/FAX:

ADDRESS:

### Social Services Department

NAME (S):

TEL/FAX:

ADDRESS:

AREA MANAGER:

### Probation Service

NAME (S):

TEL/FAX:

ADDRESS:

### Citizens' Advice Bureau

### Voluntary agencies and support groups





## Conclusion



Joanna Hooton,  
aged 5



# Conclusion

For many children, younger or older, having a parent sent to prison means significant practical, psychological and emotional changes in their lives. It may be one of the most difficult experiences a young child or teenager has to face during their school years. Despite this fact, and the large number of children affected in the school-aged population, there is currently very little formal support available for either children or their teachers in or outside the current education system.

## Listening to Children

All children should have their basic needs met and receive support and care through difficult times. Among children's essential human rights is the right to education and the right to be listened to as set out by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights have particular relevance in the case of children of prisoners because lack of information and awareness often combine to deprive them of education; it also means that what they say and know often goes ignored.

## Increasing Understanding and Awareness

In the UK, teachers and schools play the key role in child development and education outside the family. Many teachers and schools already provide support and assistance to prisoners' children through a range of individual and shared initiatives. This effort is made voluntarily and often without official guidance despite the increased pressures and limited resources experienced in the education sector today.

It is hoped that this guide will help build on current efforts by teachers and schools by:

- increasing understanding of the criminal justice system and its impact on the children of prisoners in the education sector;
- increasing awareness in the classroom so that children affected can be more easily identified and supported appropriately in school;
- providing some practical tools and ideas for teaching;
- increasing understanding and support for carers.



### **A Challenge for Schools**

Ultimately, responsibility for a child's well-being does not belong to the individual teacher but to the school. Schools have a responsibility to increase awareness among staff and develop, adopt or incorporate policy on the children of prisoners into existing frameworks.

One part of developing school policy could be to develop awareness of and draw on some of the experience and knowledge gathered by existing support networks and voluntary organisations involved with prisoners and their children. In this way, links can be built and resources pooled which will benefit prisoners' children, their families, communities, teachers and schools.

It is vital that in setting up ways of working, children are at the centre of any planning: children must be listened to, respected and allowed to participate in any decisions affecting them. It is hoped that by using this resource, teachers and schools will be able to offer such a child-centred approach which gives essential support to the children of prisoners.



## Resources



Ferghal McTaggart,  
aged 12



# Resources

Save the Children's web site at: [www.scfuk.org.uk](http://www.scfuk.org.uk) provides information about our work and resources.

## Useful Practical Materials for Teachers

Buist, Maureen, *More Than a Box of Toys*, SCF/Scottish Forum on Prisons and Families and Save the Children, 1997, ISBN: 1 899 120 599, Price: £5.00.  
For further information, tel: (0131) 527 8200.

No Way Trust, The, *Prison! Me! No Way!*, Price: £12.00. A video suitable for 12–17-year-olds focusing on a young offender's perception of prison life and the stark reality he encounters when going into prison for the first time. Includes a 100-page information pack for teachers.

An audio cassette is also available, price £ 3.00.  
For further information, contact: HM Prison, Hedon Rd, Hull, East Yorkshire, HUG 5L2 or tel: (01482) 224 382.

Prison Reform Trust, *Men in Prison, Women in Prison and Young Offenders*.  
For further information, contact: Prison Reform Trust, 15 Northburgh Street, London, EC1V 0AH  
or tel: (0171) 251 5070.

## Promoting Positive Behaviour in School

Alderson, P., (ed), *Changing Our School: Promoting Positive Behaviour*, Highfield Junior School and the Institute of Education, University of London, 1996, ISBN: 0 854 735 097, Price £6.00.

David Fulton Publishers, *Changing Behaviour*, 1995, ISBN: 1 853 463 507, Price: £14.99.  
Teaching children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary and secondary classrooms.

Gillmore, J. and Dymond, P., *The Co-operative Classroom*, LINK Educational Publications, Price: £20.50 inc p+p. A behaviour resource pack for primary schools.  
For further information, contact: The Dingle, Pontesbury Hill, Pontesbury, Shropshire, SY5 OYN or tel: (01743) 790 029.

Harper, K., *Lets Work Together Managing Children's Behaviour*, Save the Children, 1996, ISBN: 1 899 120 459, Price: £12.50.  
A resource for everyone who works with other people's children.

McNamara, S. and Moreton, G., *Teaching Special Needs: Strategies and Activities for Children in the Primary Classroom*, David Fulton Publishers, 1993, ISBN: 1 853 462 470, Price: £13.99.

Mosley, J., *Turn Your School Round*, LDA, 1993, ISBN: 1 855 031 744, Price: £19.95. A circle time approach to the development of self-esteem and positive behaviour in the primary staff room, classroom and playground.

## Negotiation and Decision-making

Fine, N. and Macbeth, F., *Fireworks: Creative Approaches to Conflict*, Youth Work Press, 1991, ISBN: 0 861 551 451, Price: £7.95.  
For further information, tel: (0171) 272 5630.

Fine, N., and Macbeth, *Playing with Fire: Training for the Creative Use of Conflict*, Youth Work Press, 1992, ISBN: 0 861 551 419, Price: £14.95.

Macbeth, F. and Fine, N., *Burning Issues*, illustrations by G. Hitcham, graphics by S. Henry, LEAP, Price: £5.95. A pack of fourteen posters, each depicting a different aspect of conflict and its impact on our everyday lives. The accompanying booklet outlines key questions and techniques for exploring the themes raised by the posters. For further information, contact: LEAP, The LAB, 8 Lennox Road, London, N4 3NW or tel: (0171) 272 5630.

Miller, J., *Never Too Young*, National Early Years Network, 1996, ISBN: 1 870 985 346, Price: £10. How children take responsibility and make decisions.

Treseder, P., *Empowering Children and Young People: Training Manual*, Save the Children, 1997, ISBN: 1 899 120 475, Price: £15.

### **Bullying**

Blatchford, P. and Sharp, S., *Breaktime and the School: Understanding and Changing Playground Behaviour*, Routledge, 1994, ISBN: 0 415 100 992, Price: £14.99.

Broadwood, Jo, Carmichael, Helen and Langley, Graham, *Positive Behaviour: Activities for Preventing Bullying in Primary Schools*, LEAP, ISBN: 1 873 298 335, Price: £7.50.

For further information, contact: LEAP, The LAB, 8 Lennox Road, London, N4 3NW or tel: (0171) 272 5630.

Broadwood, Jo and Carmichael, Helen, *Tackling Bullying: Conflict Resolution with Young People*, LEAP, ISBN: 1 873 928 22X, Price: £7.50. For further information, contact: LEAP, as above.

Cooper, P., Smith, C. and Upton, G., *Emotional Behaviour Difficulties: Theory to Practice*, Routledge, 1993, ISBN: 0 415 071 992, Price: £14.99.

Tattum, C., *Understanding and Managing Bullying*, Heinemann, 1993, ISBN: 0 435 800 434, Price: £16.99.

### **Communicating with Children in Distress**

Richman, N., *Communicating with Children: Helping Children in Distress*, Development Manual 2, Save the Children, 1995, ISBN: 1 870 322 495, Price: £3.95.

### **Child Rights**

Save the Children, 1990, *It's Our Right*, from the provision articles about the rights of care, food, water and health, ISBN: 1 877 032 18, Price: £4.50.

Save the Children, 1990, *Keep Us Safe*, from the protection articles about the rights against neglect, abuse, exploitation and violence, ISBN: 1 870 322 193, Price: £4.50.

Save the Children Alliance, 1997, *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Training Pack*, ISBN: 1 899 120 556, Price: £28. This pack includes the following items which can be bought separately:

Save the Children, 1990, *Teachers' Handbook*, ISBN: 1 870 322 207, Price: £3.50. This provides the full text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with a brief history of child rights.

Save the Children, 1990, *The Whole Child*, ISBN: 1 870 322 177, Price: £4.50. These participation articles of the UN Convention provide Topic Books for 8–13-year-olds to introduce the articles of the Convention through classroom activities and case studies of children's experiences around the world.

Unicef (UK Committee), 1995, translated by and for young people, *Know Your Rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, ISBN: 1 871 440 114, Price: £3.00.



## Useful Resources for Children

### For Younger Children

Allki, *Feelings*, Piper Books, 1984,  
ISBN: 0 330 294 083, Price: £3.99.

Bryant-Mole, Karen, *Bullying* from the  
series *What's Happening?*,  
Wayland, 1992, ISBN: 0 750 204 435,  
Price: £7.99.

Burningham, John, *Aldo*,  
Red Fox, 1993, ISBN: 0 099 185 016,  
Price: £4.99.

Grifalconi, Ann, *Kinda Blue*, Little,  
Brown and Company,  
ISBN: 0 316 328 693, Price: \$15.95.

Grunsell, Angela, *Let's Talk About  
Bullying*, Gloucester Press, 1993,  
ISBN: 0 749 600 56X, Price: £6.99.

Kalifon, Mary, *Mom Doesn't Work  
There Anymore*, Cedars-Sinai Medical  
Center, 1995, ISBN: 0 964 198 118,  
Price: £4.50.

Kalifon, Mary, *My Dad Lost His Job*,  
Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, 1995,  
ISBN: 0 964 198 10X.

Sanders, Pete, *What Do You Know  
About Feeling Violent?*,  
Gloucester Press, 1994,  
ISBN: 0 749 616 946, Price: £10.99.

### For Older Children

#### Fiction

Alcock, Vivien, *A Kind of Thief*,  
Methuen, 1991,  
ISBN: 0 416 15562 6, Price: £8.95.  
A family is shown confronting its prob-  
lems particularly through the voice of  
Elinor, a strong thirteen-year-old girl.

Alcock, Vivien, *The Trial of Anna  
Cotman*, Mammoth, 1989,  
ISBN: 0 7497 0978 2, Price: £2.99.  
The effect of peer pressure, the need  
to belong and the power wielded by  
older children against younger ones  
are all explored in this story.

Chambers, Aidan, *The Present Takers*,  
Red Fox, 1994, ISBN: 0099991608,  
Price: £2.99. Lucy has become the  
latest victim of the school bully. The  
perspective of both bully and bullied  
are portrayed in a strong story line  
which provides no simplistic answers.

Coppard, Yvonne, *Bully*, Red Fox,  
1992, ISBN: 0099839605,  
Price: £2.99. Kelly faces bullying at  
school because she is different from  
other children. In a neat twist Kelly  
devises a way of getting her own back  
on the bullies. A sensitive story which  
demonstrates the intense feelings of  
the victim of bullying.

Fine, Anne, *Goggle-eyes*, Puffin, 1990,  
ISBN: 0140340718, Price: £3.99. In a  
school cupboard Kitty weaves a won-  
derful story about 'Goggle-eyes' – the  
man who has become her stepfather.  
Her audience is Holly who has left the  
class in tears. A funny and ironic view  
of parents, siblings and step-parents.

Swindell, Robert, *Stone Cold*, Puffin,  
1994, ISBN: 0 14 036251 7,  
Price: £3.99. An extremely powerful  
novel which provides differing perspec-  
tives of the death of a number of  
homeless children and deals with the  
issues of violence, loss and friendship.

#### Non-fiction

Haughton, Emma, *Dealing with peer  
pressure*, Wayland, 1995,  
ISBN: 0750209941, Price: £9.50.  
Teenagers are the group most  
vulnerable to peer pressure and this  
factual book will help them to deal  
with problems they may encounter  
with their peers.

Hodder, Elizabeth *Stepfamilies*,  
Franklin Watts, 1990,  
ISBN: 0 7469601 20 5. Price: £6.95.  
An easy-to-access book which  
explains the concept of stepfamilies. It  
uses case studies to illustrate the  
problems encountered and the solu-  
tions some families have found.

Solomon, Yvette, *Dealing with bullying*, Wayland, 1994, ISBN: 0750212276, Price: £9.50. A practical book which focuses on how teenagers can help themselves to combat bullying. It also clearly identifies what constitutes bullying and indicates which adults and organisations can help teenagers cope in this situation.

### Useful Resources for Carers

Benefits Agency, PRIS, 1997, *Prisoners and Their Families: A Guide to Benefits*.

FPFSG, (ed), 1997, *National Directory for Prisoners' Families*, Price: £6.80; FPFSG, 1993, *A Problem Shared – Starting Your Own Support Group*, ISBN: 0 952 107 201, Price: £5.00. Both these leaflets are available from the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups, tel: (0181) 741 4578 for details.

Horner, C., *The Outsiders: A Survival Guide For Prisoners' Partners and Families*, NIACRO, 1994, ISBN: 0 951 658 417, Price: £4.99. This includes sections on *Separation & Parenting* and *What To Tell the Children*.

NACRO, (ed), 1997, *Outside Help*. Contains practical information for families and friends of people in prison.

Ormiston Children and Families Trust, *My Dad's in Prison and My Mum's in Prison* leaflet series, tel: (01473) 724 517 for details.

Prison Reform Trust, *Prisoners Information Book*, free to prisoners' families, tel: (0171) 251 5070 for details.

Official information on prisons can be obtained from Prison Service HQ publications, tel: (0171) 217 3000.

### Further Reading

Blake, Joe, and Eliot, Dorothy, *Sentenced by Association*, Save the Children, 1991, ISBN: 1 870 322 274, Price: £4.50. Also available, *Sentenced by Association: A Training Pack*, Price: £10.00.

Ditchfield, J., 'Family Ties and Recidivism: Main Findings From the Literature', *Home Office Research Bulletin*, Vol 36, pp3–9, 1994.

Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups, 1997, *Living in the Shadows – Tackling the Difficulties Faced by Families of Prisoners in the Community*, Conference Report, Price: £6.00.

Hounslow, B., Stephenson, A., Stewart, J. and Crancher, J., *Children of Imprisoned Parents*, Ministry of Youth and Community Services of New South Wales, 1982.

Howard League, The, *Families Matter*, 1994, ISBN: 0 903 683 172, Price: £9.55. A report by the Howard League for penal reform.

Howard League, The, 1993, *The Voice of a Child: the Impact on Children on their Mother's Imprisonment*, ISBN: 0 903 683 172, Price: £10.70.

Leach, P., 'Young Children Under Stress', *Starting Points 13: Practical Guides for Early Years Workers*, The National Early Years Network, 1992, Price: £6.20. This includes a short section on prisoners' children under the age of five.

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Some of these resources may be out of print, but should be available at your local library.

## Useful Organisations

ADFAM NATIONAL  
Waterbridge House  
32/36 Loman Street  
London SE1 0EE  
Tel: 0171 928 8900  
Fax: 0171 928 8932

ADFAM provides a telephone helpline for the family and friends of drug users offering the opportunity of talking over problems in confidence. Open 10 am to 5 pm Monday–Friday. They have a specialist worker who provides support and information for prisoners' families affected by drugs misuse.

AFTERMATH  
P.O. Box 414  
Sheffield S4 7RT  
Tel: 0114 275 8520  
Fax: 0114 275 8520

Aftermath offers assistance, support and counselling to the families of serious offenders – those accused or convicted of murder, rape, manslaughter and grievous bodily harm.

ANTI-BULLYING CAMPAIGN  
185 Tower Bridge Road  
London SE1 2UF  
Tel: 0171 378 1446

Operates a helpline offering advice for parents, and counselling for children who are the victims of bullying.

ASSISTED PRISON VISITS UNIT  
P.O. Box 2152  
Birmingham B15 1SD  
Tel: 0121 626 2797

The APVU deals with claims for travelling expenses from people visiting relatives in prison. Claims for children visiting prison must be made by the accompanying adult. If they are the child's carer, they should be in receipt of Income Support, Family Credit or on a low income and hold a certificate AG2 or AG3 supplied by the DSS. Children's escorts can also be arranged through the Probation Service or local family support group.

THE BOURNE TRUST  
Lincoln House  
Kennington Park  
1–3 Brixton Road  
London SW9 6DE  
Tel: 0171 582 6699  
Fax: 0171 735 6077

Provides advice and support to prisoners and their families. The Bourne Trust runs a play scheme during visits at Wormwood Scrubs and it also runs Visitors' Centres at Wormwood Scrubs and Belmarsh prisons.

CHILDLINE  
Freepost 1111  
London N1 0BR  
Tel: 0800 1111 (Free helpline for children)  
0171 239 1000 (Office)

Provides support and advice to children and young people in distress through a confidential helpline, open 24 hours a day, every day.

CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
Colchester CO4 3SQ  
Tel: 01206 873820  
Fax: 01206 873428

An independent organisation concerned with law and policy as it affects children and young people. They provide a free and confidential service of advice and information by telephone and letter in all the decisions which affect their lives. They do not undertake individual casework. Children and young people calling outside opening times will not be refused. Open 2 pm–5 pm Monday–Friday.

FAMILY WELFARE ASSOCIATION  
501–505 Kingsland Road  
London E8 4AU  
Tel: 0171 254 6251  
Fax: 0171 249 5443

Can offer some crisis grants to individuals.



# FEDERATION OF PRISONERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUPS (FPFSG)

c/o SCF  
Cambridge House  
Cambridge Grove  
London W6 0LE  
Tel: 0181 741 4578  
Fax: 0181 741 4505

FPFSG is the national organisation for prisoners' families. It provides information on support services for families across the UK and acts as the central contact point for anyone requiring further information.

# FELTHAM FAMILY SUPPORT

HMYOI and Remand Centre  
Bedfont Road  
Feltham, Middlesex  
TW13 4ND  
Tel: 0181 890 0061

The prison also runs Feltham Family Support Group for prisoners and their families. Contact the Visitors' Centre for further information.

HALOW (Birmingham)  
The Summerfield Foundation  
260 Dudley Road  
Winson Green  
Birmingham B18 4HL  
Tel: 0121 454 3615

Help and advice line for offenders' families, with an emphasis on self-help. Also offers advice and support and full counselling service.

HALOW (Coventry)  
7 Alfred Road  
Coventry  
West Midlands CV1 5BN  
Tel: 01203 258040  
01926 613026 (Leamington Spa)

Offers practical and emotional support to anyone connected with a prisoner. 24-hour helpline – answer machine when no one is available.

HELP AND ADVICE FOR THE  
RELATIVES OF PRISONERS (HARP)  
c/o Cambridgeshire Probation Service  
Old County Buildings  
Grammar School Walk  
Huntingdon  
Cambs PE18 6LF  
Tel: 01480 437637  
Fax: 01480 435148

HARP provides advice, information and support for families in a way that they choose – either by letter, phone or, in the Huntingdonshire area, by personal visit from the co-ordinator or trained volunteers.

# HOWARD LEAGUE FOR PENAL REFORM

708 Holloway Road  
London N19 3NL  
Tel: 0171 281 7722  
Fax: 0171 281 5506

Campaigns for a more humane criminal justice system, researching and commenting on criminal justice policy and practice. It is able to answer enquiries from prisoners and their families but cannot provide legal advice.

# LONDON PRISONS' COMMUNITY LINKS

2nd Floor, LVSR  
356 Holloway Road  
London N7 6PA  
Tel: 0171 700 8123  
Fax: 0171 700 0099

LPCL works to improve the links between prisoners, prisons and the community.

# NORTH EAST PRISON AFTER CARE SERVICE (NEPACS)

Area Office  
22 Old Elvet  
Durham DH1 3HW  
Tel: 0191 384 3096

NEPACS operates in the area of Northumberland, Durham, Tyne & Wear, Cleveland and North Yorkshire. It supports prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families; it also supports children's visits projects at Durham prison and Low Newton Remand Centre. NEPACS maintain two caravans at the coast for family holidays and also offers a counselling service.

#### THE ORMISTON TRUST

333 Felixstowe Road  
Ipswich  
Suffolk IP3 9DU  
Tel: 01473 724 517

Provides childcare and family support in two prisons in East Anglia and also works with the families of prisoners in their communities through its family centres and other projects in East Anglia. The Ormiston Trust has a particular interest in researching and promoting the needs of families of prisoners and further support is available from HMP Norwich Visitors' Centre on 01603 702301.

#### PARENTLINE

Endway House  
The Endway  
Hadleigh  
Essex SS7 2AN  
Tel: (Central Office) 01702 554 782  
National Helpline 01702 559900

Parentline offers telephone support, guidance and counselling services to any parent or carer of children. Parentline aims to break the cycle of family unhappiness and child abuse by enabling parents to share the difficulties of bringing up children with other parents. Parentline has a number of local groups operating at varying times. Call the above number for details.

#### PARENTS ANONYMOUS

6-9 Manor Gardens  
London N7 6LA  
Tel: 0171 263 8918

Support and advice line for parents in distress.

#### PARTNERS OF PRISONERS AND FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP (POPS)

St Marks Cheetham  
Tetlow Lane  
Cheetham  
Manchester M7 8HF  
Tel: 0161 740 8600  
Fax: 0161 740 4181

POPS is a self-help organisation covering North England and Wales. It provides help in many ways – general advice on the prison system, claiming for visits, arranging a prison move, offering moral support and much more. It also holds a 'drop-in' service where families can access welfare rights, counselling and moral support from other families.

#### PRESSWISE

25 Easton Business Centre  
Felix Road  
Bristol BS5 0HE  
Tel: 0117 941 5889  
Fax: 0117 941 5848

Provides advice and support to those affected by unfair or inaccurate media coverage and to anyone considering selling stories to the press.

#### PRISON LINK (Birmingham)

29 Trinity Road  
Aston  
Birmingham B6 6AJ  
Tel: 0121 551 1207  
Fax: 0121 554 4894

Offers support and befriending to African Caribbean and Asian people as follows:  
Prisoners' families – family support and assisted visits  
Children's network – activities for children of offenders  
Return – supporting offenders both pre- and post-release.

Provides support, advice, information and access to counselling for offenders, ex-offenders and their families. Aims to develop and maintain links with the Prison and Probation Service, statutory voluntary organisations and concerned individuals to raise awareness about crime and its impact on society.

#### PRISON REFORM TRUST

2nd floor  
15 Northburgh Street  
London EC1V 0AH  
Tel: 0171 251 5070  
Fax: 0171 251 5076

Campaigns for better conditions in prison and the greater use of alternatives to custody. The PRT is able to deal with enquiries about various aspects of imprisonment and with complaints about the treatment of individuals in prison.

PRISONERS ABROAD  
72/82 Roseberry Avenue  
London EC1R 4RR  
Tel: 0171 833 3467

Offers support, advice and aftercare to British Nationals and their families, and others with close links to the UK, who have been imprisoned abroad.

PRISONERS' FAMILIES AND FRIENDS SERVICE  
20 Trinity Street  
London SE1 1DB  
Tel: 0171 403 4091

PF&FS offers advice, information and a support service to any relative or friend of a prisoner who contacts them. Volunteers are available at some London courts to provide advice to families at the sentencing stage. Ongoing support is offered through a Home Visiting Scheme available in Inner London only, providing advice and friendship. Regular groups are held in the Swan Centre. Summer holidays and Christmas programmes are also available through the Swan Centre.

PRISONERS' WIVES AND FAMILIES SOCIETY  
254 Caledonian Road  
Islington  
London N1 0NG  
Tel: 0171 278 3981  
Fax: 0171 278 3981

The PWFS is a self-help voluntary organisation. It has overnight accommodation for families visiting London prisoners or passing through on their way to a visit. Help and advice is available to anyone in the UK but, wherever possible, families will be referred to local organisations in their area. Help and advice line for offenders' wives, with an emphasis on self-help. The PWFS also offers advice and support for prisoners' families.

PRUE YOUTH ACTION TEAM  
Beaver House  
147-150 Victoria Road  
Swindon  
Wiltshire  
SN13 8U  
Tel: 01793 863 516

Offers advice on how to set up youth action groups that are concerned with peer counselling and tackling bullying.

SAMARITANS  
10 The Grove (HQ)  
Slough  
Berkshire  
SL1 1QP  
Tel: 01753 532713 (HQ Number)  
Tel: 0345 90 90 90 (Helpline – local rate charge)

A helpline offering support and advice for people in crisis and distress. There are over 200 branches throughout the UK. All branches are available 24 hours a day, every day, to listen in complete confidence. Many have links with prisons. Details of local branches are available from the telephone directory or local library.

THE SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND  
Mary Datchelor House  
17 Grove Lane  
London SE5 8RD  
Tel: 0171 703 5400  
Fax: 0171 703 2278

SCF has undertaken considerable work around the needs of prisoners' children including running the extended visits scheme at HMP Holloway until March 1998. It has produced a number of publications including: *Prisoners' Children: research, policy and practice* and *Children visiting Holloway Prison*. It also runs a website, which offers information about the organisation, and gives details of publications. Visit the site at [www.scfuk.org.uk](http://www.scfuk.org.uk).

SHROPSHIRE HELP AND ADVICE FOR RELATIVES OF PRISONERS (SHARP)  
01743 792696

Offers telephone support and advice and help with visiting and supporting families, e.g. going to court.

WEST YORKSHIRE PROBATION SERVICE

Cliff Hill House  
Sandy Walk  
Wakefield WF1 2DJ  
Tel: 01924 364141

Advice on debts and benefits is offered to both prisoners and their families as well as to those given community service and probation orders across West Yorkshire. There is an initiative specifically for helping prisoners' families in the Kirklees division.

WOMEN IN PRISON

Unit 3B  
Aberdeen Studios  
22 Highbury Grove  
London N5 2EA  
Tel: 0171 226 5879  
Tel: 0171 354 8005

An ex-prisoner organisation campaigning on aspects of women's imprisonment. Contact from women prisoners about any aspect of imprisonment is welcomed.

WOODHILL SUPPORT GROUP

HMP Woodhill  
Tattenhoe Street  
Milton Keynes  
Bucks MK4 4DA  
Tel: 01908 507 722 (Visitors' Centre helpline)

24-hour telephone helpline for families. Messages left on the answer phone will be returned by 1 pm on day left, or on the following day.



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working with

# children of prisoners

A RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS

Children of prisoners are largely invisible both within and out of school. They may suffer enormous emotional, psychological and practical changes. Yet, when teachers do find out about the situation, it is the crime for which the parent has been sent to prison, rather than the effect on the child, that they will probably hear about.

For many children, their teacher is often the most important person in their life outside home. *Working with Children of Prisoners* explores ways in which teachers can deal sensitively and confidently with this significant group.

Drawing on the experience of 50 teachers from around the country, and of parents and carers, this handbook gives a voice to children who have visited a parent in prison and aims to provide:

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- models for good practice, especially around issues of confidentiality;
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- details of the practical support that is available;
- ideas for constructing greater awareness and a whole-school approach;
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