

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Parent in the Criminal Justice System

Introduction

It is estimated that 310,000 children and young people have a parent in prison in England and Wales every year (National Information Centre for Children of Offenders). This number is likely to be an underestimate as families often do not disclose their situation due to stigma, and it does not account for other family members e.g., a sibling or a grandparent in prison or, include the other stages of the criminal justice system – arrest, court, and community sentences.



Children and young people with a parent in prison are more likely than their peers to experience stigma, bullying and isolation. A family member within the custodial system also increases the likelihood of the child experiencing poverty as the family may become vulnerable to financial instability, debt and housing disruption. These children and young people are also at higher risk of mental health problems and poor school attendance and attainment.

The children of prisoners and offenders are more likely to engage in anti-social and criminal behaviour than their peers. This is especially a risk factor for boys with a father in prison; around 65% of boys with a father in prison will go on to offend.

Despite these vulnerabilities, this group remains hidden, with stigma and fear inhibiting them from accessing support services. Support is required through the offender journey including resettlement (release from a custodial sentence). When prisoners are released into the community, they and their families are faced with another set of difficulties which help to prevent them accessing universal services e.g., stigma, reintegration into the community and unemployment.

Children of offenders are regarded to be an 'invisible' or 'hidden group'. There is no standard collection of information about who these children are, where they are, who is looking after them, what their needs are and what support they receive. Having a family member in prison is also identified as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) which can have a lifelong impact on health and behaviour.

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?



Adolescence is characterised by significant changes in social, emotional and cognitive capacities. Unlike younger children, teenagers are more able to process their feelings about the family member and their actions and have the language and cognitive skills to express themselves. However, often due to the emotional impact of having a family member in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) these children and young people are more than twice as likely as their peers to suffer with mental health problems. This can present in a number of ways including struggling with anger management, withdrawal, anxiety (including separation anxiety), and use of alcohol and drugs.

There are many areas of a parent's or family member's journey through the CJS that can cause stress and trauma to a young person:

Arrest - Both the shock of an arrest happening and the concern of what will happen next as well as witnessing the arrest of a loved one – this can be a traumatic experience. Many police departments, especially in the USA, have become trauma informed organisations in order to minimise impact on children.

Court - Both a lack of understanding of the court process and lack of information provided by professionals to families. Worries and stress can also be exacerbated by long delays and adjournments.

Sentencing - Hoping for, or being told, to expect a non-custodial sentence or a not guilty result at trial, only for the opposite to happen. At sentencing, the immediate departure of the family member, often to a prison miles away from home.

Custodial - There are a multitude of factors that can impact on a young person at this stage including maintaining a relationship, distance and cost of travel, changes in family circumstances and isolation. It must also be recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on contact and maintaining relationships. Many children and young people who visited prison before the pandemic are yet to do so due to ongoing restrictions.

Release - Emotional and practical issues of reintegration of the offender back into family life, rebuilding relationships, worries that the family member may return to custody, response of community and peer group.

Media - Media reporting can occur at any stage and usually the person's name and address (minus house number) is included, taking privacy away from the family and often leaving them open to community/peer hostility, stigma and feeling more isolated.

Additional Resources and Information

Professional resources

[National Information Centre for Children of Offenders \(NICCO\)](#) - Lists comprehensive information from voluntary and statutory agencies across England and further afield. The three directories enable practitioners to search for 'Services', 'Resources' or 'Research' to inform their practice with children and families of offenders.

[Supporting children and families affected by a family member's offending – A Practitioner's Guide](#) - Intended for use by all practitioners with direct contact with children and families, including social workers, early years practitioners, family support workers, health visitors, school nurses, pastoral workers, resettlement workers and prison-based family engagement workers.

[Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member: A handbook for schools developing good practice](#) - Aimed at both primary and secondary schools. The handbook offers a whole-school approach and is relevant to teaching staff, administrative staff, lunch-time assistants and non-teaching support staff.

[Children of prisoners: A guide for community health professionals](#) - Aimed at community health professionals whose work focuses on children and families. It covers children aged 0-19 years.

[Isle of Wight Charter for Organisations/Services to Support Children and Families of Offenders](#) -

Developed by Barnardo's Community Support for Offenders' Families (CSOF) on the Isle of Wight for local organisations to sign to demonstrate their commitment to making a difference for offenders' children.

[Children of Prisoners Fixing a broken system Crest Advisory 2019](#) - Report looking at improving the understanding of the children of prisoners; who this 'invisible' group of children are, the extent, nature and root cause of poorer outcomes for these children and how a whole family approach can be used to improve outcomes.

Support for children and young people

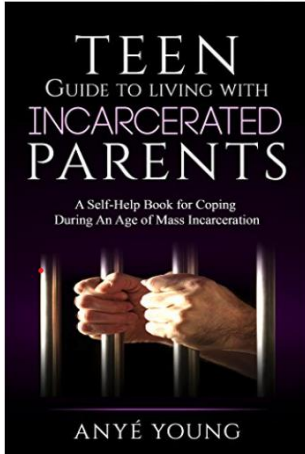
[AFFECT \(Action For Families Enduring Criminal Trauma\)](#) - Offer confidential and non-judgemental support, regardless of length of sentence or type of offence.

[Prison Advice and Care Trust \(Pact\)](#) - A national charity that provides support to prisoners, people with convictions, and their families.

[Are you a young person with a family member in prison?](#) - Developed by Action for Prisoners' Families, this leaflet has been developed to help teenagers who have relatives in prison.

[Time-Matters UK](#) - Based in Merseyside, supports children who are impacted by parental imprisonment. Provides support and individual support for children and young people from anywhere in the UK, aged 5 years to 18 years, both face to face and online.

[Safe Together – Information and coping strategies for children with a parent or family member in prison](#) - A self-help booklet illustrated and informed by a group of children who attend Time-Matters UK.



BOOK: Teen Guide to Living with Incarcerated Parents: A Self-Help Book for Coping During an Age of Mass Incarceration, by Anyé Young - An American author, who details her life as a teenager while her father is servicing a 12-year prison sentence. The author shares personal stories along with tips and tricks she learned while coping with the challenges of life away from her father and in a single-parent home. The book is aimed to motivate and inspire children who have parents in prison and to overcome the shame and embarrassment they may feel. The author also aims to help the single parents and extended family members, who are raising other children with incarcerated parents, gain a better understanding of the challenges their children face.

Short films

[Children of Prisoners: Videos on Social Care TV](#) - Three films from the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) covering arrest, custody and release.

[Action for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families](#) - Variety of clips/short films looking at the effects of imprisonment and release on the whole family, intergenerational crime and effects of imprisonment on the families of women prisoners.

[Families on Trial, Chapters 1-4](#) (YouTube) - How arrest, sentencing and imprisonment affect families. 'A Mother's Story' and 'A Sister's Story'.

[Families on Trial, Chapters 5-6](#) (YouTube) - How arrest, sentencing and imprisonment affect families. 'A Husband's Story' and 'A Wife's Story'.

[Families on Trial, Chapters 7-9](#) (YouTube) - How arrest, sentencing and imprisonment affect families. 'A Mother's Story' - 'They Arrested my Son for Murder.'

References

[National Information Centre for Children of Offenders \(NICO\)](#) Accessed: 18 November 2021.