

# Putting Your Child First

A survival guide for carers of children  
of prisoners, their families and workers



SHINE for Kids®

support - hope - inspire - nurture - empower

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# Acknowledgements

This valuable resource book has been widely distributed and is now in its fourth print. I would like to thank all the individuals, organisations and SHINE for Kids staff for taking the time to review this resource and providing their feedback. The resource has been updated to include information that incorporates the introduction of SHINE for Kids programs to the ACT.

Children and families of prisoners were consulted widely across New South Wales and all shared their stories and gave their time freely to ensure that this resource becomes a useful resource for families who become involved in the criminal justice system through having a family member imprisoned.

We remain indebted to **Jeni Monks** who initially developed this book. It is due to her dedication, commitment and enormous personal generosity that this book continues as a mechanism to ensure that families receive adequate, appropriate and informative information to assist them in caring for their children and themselves when a family member goes to prison.

As SHINE for Kids expands our support services throughout Australia, it is vital that we have such a comprehensive and valuable resource readily available for carers and other people supporting children and young people with a parent in the criminal justice system.

This book has been funded by Corrective Services NSW through their Victims of Violent Grant Scheme, and the Ian Potter Foundation; this edition is funded through Family & Community Services. We sincerely thank them for making its publication possible.

**– Gloria Larman**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and we welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to our service.



**Family &  
Community Services**

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# Foreword

SHINE for Kids has been supporting children and families of prisoners in NSW since 1982 and its reach now extends to Victoria and ACT. This book is a culmination of the experience of workers and volunteers who have worked with children and young people with a family member in prison to assist them to negotiate the prison system, assist family members to support their children and to directly support and assist children and young people of prisoners through this period in their lives.

When a parent is sentenced for their crime and sent to prison it is often said that families, and especially children, are also 'doing time' with their family member. The needs of these children and young people are forgotten by many and they become the silent and invisible victims of crime.

The number of people ending up behind bars in NSW is a large and growing problem that has an enormous flow-on effect. In 2001 it was estimated that 14,519 children were affected by parental imprisonment in NSW under the age of 16. It is also estimated that that 60,122 children under 16 years had experienced parental incarceration, representing 4.3% of all children and 20.1% of all Indigenous children in NSW. The prison population continues to increase; it would be expected that the number of children has also risen.

There are similar figures proportionally in Victoria where in 2008 there were over 4000 people in prison and over 7000 offenders on community-based dispositions. As such there are known to be over 10,000 young people with a parent in the criminal justice system.

Children with a parent in prison are perhaps the most vulnerable group in Australian society. Since over 90% of prisoners are men, most children who experience parental incarceration lose their father. The loss of a father means many different things to different families and children – the loss of someone loved, of a provider, of a role model. Perhaps sometimes it is also a 'welcomed' loss of a person who creates unwanted turbulence in a child's life. This loss will often be regularly re-experienced – approximately 60% of parents are repeat offenders and return to prison on numerous occasions.

The loss of a mother is becoming an ever greater problem as the number of women in prisons expands disproportionately. The loss of a mother poses even greater problems to children in terms of their health and welfare, and despite attempts made by the various departments

of corrective services to maintain healthy relationships between imprisoned mothers and their children, maternal bonds continue to be severed.

Recent research estimates that 27% of children who experience parental incarceration are of Aboriginal descent, with as many as one in four experiencing this at least once before the age of sixteen. Aboriginal children, with all the disadvantages they already face, see prison as a normal life experience – a reflection on the state of social injustice that these children face in all aspects of their lives.

In the 1960s, eminent psychiatrist John Bowlby laid the foundations to understanding the importance of early childhood in creating a personality 'blueprint'. Bowlby's premise, now the basis of Attachment Theory, was that the parent/child bond to the age of three was fundamental to the way that they would form relationships lifelong. Since then, substantial contributions to this theory have deepened our understanding of adverse life events in a child's formative years and their long-term mental health ramifications. In this light, 60% of the 60,000 children in NSW who have experienced parental incarceration did so before they were five years old. On top of this, over 60% of these children have experienced multiple such events throughout their lives with their parent's recidivism. This occurs against a background of the immense adversities facing children whose parents are imprisoned, and leads to cumulative damage that places them at the highest risk of adverse psychological, social and developmental outcomes.

Research throughout the world supports the importance of maintaining parent/child relationships. When a parent goes to prison this should not change the importance of the parent/child relationship.

While we accept that society demands that crime cannot go unpunished it must not be done at the cost of the rights of the child. If this is to change we must discard assumptions embedded within the mechanism of the criminal justice system, that children of prisoners do not exist and that their welfare is irrelevant when making decisions regarding their imprisoned parents. Children of prisoners are visible if we just take time to look.

**– Gloria Larman  
Chief Executive Officer**

References are listed in the Bibliography, p89

# Introduction

This resource has been written as a survival guide for families who are struggling when a parent first goes to prison. Children and their carers are directly affected by parental imprisonment and often feel alone as they struggle to face a variety of difficulties. Children of prisoners, through no fault of their own, face unique challenges that can leave them traumatised, stigmatised and isolated. This resource offers insights to help guide and inform carers of children of prisoners' about the different issues children and young people can face on a daily basis and provide suggestions and ideas to help carers overcome these obstacles and give families the best opportunity for a positive future.

It is hard enough for adults to cope with all the changes and emotions they experience when a family member is in prison. We all need to remember that it is often even harder for children and young people. It is well known that children of prisoners – of all ages – suffer when their parent is in prison. The right support helps ensure children of all ages are able to “bounce back” from the trauma and loss they experience.

Without the proper care and support children and young people do not automatically “bounce back” from the changes and emotions they have to cope with. The ability to “bounce back” is known as resilience, and for a variety of reasons some children are more resilient than others. This resource offers hints and guidance to help carers nurture and support their child and in turn, provide their child with the best chance to “bounce back”.

This resource will also provide information for the broader community to assist them to understand the experience of children and families of prisoners. Through understanding and education, the stigma and isolation experienced by these children and families can be reduced and over time eventually eroded.

## A note for carers

I hope the ideas in this resource will leave you feeling less alone and confused. I hope too that this resource will assist you to feel more empowered to cope with all the changes and hardships you face along the way. I hope you will also feel more empowered to reach out and get support for yourself, or your child, as your family travels this journey.

## A note to workers

I hope workers will also benefit from the insights contained within this resource. I hope you will learn and understand more about the specific challenges and trauma families of prisoners face, and integrate this knowledge and understanding into your work practice as you support and assist these particular clients. This resource has been designed to complement **A Resource Kit for Workers and Volunteers who Support Aboriginal Women with Family Members in Prison**.

## A note to the families

I am indebted to the generosity and honesty of all our families who shared their personal stories, ideas, advice, suggestions, and experiences. Without their support and insight this resource would not have been possible. I am grateful for the time, sense of humour, encouragement and strength shown by these carers and children. Your voices have shaped this resource into a practical survival guide for other families affected by the prison system. It was wonderful to work beside families motivated by the desire to help other families survive and thrive and sidestep some of the challenges which surely lay ahead.

This book is dedicated to you all – you know who you are.

– Jeni Monks

# Our other publications

**This book is designed to complement existing materials provided by government agencies, prisons, and prisoner support groups in your area.**

At the end of this book is a Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families that you can contact for more information and to help you get your questions answered.

## More Support Directories are on our website

There are lots of more specialised organisations who may be able to help you. As contact details often change, we've kept them on our website in Support Directories. We refer to these where appropriate throughout this book.

Download or view them at [www.shineforkids.org.au/publications/directories](http://www.shineforkids.org.au/publications/directories)

## Other publications by SHINE for Kids



- **Information for Aboriginal Women**
- **A Resource Kit for Workers and Volunteers who Support Aboriginal Women with Family Members in Prison**
- **The Visit** – a brochure available in English, Arabic, Spanish and Vietnamese
- **SHINE for Kids** – a brochure available in English, Arabic, Spanish and Vietnamese

**Phone SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW & ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**



**to request a publication – or download a PDF at [www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)**



# The impact of separation on families

# Survival tips for carers

## Emotional rollercoaster

**During over 30 years of working with children and their carers, we have seen a range of experiences and emotional journeys that carers face in the first weeks after a loved one has gone to prison.**

These feelings and emotions are often painful.

When a partner or family member goes to prison most people are shocked and stunned by the news and find that it takes a few days to calm down and begin thinking clearly again.

The world does not stop turning during this chaotic time.

Your family still needs you to keep functioning and make decisions.

There are heaps of practical, day-to-day things to organise and work out, such as:

- What to tell the kids
- What to tell friends and family
- Trying to understand what your kids are thinking and feeling
- Keeping on top of the household budget, housing, rent, and bills
- Getting the kids off to school each morning
- Worry about what will happen to your family member in prison
- Dealing with all your own stress and emotions.

**“Your whole world changes the moment they are taken away.”**

## Common emotions you may feel

It is normal to feel strong emotions and most carers find that their emotions change from day to day or even hour to hour.

### **Different emotions surface as life goes along.**

This survival guide will explore many of these situations, feelings and emotions.

These are some of the emotional experiences carers talk about feeling:

- Filled with panic and confusion when your family member first enters the prison system
- Having no control over what is happening
- Overloaded by everything that has happened
- Scared knowing that you are now the only one who can keep the family together
- Relieved that your partner was finally arrested and sent to prison.

## Feelings families have experienced as the reality sank in

- After a day where everything has gone wrong you might feel abandoned and depressed about your situation
- When you see the pain in your child's eyes you might feel scared about the future and about the impact this loss is having on your child
- Sad for your child's loss, but secretly relieved that the violence has stopped
- Embarrassed and scared that friends and neighbours are going to ask questions about where your family member has gone
- Guilty that your child is missing out on time with their parent
- A couple of weeks later: confident and optimistic that you can cope, and your family member will get a light sentence.

## Feelings families have experienced as time went by

- You might be filled with loneliness as reality of life without your partner really sinks in
- After a long wait queued up to get into the visits area you may feel frustrated and angry about how the officers have treated you
- If you find out that your family member is being moved 400km away from home, you might think about moving house to be near them, feeling confused and scared, not sure what to do
- On your child's birthday or after a special school performance night you may feel anger and frustration at your partner being locked up and unable to share in your child's achievements.

**You may feel like there is a huge burden on your shoulders as your family member places extra demands on you for support, visits and money.**

## Change of daily routine

Your family is relying on you to keep the household running smoothly.

If your family member lived with you – suddenly your daily routine will change.

Putting out the garbage bins, feeding the pets, paying bills, doing the shopping and the washing are all jobs that still have to get done.

You and your child may find these changes stressful and confusing.

You can sit down with your child and explain why these changes are happening to help your child cope and adapt to the new routine.

Many carers find their child offers to help with household chores and it is good to give your child some extra jobs to do.

Your child will feel like they are helping out and this is good for their self-esteem.



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It is important that your child does not take on too much adult responsibility during times of crisis. All children need to have fun and play. For children, "play time" is an important part of coping with emotions and change.

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The number one reason why you need to make the effort to look after yourself is because life goes on and your child needs you to support them.

# Looking after yourself

**Everyone copes differently. Most carers find it helps to share their worries. You might turn to family, friends, your neighbour or worker from a prisoners' support group.**

You may feel like you're carrying many burdens on your shoulders right now and your feelings may change from minute to minute.

During tough times it is important to make time to look after yourself.

When everything is going crazy, you might feel out of control and in crisis.

Some carers tell us they found it helpful to get back to basics:

- Keep up normal routines, so your child can see you are coping and surviving
- You need to shop for food
- Make sure that you are eating regular meals, even when you don't feel hungry
- Do some exercise, get out of the house and walk to the shops or take the kids to the park
- Play with your child
- Clean the house – some carers told us they found cleaning to be a good way to think about things and keep the household running at the same time
- Let yourself cry – it is OK to not be strong all the time
- Take a long hot bath after the kids are tucked up in bed
- Play your favourite music
- Try and get some time to yourself to have a big cry, or to sit and think, without worrying that your child is watching.

## How stress affects people

When people face lots of changes and powerful emotions it is normal to feel stressed.

You may be faced with a lot of problems and emotional turmoil.

**It is common during very stressful times in anyone's life to act differently for a little while.**

You might be in shock.

This is perfectly normal and expected.

Yet, your child is relying on you.

You have a responsibility to start functioning again.

If you are feeling highly stressed you may find yourself:

- Overreacting to minor events
- Feeling depressed, isolated and lonely
- Daily chores and children's needs might be forgotten
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Getting cross with your child for everything that they do
- Letting your child get away with stuff instead of stopping them.

When carers feel overwhelmed it can be hard to:

- Care for your child
- Show love
- Show interest in child's aspirations, dreams and interests.

You may be struggling to make sense of a lot of strong emotions – this can leave you feeling like you are living life through a fog.

## Maintaining boundaries and rules for your child

It is very easy when you are stressed and worried to let your child get away with a lot more than usual.

It is understandable.

You may be tired or lost in your private thoughts and it is easy to not react and maintain the rules.

Your child will probably learn very quickly that at the moment they can get away with a lot, and not get into trouble, because you have a lot on your plate.

**Children need rules to feel secure.  
Your child will feel more secure when  
you keep up the rules and do not let  
them get away with breaking them.**

## Keeping up the rules

Your child's resistance to your rules can result in family life becoming a bit crazy.

This can be stressful and frustrating.

The easiest way to stop this happening is to try and maintain the family rules.

It is difficult but important for you to keep up the boundaries. You need to be specific about what is OK and not OK for your child to do.

This will help make your life easier because your child will be less likely to push.

## Positive or helpful ways of coping with stress

- Some carers hide away at home until they feel better and in control again
- Some carers rush to their best friend's kitchen table to talk about their troubles
- Still, some carers call a telephone helpline
- Some carers make new friends in the visit area and share their stories and experiences
- Other carers turn to prisoners' support agencies for guidance and information
- Some carers reach out for help from their GP or local community centre
- Some carers hold their head up high.

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"These children also lose out because their remaining parent may herself (and it was, in most cases, the mother or grandmother) be so traumatised by the whole experience that she cannot effectively parent. Mothers often feel that their imprisoned partner is having it relatively easy: 'I feel that my punishment has been worse than that of my husband. ... Life out here seems to be one long struggle.'"

– Katz, Young Minds Magazine 62:3

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Some carers make new friends in the  
visit area and share their stories.

## How you can tell if you are not coping very well

We understand that it is a shock when a family member goes to prison.

Do any of the experiences listed below seem to fit your situation? You may need to reach out for help to get back on track if:

- You find yourself staring at the TV and not taking it in
- You are very busy or obsessively cleaning the house all day long
- You are cooking enough food to feed an army
- You feel isolated
- You start taking sleeping pills
- You cannot stop crying – every little thing sets you off
- You find yourself staring into space and losing track of the time
- You find yourself overreacting to little things
- You find yourself shouting, angry or frustrated all day long
- You cannot get up the energy to have a shower or get dressed
- You find that you tune out while your child is talking to you
- You find you cannot remember little things like whether you put the garbage out or not
- You are drinking or using drugs a lot more than usual
- You find that you end up sitting around all day long on the couch and do not have the energy to do the washing up or get dinner ready for your family
- You forget to get the kids up and ready for school on time
- You forget to pay the bills
- You stop phoning friends and family
- You feel like your spirit has reached breaking point
- You feel too embarrassed or frightened to reach out for help.

## Reach out

Right now you probably feel like you are the only person going through all this, but you don't have to soldier on by yourself.

You may need help and someone to talk to:

- About your fears
- About the confusion you are feeling
- To help make sense of this crisis
- To help sort out finances, housing, and a new household budget now your family member is in prison

When you share your feelings and let yourself lean on someone else, you will feel better and you will probably feel stronger and better able to cope.

Everyone around you will benefit when you look after yourself.

### **Your child needs you to be strong right now.**

If you do not have friends or family to talk to then think about:

- Talking to a counsellor who will not judge you or your family situation
- Calling a telephone helpline so that you can share your worries and feel understood
- Visiting local community centres, health centres or your GP to get support

**When you are caring for children you have a responsibility to reach out for help if you are not coping well. You are not alone – there is help out there.**

## Where to get help

At the end of this resource we have included an Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families that you can contact for more information and to help you get your questions answered.

**It is important that you seek help because you are teaching your children a very important lesson: "It is okay to reach out for help."**

### **Help is out there.**

Your child can benefit from this lesson for the rest of their lives.

It will also make it easier for your child to admit that they are in pain and confused; this is healthy for children.

Get Support Directories  
from our website  
[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)



- **Directory of Aboriginal Support Services**
- **Directory of Financial and Housing Support Services**
- **Directory of Legal and Court Support Services**
- **Directory of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People Support Services**
- **Directory of Grandparents Caring for Grandkids Support Services**

It is important that you seek help  
because you are teaching your children  
a very important lesson:  
"It is okay to reach out for help."

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait

A few years ago SHINE for Kids created two booklets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families:

**Information for Aboriginal Women and A Resource Kit for Workers and Volunteers who Support Aboriginal Women with Family Members in Prison.**

This book is designed to be read alongside them.

## Blackfella's history

There are many reasons why Australian history has seen high levels of Aboriginal imprisonment, and it is still true today.

It is well known that a history of white man's law, the Stolen Generation, 'deaths in custody' and ongoing discrimination has resulted in extra hardship and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**There are some unique issues which apply to Aboriginal communities.**

## Isolation, kinship and shame

The shame is stronger, and the stigma and discrimination is usually harsher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

- Some women are blamed for their partner's imprisonment by the community and are later the victims of retaliation or payback
- Kinship ties are broader and stronger
- Children often have stronger kinship ties to many relatives and the emotional costs are often ignored by society
- Children often have more than one relative in prison
- Aboriginal children will grow up knowing at least one family member has been to prison
- Sometimes upon release mum or dad are not allowed to return to their old community and this further disrupts family life and ties of love.

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"Unlike the English word, which implies individual embarrassment, shame in Aboriginal cultures operates as a mechanism for modifying behaviour and ensuring that cultural traditions and norms are observed."

– Jenkins & Seith, 2004, State Carers Policy

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"... many Aboriginal people regard being locked up as frightening, stressful, shameful, and a cause for considerable 'worry' about family and tribal matters (Midford 1988)."

– Reser, 1992, RESEARCH PAPER NO. 9

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# Islander families

## Respect yourself – don't let your shame stop you from taking the first step

With all these social factors going on it is easy for Aboriginal carers to isolate themselves.

This can be very lonely.

Life is harder if you walk the path alone.

Carers need to be brave and strong and reach out for a helping hand and find someone to talk to.

There are many wonderful workers, whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or others, who 'get it' and don't buy into control by shaming and can support you.

We have created a directory with Aboriginal-specific support services and provide you with contact phone numbers.

Get Support Directories  
from our website  
[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)



- Directory of Aboriginal Support Services
- Directory of Legal and Court Support Services

"When my fella was first in the gaol, the best thing that happened was that someone from the local Indigenous support group came around to my place to visit me. They knew that he'd gone in and that I had a few little kids with me at the time. I had been so depressed and had hardly left home in weeks, I just didn't want to see anyone, I was sad and lonely and shamed. They came around and stayed a bit, we had a cup of tea and they brought me a food basket. They helped me feel a bit better again, just having someone to talk to about him being inside, and I felt safe in my own place, less shamed, they helped me get going again."

SHINE for Kids' Aboriginal staff are always happy to have yarn with you. Phone us on (02) 9714 3000



There are many wonderful workers who don't buy into control by shaming and can support you.

# Grandparents who care for grandkids

## You are not alone

There are lots of grandparents who step in as full-time carers when their child ends up in prison.

You will find most of this resource helpful to help you get your head around parenting again.

You may find that you have to suddenly move into their family home to avoid any more disruption to the grandkids' lives, and this can have its own stresses for you.

You may find the grandkids end up on your doorstep, and your spare room is suddenly filled with scared, lonely, confused kids.

Changes are to be expected.

## Your emotions

You will be facing your own pain over the loss of your son or daughter.

You may be angry, frustrated, and disappointed by your child's choices and decisions that led to them being sent to prison.

You may be angry that you no longer have all your spare time because you are looking after the grandkids.

You have to cope with all these changes and emotions as best you can and look after the grandkids.

It can be quite a shock, so you need to be kind to yourself.

**To help you look after yourself, think about getting other family or friends to help out with the shopping or baby-sitting so you can have an afternoon off.**

## Fun fun fun

It's helpful to remind yourself that it is really good for your grandkids to have fun and play games.

Playing is about more than just being silly.

Having fun and playing is a great way for your grandkids to start to heal their emotional wounds.

### **Having fun and playing is a great way for adults to de-stress too.**

Your grandkids need your care and support right now.

You may find that it seemed like a burden at first, but the grandkids quickly turn into a joy to be around.

These days there are lots of support services for carers looking after the grandkids on a full time basis.

Get Support Directories  
from our website  
[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)



- **Directory of Grandparents Caring for Grandkids Support Services**
- **Directory of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People Support Services**

Having fun and playing is a  
great way for adults to de-stress too.

# Shame and isolation



## The impact of stigma on children

When a child has a parent in prison it can take all their inner strength to cope with the emotions they may experience over the loss of their parent.

There is a double hardship for these children, because they also have to cope with changes within the family and social stigma.

**Many carers tell us they feel powerless, embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated and isolated when a family member goes to prison.**

## What is stigma?

Today, we use the word stigma to describe attitudes and beliefs that cause shame, disgrace and can lead to discrimination.

Stigma is like a stereotype, and because it's based on myths and misunderstandings, it's always negative.

Stigma is hurtful and can make it difficult for you or your child to be accepted by others.

Facing these negative attitudes can make you or your child feel guilty or ashamed and start to lose self confidence.

Over time, your family may start to believe that they are odd and don't fit in.

These reactions can make your family feel isolated and unhappy.

## Will others judge your family?

Many carers worry that if they tell friends, family, neighbours, child's teacher, Centrelink office or family doctor that they will be judged harshly or badly.

This is called *stigma*.

It is stigma that makes us feel fearful about how others will react. You may be worried that:

- Your neighbours saw police cars out the front of your house
- Your neighbours watched your family member being taken away in handcuffs
- Maybe your family member screamed and shouted as he was arrested and now you are sure everyone knows and is thinking negatively about you and your family.

**Stigma results in an attitude of fear, hostility and disapproval rather than compassion, support and understanding.**

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Stigma and feelings of isolation associated with being the family of a prisoner, of being contaminated in some way by the deeds of the offender, is central to many of the difficulties that children and families face. This may also be compounded by community perceptions that prisoner parents are intrinsically bad parents. Inmate mothers are not only seen to offend against society, but also against their role as mothers."

– Cunningham, 2001:36-7

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## Crime, society and stigma

Stigma is also the reason why it is hard to tell your child about their parent being in prison.

If your child's parent was in hospital you would probably not be so nervous about explaining this to your child.

When someone is in prison it is because they have been involved in a crime and crime is viewed in a negative way by society.

### **Remember, you and your child have not committed a crime.**

Not all people agree your family should be stigmatised.

In our society people who break the law are judged harshly and some people in the community will be very judgmental and can be quite cruel to you or your child.

You do not deserve to be treated badly.

You and your child did not do anything wrong.

When people are nasty to you it is normal to feel bad or sad.

### **As a family you can support each other and stick together.**



You do not deserve  
to be treated badly.

## Why do people think this way?

There are many reasons why people who break the law (and their families) are treated differently by society.

### **Some people think all criminals are bad, but we know better.**

### **You know that your family member is not a bad person, but you can see that they have made bad choices and made mistakes.**

Some people think anyone who breaks the law should go to prison for a long, long, time.

These people sometimes get angry if the sentence is not very long.

Most people who think criminals should have long sentences do not stop to think about the impact this will have on children and families.

### **There are many TV shows, movies, politicians and radio interviews that encourage everyone to think that all criminals are bad people, dangerous people, and should not be trusted.**

We are all taught that punishments handed out by the courts are too easy.

Other people see these TV shows, movies or listen to radio interviews and start repeating what is said without really thinking about it themselves.

Many times these people don't stop to think if the hurtful things they are saying are hurting innocent children and families also.

Some people quickly make judgments about a person without even knowing them. This is dumb.

Sometimes children hear adults talking and just start repeating what the adult said without even thinking about it properly.



## Hold your head up high

You understand that your family member is paying a very high price for their mistake and that your child is suffering too.

In most cases, the highest price for your child is separation from their mum or dad.

But, because you see the other side of the story you understand that people who break the law are not always bad, dangerous or not to be trusted.

You know your family member is caring, friendly and works hard, but some things went wrong and your family member made a mistake.

## Some people will not judge your family

Not all people will treat you badly.

### **Some people have compassion and understanding for your situation.**

Often, these people have questioned what the media, movies and politicians tell them about criminals.

They have made up their own mind after they have thought about it.

These people will not judge you or your family at all.

Some people haven't really thought about the whole crime thing, but they know it must be painful to be separated from your family member.

These people will understand that you, and your child, are in pain.

## Sometimes the fear of how other people will react is worse than the reality

You may find that you have to constantly explain your partner's absence from home.

Neighbours, teachers, friends, and family will all ask or wonder where your family member has gone.

They are not all being nosy, busybodies or gossips.

They may have no idea about the facts, but you may find yourself reacting and being worried that they are judging you and your family.

This is your fear sneaking through.

Some of these people will react with compassion for you and the children.

Some people will offer to help and be happy to listen so that you can get stuff 'off your chest'.

### **These people are not judging you badly; they are supporting you.**

## Should you keep it a secret?

Right now you may think that it is easier to make up a story, but you are putting extra pressure on yourself and over time keeping track of your stories can be very tiring.

If you choose to make up a cover story you need to make sure that it is realistic to explain why your partner has been gone for so long.

If you have chosen to hide the real situation you may find that you feel worried and stressed all the time afraid that someone will find out.

If people do find out you may be very embarrassed when your cover story is blown.

Your child may be worried that they will accidentally say something.

You need to keep in mind that you are placing an extra burden on your child if you tell them to keep it a secret.

## Telling your friends and family about the situation

It is important that you do not isolate yourself from all your friends or family because they can help you to get through the hard times ahead.

**By keeping up normal contact with friends and family you are showing your child that not everyone is judging your family badly because of their mum or dad's mistake.**

Find at least one person that you trust and tell them.

Even if it is a counsellor you need to be able to talk about your feelings and daily struggles.

If you find that you try to tell a friend a few times and each time you panic and stop yourself it could be that you know in your gut that they will react badly and judge you.

Listen to your gut reactions.


On the other hand you might feel the urge to tell a more casual friend – it will probably turn out that they are understanding and supportive.

## Some ideas on how to tell people

- “Our family member committed a crime and is now in prison.”
- “We didn’t know he had done anything wrong until we found out he was arrested.”
- “The children are very upset and confused and so am I.”
- “I’m too upset to answer all your questions – read this booklet because it explains things about prison.”
- “Yes, my partner did commit a crime and I don’t agree with what they have done.”
- “Our family needs support right now – none of us committed a crime.”
- “We are living through the mistakes of someone else.”
- “My partner is not a bad person, but has done a bad thing.”



“Our family needs support right now  
– none of us committed a crime.”



## When your child faces negative attitudes from other children

You may be worried about what nasty things other children will say to your child.

**If your child is old enough to be teased and treated badly by their friends, then your child is old enough for you to explain the situation and help them understand why it is wrong for other kids to judge, tease or insult them.**

You may find that you need to try to explain why people are being mean, teasing, or insulting you, your child.

When other children insult your family member in prison sometimes your child will feel like they need to stand up for their mum or dad.

## How you explain negative attitudes to your child will depend upon how old they are and what they will understand.

Here are some suggestions from carers to help you talk to your child:

- “When people break the law and go to prison other people think it is OK to say bad things about them. But it is not OK!”
- “Your mum or dad is not a bad person, they did a bad thing but now they are paying for it. They are being punished for their mistake.”
- “The worst punishment for your mum or dad is being forced to be away from you.”
- “If they say your mum’s ‘a loser’ or your dad’s ‘a crim’ don’t get into a fight with them. Walk away with your head held up high.”
- “If someone teases you or says bad things about your mum or your dad, come and tell me about it – don’t keep it to yourself.”
- “When people say these things it is because they are confused and don’t know any better.”
- “Instead of making you feel bad they should think about how hard it is for you without your mum or dad.”
- “You didn’t do anything wrong, so when they say bad things to you, you have to be very brave, and remember that you did not do anything wrong.”



“The worst punishment for your mum or dad is being forced to be away from you.”

# Juggling the expectations of y child's needs

When a family member goes to prison for the first time, or is in prison for a long time, problems may occur that you will not expect.

You may start to feel like you are being pulled in different directions all at once and this can be confusing.

**You may find that you are responsible for meeting your family member's requests, your child's needs and your own needs.**

Sometimes it is hard to juggle all these needs.

In this section we will share with you some of the things faced by the carers we spoke to.

**It is up to you to judge what is most important and make decisions that are best for your family.**

## Are you starting to feel under extra pressure?

**It is common for family members to put extra demands on you and these demands can compete with the needs of your child, yourself and running the family home.**

Carers sometimes face a range of demands from their family member and at first you probably won't think anything about it.

When your family member in prison looks to you for emotional support all the time it can be very draining.

Or when that family member looks to you for financial support it can be very expensive.

It is hard for your family member to fully understand the difficulties you now face since they went inside.

These extra hassles may start soon after they go to prison, or not until months later.

The extra pressure might only become clear over time when you find out that you are reacting to something that you cannot quite put your finger on.

**Sometimes after a visit, a letter or a phone call you can find yourself feeling a bit down, flat, tired, or guilty but you are not sure why.**

Maybe after a visit, a letter or a phone call you begin to realise that you agreed to something that is a big hassle for the rest of the family.

It is up to you to judge what is  
most important and to make decisions  
that are best for your family.

# our family member with your



## Extra demands on the family

You may find that you are struggling to keep putting money into your family member's bank account.

You may find that your family member insists on seeing your child every weekend or sometimes on both Saturday and Sunday.

You may find that you feel torn between spending money on fun things for your child or putting the money in your family member's bank account.

You may feel under pressure to be home at a specific time when your family member will phone you.

If you are not at home your family member might demand to know why you were not at home.

All these extra demands can be very confusing for you, and you may even find yourself feeling guilty if you hesitate before you say yes to their request.

You may find that you are unsure about how to tell your family member about all the things you are trying to juggle.

**Your family's needs have to be your number one priority. It is not their fault that any of this happened.**

## Looking after your family member's needs

At first, you may be happy to help and happily do anything you can to make their life that little bit easier:

- Because you love them
- Because you worry that they have a terrible life in prison
- Because you may secretly feel guilty that you are free on the outside while they are locked up
- Because they are mostly only asking for little things
- Because you feel guilty that your family member doesn't get to see you, or your child, very often, and they keep telling you it is their only joy in life.

## Financial pressure

**Take a deep breath and remember your family member in prison is housed, fed and has no real responsibilities at the moment. You are not being selfish if you put you and your child's needs before your family member.**

Many inmates are not able to work for one reason or another and those who do work still do not earn very much money.

Everything for sale inside prison costs more than on the outside – TV, telephone cards, cigarettes, snacks.

This means they will keep asking you to top up their bank account.

Sometimes family members forget to stop and think about how tight your budget is now.

**Keeping your child well fed and clothed, safe and nurtured is your responsibility.**

## Deciding how often to visit

Many families find that the cost of transport to and from visits is very expensive.

This can put a big strain on the household budget.

Public transport is expensive and so is petrol.

If you live a long way from the prison, find out if there is a Video Visit available so your kids can visit without breaking the budget. Sometimes low-cost bus services are available or ask the prison if they offer assistance with transport costs.

### **We recommend talking to each of your children to find out how often they need to visit their mum or dad.**

Some of the money you save by not visiting every Saturday and Sunday could buy your family many things – food, pay bills, school uniform, new shoes.

This is an important reason why you should not agree to take your child to visit the prison every Saturday and Sunday even if they live in the same city.

### **If your child spends every weekend in the prison visit area they are not able to see their own friends and enjoy their own hobbies.**

It can be very difficult to decide when you are trying to juggle the household budget and everyone's emotional needs – including your own.

Many carers find there is no one perfect answer and decide to:

- Visit more when the budget allows for it
- Visit only on a pay week
- Visit sometimes without your child to help maintain your own relationship with your partner.
- Go without visits when there are bills waiting to be paid
- Visit more often when your children need more contact with mum or dad.

## You deserve to have fun

You and your child deserve to go out and have fun; it's not your fault your family member is in prison.

If you can afford to take your child to the zoo or fun park you do not need to feel guilty for having fun.

Chances to play and have new experiences are a very important way for your child to start healing and learn to cope with everything that has been going on.

If you have the money there is no reason for your child to miss out on having fun and friends just because their mum or dad is in prison.

It is very important for your child to continue seeing friends, play sport, go on school excursions or buy music despite their mum or dad being in prison.


### **Your child will bounce back better if they are connected to the community and are still able to play, do their hobbies and have fun the way they used to before mum or dad went to prison.**

**An important part of helping your child to bounce back is making sure they can still see their mum or dad as often as they want to.**

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READ 'Understanding prison visits',  
page 63.

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## Giving your family members emotional support

You may feel like you can never reassure your family member enough as they keep asking every time you see them, or talk to them on the phone:

“When you are going to visit next?”

“So you still love me?”

“Are you seeing someone else?”

Your child may start to get worried when their mum or dad always asks:

“Is she seeing someone else?”

“Who stays overnight with mummy?”

“Do you miss me?”

**Over time these emotional demands can feel like an extra burden on your shoulders.**

## Why your family member leans on you for emotional support

There are lots of reasons why family members in prison need more emotional support than usual.

Most of the reasons are a side effect of the prison environment they are now living in.

Your family member has lots of spare time to think and sometimes this leads to imagining fears and worries about what is going on back at home.

These fears may lead to obsessive thinking about all sorts of things including what you are up to – and your family member then might start to get scared that you will leave them.

Most inmates feel powerless to control their life, but, unlike with the Officers, with family members they have a chance to be heard and get their own way.

It is easy for your family member to forget how busy you are – the kids, the house, at work!

This can leave you in difficult position trying to juggle all the competing demands that you are faced with.

**It can be very hard to juggle all the demands that are on you at the moment – if you find yourself struggling, remember there is help out there.**



Your number one responsibility is to keep your child and yourself emotionally safe and happy.

# Breaking barriers and involvi in decisions

The last few pages looked at some of the reasons carers find it difficult to juggle all the competing demands.

## **This next section is written for carers who have a partner or loved one in prison.**

The advice is for families where the partner has had very close ties to the family and been involved in raising your child.

If your situation is different you can still read the ideas on good communication but you may choose not to involve family members in making decisions.

**Almost anyone in prison gets 'out of touch' with reality as time goes by and talking and sharing your life with your family member will help your family member to adjust when they are released later on.**

## **Trust and communication**

It is common for your family member to get a bit distrustful, paranoid or even jealous that you are having an affair or going out and having a good time without them.

This is a very frustrating and confusing situation for you to find yourself in.

You will need to accept that this is their view and you should reassure your family member that you still love them and want them home.

You may find you start to feel guilty, even though you are not having an affair.

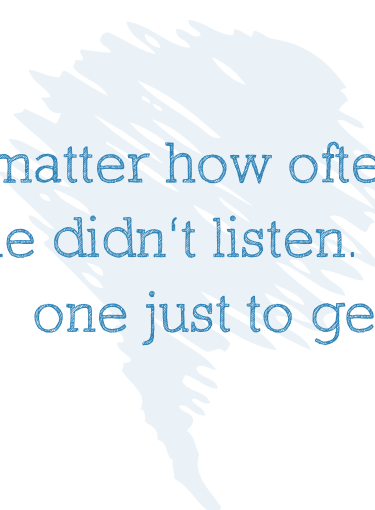
You need to be careful to look after yourself.

**If you find that it is 'getting to you' so you may need to find a counsellor to talk to.**

If you are feeling under a lot of pressure you may need to stop visiting or accepting phone calls from your family member until you feel better.

Make sure you communicate your reasons to your family member so they understand also.

Remember, your child is relying on you to 'keep it together' and your child only has you, so you need to look after yourself.



“It didn't matter how often I told him I loved him, he didn't listen. I nearly clobbered him one just to get it through his thick head.”

## Reconnecting during separation

There are very limited opportunities to talk when you have a partner in prison.

Phone calls are expensive and have time limits and this makes it hard to have big conversations about important things.

Not everyone feels comfortable writing letters and then you have to wait over a week to get a letter back.

This delay makes it very difficult to talk about important things.

When you visit the room is often very noisy and you may feel like you have no privacy to talk about difficult subjects or conflicts.

It is also hard to give emotional support and reassure your partner when you worry other visitors may be listening.

All of these factors make it difficult to talk about hard subjects like money and things that are going on at home.

You may find it hard to share everything with your partner, because you worry it will be a burden on them, and they cannot do anything to help turn the situation around.

**Despite all of these restrictions you may find you feel happier if you try to talk to your partner.**

Now we will look at ideas to help you talk to your family member in prison.

## Building good communication

Your partner will feel more involved in the family if you make the effort to talk about things with them.

When your partner is more involved with the family it is easier for them to remember the reality of life on the outside.

Your partner will probably feel more secure if you involve them in decisions.

Some of your partner's fears may be put to rest when they have the opportunity to voice opinions, be heard and act like a partner again.

Your partner can help discuss a problem and help find the answer with you.

Sharing decisions will help your partner to understand the reasons why some decisions have to be made.

These discussions will help remind your partner about how tight the budget really is and this may help them to stop and think before they ask you to put money in their account.

These discussions will help remind your partner that your child needs to have clothes, food, activities, and school books.

If you are able to have open conversations with your partner this can lessen the load you are carrying:

- If you explain to your partner why you have to make this decision
- If you both get a chance to say what you think
- If you both try to listen to each other's point of view
- If you understand why the other person was thinking that way
- If you both share and talk openly there will be less confusion and more trust will build up between you
- You will both feel connected, clear, and trusting.

**Good communication will not leave you feeling guilty, or that you are being mean, nasty or selfish.**

## Making decisions together

You may have to be very clear in your own mind about your reasons for saying NO.

Always reassure your family member that you love them every time you see or talk to them.



Imagine if your family member asks you to put more money in their account but you know that you cannot afford it.

To have good communication you may need to stop and think about your reasons for saying no.

If your family member will not discuss this with you:

- You may have to be strong and say no to your family member.
- You will have to be firm and learn to be assertive.

If you are clear that your reasons for saying no is because the money needs to be spent on something for your family, then it can make it easier to stay strong.

**Remember, you are saying no not because you don't care about your family member, but because your child is relying on you to make good decisions.**

How do you discuss this with your partner rather than just saying no?

Here are some of the ideas that carers shared with us:

- "I need the money for his soccer fees."
- "Soccer is important to him."
- "Do you remember how much he enjoys soccer?"
- Explain that it is important for your child's wellbeing to have their own fun things to do because it helps to heal their pain.
- "Do you see why I don't want him to miss out?"

You are saying no not because you don't care about your family member, but because your child is relying on you to make good decisions.

## Examples of poor communication

Here are some examples carers have shared with us about some of the emotional demands placed on them from a family member in prison:

- “It’s alright for you – you’re free but I’m stuck in here!”
- “I wish I could go to the movies like you did.”
- “My only pleasure I get in here is my smokes and you won’t put a lousy ten bucks in the bank for me.”
- “It’s all right for you, your mum bought you a new game, she won’t even give me money for a TV.”
- “I have to have money for a TV, you have to put money in the bank. All I need is fifty bucks. I cannot go outside of my room very much, because those guys are gonna bash me up.”
- “Who were you out with on Monday night when I called?”
- “If you still loved me you would come and visit me Saturday and Sunday. You’ve got nothing better to do and I’ve got no-one. I’m so lonely. I miss you all the time.”

**No matter what reason your family member is acting this way – your number one responsibility is to keep your child and yourself emotionally safe and happy.**

## The impact of negativity on your child

You have a duty to keep your child protected from this kind of negative situation, because it is bad for their self esteem, and your child already has to cope with lots of changes and sadness.

Some other ways your child may be affected:

- It will scare and confuse them
- They will feel even more powerless to make everything OK again
- They will not understand why their parent is acting this way
- They will worry that their mum or dad no longer loves them
- They may stop doing fun things, so that they are suffering as much as mum or dad is
- They may start to feel guilty if they laugh or smile or have any fun
- They may have trouble sleeping
- It may impact on their school work
- They may start to blame or distrust you.



If your child hears this sort of thing from their mum or dad on a regular basis it can be harmful to your child’s well being and cause added trauma.

**Your child needs to know that they are safe, secure and that they can trust you.**

**This is especially important now because you are their lifeline.**

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“The effect of both witnessing and experiencing abuse is mediated by many factors such as age, gender and available support systems. But the severely negative impact on the children’s lives cannot be denied.”

– Bhana & Hochfeld, 2001:2

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# Coping with the different stages on families

## Your child will have different needs at different times

The emotional responses vary in intensity at different points of the experience of having mum or dad in prison.

The shock and crisis you and your child faced when mum or dad was first arrested and sent to prison will probably calm down and change a few months later.

Now that one parent is not at home new routines and rules will develop within your family unit.

**With support, care, and love your child will survive and bounce back to their normal happy self.**



The child will take their cue from you.

## The impact on a child when witnessing an arrest

**The arrest of a family member is usually a traumatic event, particularly traumatic for children – especially if they witness the event, and even more so if it involves violence, handcuffing or the producing of weapons.**

If it is your partner who has been arrested you will be feeling a lot of emotions around this event. For your child the witnessing of the arrest of a family member, particularly a parent, is a traumatic event.

Even though you are feeling bad yourself, you need to consider how best to support your child through and after this event to reduce the trauma. The child will take their cue from you. Reducing trauma helps to reduce its negative flow-on effects.

Thinking of the right support for your child could lessen the risk of more difficulties for the both of you in the future. It's hard to think outside your own immediate needs at times like this. Think of it as an investment in the future of your child and your family's relationships. You will feel better about these events further down the track if you take back some control and support your children as best you can.

You can expect a child to respond in varying degrees to any trauma. Witnessing the arrest of a parent is traumatic, and how much will be determined by the circumstances of that arrest, the degree of distress displayed etc. Here are some of the impacts which child psychologists identify in children who have experienced trauma such as an arrest:

- **Emotional changes:** anger, fear, confusion, helplessness, shame, guilt, rejection
- **Behaviours:** aggression, destructiveness, defiance, reversion to childish behaviours, disrupted sleep
- **Learning:** drop-off in school performance or attendance, resistance to or suspicion of authority figures.
- **Socialising:** withdrawal and isolation, bullying.

Read any of these behaviours as a cry for help.

## What can I do to support my child after they witness an arrest?

It can all be a bit overwhelming. That is why there are support networks. You are the child's first and most important support. You should also seek help for yourself.

As adults we perceive and respond to events differently from how we did as children. It is easy to forget or overlook how frightening events can seem to a child, who is not able to explain or understand events with the clarity of an adult.

No child of any age would find these events easy to deal with. If the adult is distressed or frightened by an event, think how much more distressing it is for the child.

Children will respond differently at different stages of development. Very young children can become distressed by separation from a parent, loud noises, sudden events, strangers, aggressive speech, sudden change in circumstances or seeing adults in distress.

### **Think first of the child: take the time to look out for and talk to them.**

Provide a supportive environment after the arrest do this by gathering a small trusted support team around you.

Try to keep the child's life stable as possible. Try to avoid too much change too quickly. Give the child time to adjust to each change. Separations from a parent, a shift of house, a change of school are all major events even for adults to cope with.

Talk as calmly and truthfully as you can with the child about what is happening without overloading them with details. Confusion and mystery increase fear in children.

Recognise the child's loyalty to the arrested parent. Reassure the child about the parent's safety. Give simple, calm explanations. Don't overload the child.

Be careful how you speak about the arrested parent in front of the child. Negative messages set up tensions and guilt in the child. The child has a right to love their parent.

Reassure your child that the parent being removed still loves them and will remain involved in the child's life. If practicable explain that you will be visiting the parent.

Does your child have a comfort toy?

Don't rush or overwhelm the child. Read their body language, listen to them.

Trauma may hamper your child's capacity to listen, to reason and to retain information. You may need to take time to talk further about the event when your child is less distressed.

### **It's a big ask, isn't it!**

You did not ask to be in this situation and now you find yourself as the main family support person. It all comes down to you.

You have had your own trauma and are being asked to put your child needs before your own considerable distress.

In years to come, you will be glad you did, and respect yourself for the effort made when the chips were down.

Meanwhile, give your child and yourself the best chance to "bounce back":

- Surround yourself with people you can trust and share with.
- Use family counselling services and community support agencies in your district.
- A good family GP is invaluable. If you do not have one, ask around.

### **Schools have very good welfare/pastoral care programs.**

This may be very different to your own school experiences! A trusted teacher or school counsellor can be a wonderful ally for you and your child. Too many parents are reluctant to approach schools, especially high schools. Open communication will help you and your child.

There are caring teachers on the staff in every school. It might not always be your child's class teacher. Ask around. A trusted teacher can make a huge difference in a child's life.

## How to help children trust authority figures

Helping children trust authority figures is important if we want them to be assured that their family member in prison is safe.

If someone you love goes to prison and you're left to care for the children, there are lots of emotions you can feel. These feelings come and go and some will be stronger at times. One of these feelings might be anger. You might be angry at everything, angry at the system which seems impossible, angry at how hard it is to get to the prison, angry at the police for taking your loved one away, angry at the prison officer that has turned you away.

You have every right to these feelings and they are normal, but don't forget, if you are feeling down or having a hard time, then your children will be feeling even worse. The whole experience is even more frightening and confusing for children.

You want your children to grow up to trust people in authority.

If children witness authority figures behaving in an apparently aggressive or unfair way it can be a challenge to build an alternative image for that figure. Similarly, if children go to the prison to visit their family member and a prison officer turns them away, this can be a very traumatic experience for a child who's waited weeks, months or years. That authority figure will remain in the child's mind as a dark force and can grow into resentment and rebellion if not addressed.

### Things that you can do to improve the situation include:

- Give careful thought to what you say when children are around. Sometimes they are listening when you don't even think they can hear you.
- It's best to discuss the downside when children are not around.
- Children take on attitudes about things. If adults badmouth and act as if the police and prison officers can't be trusted, then that's what the children will think too.
- Show children that even though setbacks and difficulties are unpleasant, they happen to everyone.
- Acknowledge their feelings, teach them how to get through the difficult times, it will have a much less negative affect overall.
- Be the best example you can be for them.

Feelings come and go and some will be stronger at times. One of these feelings might be anger.



## When a parent is in and out of prison

It is hard for the whole family to cope when one parent is in and out of prison.

There are many things to consider and a few dangers for your child's emotional wellbeing:

- Your child can learn to expect to be disappointed by their mum or dad
- Your child can also learn to not get very excited when their parent comes home because they believe the parent will go away again before too long
- Your child might be fearful of getting too attached
- Your child might learn to not trust their parent
- Your child may feel hopeless that life will ever get any better
- Every time their mum or dad comes home your child will have to cope with more changes to the daily routine – this is unsettling for all the family
- Your child may grow up to have many negative feelings towards that parent.

## When a parent is in prison for many years

When a parent is in prison for many years there are lots of things for your family to think about.

**You need to remember that it is very important for your child to keep connected to their mum or dad even if you decide to stop having a relationship with this family member.**

Here are some questions to think about:

- Do you still want to have a relationship with your partner?
- Will you get a divorce? Play it by ear? Can you see other people?
- How often can you take your child to visit their mum or dad?
- How often does your child want to visit?
- Are there Video Visit link ups available to help maintain the child-parent bond?
- What are the transport costs?
- How long does it take to travel?
- What changes are needed to the household routine, so the family can function well?
- Now you are a sole parent – how will you organise your household?
- What about long-term finance? Centrelink? Employment?

It's hard for the whole family to cope  
when one parent is in and out of prison.

## Tips for parenting from prison

**A prison sentence does not necessarily mean that you have lost the right to be involved in your children's lives or that your relationship with your children has become any less important.**

Your children may feel vulnerable and need extra reassurance; here are some ideas of how you can contribute to your child/ren's wellbeing:

- Tell the truth of why and where you are. Depending on the age of your children is on how much detail you give. Honesty is always the best as children are smart and they will work it out. You don't want them to see you as a liar.
- Try to accept your circumstances and communicate to your children that you have learnt from your mistakes and that you want to be a good role model for them.
- Make the first move. Help them keep their bond with you by sending letters and pictures as often as you can. Let them know you are thinking of them and that you love them.
- Most importantly: do what you say you're going to do, so they can learn to trust your word.

Children often blame themselves when a parent goes to prison. It is important to let them know that they have done nothing wrong. Where it's appropriate, you can say things like:

- "Dad/Mum made a mistake and can't come home for a while. But remember I love you very much"
- "I have to go away for a while, but it's not because of you, I will miss you a lot but we can stay in touch by letters and the phone and you can come and visit me sometimes."

## Making the most of means of contact you have available from prison

Your rights to contact your child/ren will depend on a variety of factors or orders. Staying in contact is an important part of maintaining your bond with your child/ren.

**If you are able to have visits, the first one is usually the hardest – it is important to prepare your child for this.**

Things you can do to help with this are:

- Talk to your child/ren on the phone to describe what the visiting area looks like and how long the visit will go for.
- Write a letter to your child/ren explaining how the visit will go, what kind of things you will talk about.
- Draw them a picture of what the visit room looks like, or even of you and your child/ren playing together at the visit.
- By doing this you might answer some of the questions your child/ren may have about where you live and what it looks like there. Here are some suggestions of what you can do when you have a visit with your child/ren:
- In a NSW prison, you can ask an officer in visits for a SHINE for Kids Activity Pack
- Talk to them about their interests and what is going on in their lives, e.g. school, sports, personal achievements
- Talk to them about what you do during the day, what your room looks like
- Tell them you love them
- Listen to them without judgement; let them know their feelings are important to you.
- Play with any toys or get involved in any activities there may be available.

## Should you move house?

Moving house is a big step.

It can be unsettling, expensive, and hard work for you.

It is confusing and scary for your child to change schools, learn a new neighbourhood and make new friends.

Here are some ideas from carers about things you may want to consider:

- When a person is in prison for a long sentence they will often be in one prison for many years.
- Does it make sense to move house to be closer to the prison?
- How will your child cope with the move?
- How will your child cope with making new friends?
- How will your child cope with a new school and community?
- How will you cope with the move?
- How will you cope with making new friends?
- How will you cope with the isolation?
- Will you be able to get a new job?
- Can you afford the rent in the other town?
- Can you afford to move to a new area? (Removalists and connecting the electricity and telephone are extra costs you need to think about.)

**If you do plan to move house, ask these questions and think about it for a few weeks – it's a very big decision.**

Moving house  
is a big step.

## Getting yourself ready for your partner's return home

When you stop to think about it, getting ready for a family member to return home is a complicated business.

Think about taking every chance you can to talk to your partner without your child listening.

You and your partner need to start reconnecting again and the sooner you start the easier it will be when they get home.

It involves lots of changes for you and for your child.

## Getting families ready for a family member to return home

It is best if, two months before your family member's release, you start to plan and start to talk to your child about it.

Even if you know the date, this date will only be true if your family member behaves in prison and does not delay their release date.

Sometimes you do not know when your family member will be released. Explain to your child that you are not sure exactly what date.

It is a good idea for your child to visit mum or dad more often to help them feel comfortable with each other.

Visiting more often will also help your child's mum or dad to start acting more like a parent again.

Visiting more often will help the homecoming to be a happy time.

If your child has a supportive teacher at school, let them know that changes are happening.

If your family member will live somewhere else you will need to explain this to your child and explain when and how they will see each other.

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**READ 'The impact of "broken promises" on your child', page 38.**

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## A whole new set of emotions

You and your child will each have different emotions about the family member's return.

Your family can all support each other.

Let your child know it is ok to have confusing feelings.

You may find your child is excited and happy and then a minute later teary and sullen – this is normal and expected while they are dealing with their changing feelings and mixed emotions.

Children sometimes feel distant, because they felt let down and abandoned when the family member went to prison.

Children sometimes feel relief that mum or dad is safely back at home again.

It's OK not to feel happy or relieved – it is common and there is no need to feel guilty.

You, your child or your family member may feel scared, confused, uncertain, unsettled.

You may feel tense or stressed and you are not sure why – this is normal.

It's a good idea to talk about these feelings with each other.

**Sometimes families find it helpful to talk more about their family member, look at photos and share stories – it can help you all feel more comfortable with the idea that your family member will be around the house again.**

These emotions can make it difficult to adjust to changes that happen when mum or dad is released and comes back home.

## Are your child's hopes and dreams too big?

You may find that your child is filled with hope and dreams and you worry that they are unrealistic.

You may find that your child has a fantasy in their head – their mum or dad will come home and be the parent they always wanted them to be.

Very few loving parents are able to meet this kind of expectation.

When your child sees that everything is not perfect now that mum or dad are back at home, they can be left with another layer of depression and loss.

You can help by talking to your child about what to expect.

Be truthful.

**It can be helpful for your child to be told that their mum or dad may be confused, nervous, short-tempered, uncomfortable and acting strangely when they first come home.**

It is helpful for your child to know that it can take many months before mum or dad will be back to normal.



## What you can do to help before your family member is released

You can bring in street clothes for your family member to wear home.

Your family member can ask the prison about procedures for how and where to take clothes.

Your family member can ask the prison about Centrelink Crisis Payments.

Your family member can organise for the prison to provide 'exit money' to pay for transport to get back home.

This needs to be organised a few weeks before the big day.

Here are a few pointers for you about the big day:

- Be ready for a long wait for your family member to be released – if there are staff shortages, a 'lock down' or something unusual happening there may be a long delay
- Try and keep calm and happy if you have your child with you
- Bring a game along to play with your child so you are ready if you do face a long wait at the last minute.

## How families change when a family member leaves prison

Many carers told us they were surprised by how many changes took place when their family member finally came home. Many of these changes were unexpected.

Sometimes there are fights over the rules of the house – who is to do the washing up, cooking, cleaning, taking out the garbage.

These talks and fights can be tiring for the carer who also hoped life would be easier once the family member was back at home.

**Not only children but carers as well are sometimes shocked about how different their family member is when they get home.**

This is normal and expected.

If you do not see a change for the better after three months, then reach out for help.

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**READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' that you can contact for more information and to help you get your questions answered, page 82.**

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If you make a promise to your child  
they need to be able to trust you  
that you will do as you say.

## Common ways that family members change after being in prison

**The longer the person has been in prison the more they will seem different when they get home.**

Sometimes the attitudes or actions of the recently released family member are a shock to the family.

Families sometimes feel their family member has changed for the worse.

Families sometimes feel their family member is taking too long to get back to 'normal'.

Families sometimes feel their family member has no right to be angry, lazy, or drinking again.

Families sometimes feel their family member is acting hopelessly when they should be out getting a job or helping around the home.

It is common and expected to see differences in your family member.

## Some reasons why your family member is acting strangely

It is very hard for people who have not been in prison to understand why some changes to behaviour are common with ex-prisoners.

Prisoners sometimes learn to follow the rules and not ask questions and this can mean that they forget to think for themselves and make decisions.

Your family member has not been allowed to make decisions since they went inside.

It may take them a little bit of time to remember or re-learn to speak their mind.

You may need to be patient for your family member to get used to the new routine and the idea that they can make choices and decisions again.

**Prisoners sometimes learn to expect someone to organise their day and will look to you to guide them about what to do all day.**

**Until your family member feels more confident you can encourage them, give them ideas about things to do and help out around the house or games to play with your child.**

Prisoners sometimes learn to keep their defences up and they may be startled or jump when their child screams or runs past them.



## Ways you can help your family member to settle in

You can reassure your family member that they are safe and no one will hurt them and that your child is acting normally.

Your family member has forgotten what life is like but they will soon feel comfortable again.

Prisoners sometimes learn to not talk very much and they may find it hard to join in on small talk because they do not have very much to say.

**You can give your family member ideas on topics to talk about – it's a good chance for them to ask their child about their life.**

Prisoners sometimes learn to shout and get angry when they do not get their own way and find it hard to change that behaviour when they are back home again.

You can explain that this upsets you and the children and they need to stop doing it.

Prisoners sometimes leave prison feeling very depressed and unsure of themselves.

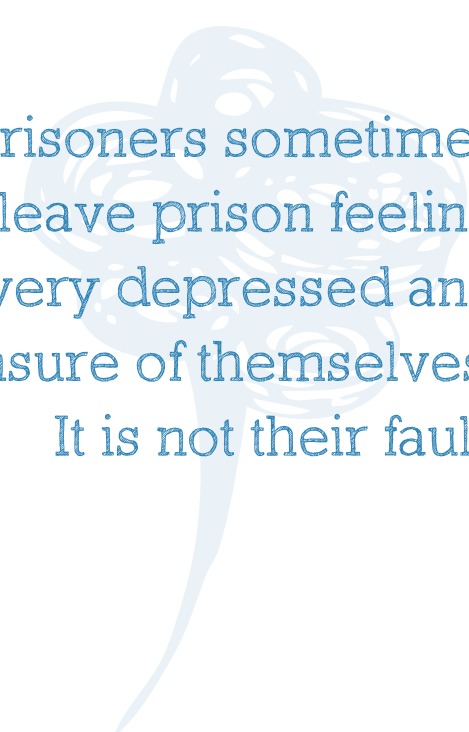
It is not their fault.

You can encourage your family member to speak to someone, join a support group, or visit the doctor and get medication.

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READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' that you can contact for more information and get advice based on your own situation, page 82.

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Prisoners sometimes  
leave prison feeling  
very depressed and  
unsure of themselves.  
It is not their fault.

# The impact of "broken promi

## Loss of trust and security

**When a parent goes to prison the children and young people left behind face a mixture of confusing feelings and emotions.**

Children have emotions that range from hurt, anger and disappointment to loss, betrayal, abandonment and loneliness.

A child may display only some of these emotions, but all will feel the loss of security and feel confusion because their world, as they have known it, is falling apart around them.

This can lead to distrust, no longer feeling safe or the world can feel very unstable, chaotic, and unsettling.

## Rebuilding trust and security

**Your child needs to feel safe and re-learn how to trust.**

It can take time for your child to feel secure and loved again.

There is no magic quick fix.

Remember your child is coping with many big changes and emotions and they need time, care, support and love to heal.

You can help with this healing by creating a safe, secure, stable home for your child.

The last thing your child needs is to be told something that does not come true, because this makes things very confusing for children, and then it can be harder for them to bounce back emotionally.

Your child does not need another disappointment.

Your child does not need another 'let down'.

Your child needs you to come home when you say you will, or your child might panic and fear that you have been sent to prison also.

**Your child needs honest, truthful answers to their questions.**

If you do not know the answer, just say so rather than invent a story you think they want to hear.

If you make a promise to your child  
they need to be able to trust  
that you will do as you say.

# ses" on your child

## Broken promises

Even small children are very good at remembering important things.

Imagine it's your family member's birthday and you know your child is missing their mum or dad on this special day. To try and take their pain away you tell them that their mum or dad will be home for their next birthday.

You go on to say that the whole family can celebrate together next year. In reality you know their mum or dad will not be home for another three years.

Your child does not say very much, but quietly remembers what you told them.

Later on that year your child calmly asks you if you can teach them how to bake a cake.

When you ask why your child just shrugs their shoulders and smiles.

Next year one day you come home and find your child cleaning up their bedroom without being asked.

When you ask your child why they are being so good cleaning up their room, how are you going to react when your child says ...

"It's March now and it's Daddy's birthday on the 25th, so I am cleaning up my room so that it looks good when he comes home for his birthday."

"What birthday present should I get him?"

"Are we inviting Nan to the party?"

"Can I help make the birthday cake?"

**It is easier for your child to cope with the idea that their mum or dad will be away for a long time, than cope with the loss they feel when promises do not come true.**

Imagine that your child's mum or dad leaves prison and comes home.

The parent is excited and happy to be home and see their child again.

A part of the parent feels guilty for leaving their child in the first place. To make up for it the parent talks excitedly about all the good things they will be able to do now that they're all together again: go to the zoo, get a new bike, go to a footy game together.

The parent promises to never leave their child again. The parent also promises never to go back into prison again.

Your child will be very excited about the happy picture that is painted. But the reality is: there is no spare money to pay for a new bike or a trip to the zoo.

Imagine if one month later that parent ends up back in prison again.

How will your child feel?

It is tempting for a carer to make your child feel better by promising things that are not true.

**Only make promises you know you can keep.**

Broken promises hurt more than the truth.



2

# The impact on children

# What children of prisoners need ...

## Healthy and happy children:

- Feel safe from danger
- Have choices and information
- Rely on your care and honesty
- Rely on you to always come home
- Know how to trust
- Have special time with just you
- Know that someone is on their side when they feel alone and abandoned
- Know that they are not being judged
- Know someone loves them
- Know that they are important
- Know they can rely on you to encourage them
- Know that someone is listening to them
- Know you are taking what they say seriously
- Know that someone cares for them and about what they did today
- Know someone cares about their interests and hobbies
- Speak to someone outside of their family situation
- Spend time with friends and family
- See and do new things
- Learn to be brave and try new things
- Feel valued and respected
- Are allowed to make choices about telling their friends
- Are allowed to make choices about seeing their mum or dad in prison
- Are told the truth about their mum or dad being in prison
- Visit their mum or dad
- Are allowed to grieve and show emotions
- Are encouraged to talk about their painful emotions
- Are not asked to keep secrets about their mum or dad being in prison
- Are not allowed to take on too much adult responsibility
- Are encouraged to play and have fun.

## How to tell if your child needs more support

Be aware that some children need more support.

**If your child is not getting the right support then it will usually show up in their behaviour.**

All children have different personalities.

Often children's behaviour changes dramatically from how it was before their mum or dad went to prison.

**These changes may not show up for many months and then all of a sudden you notice that your child is acting differently.**

Some children will withdraw into themselves or 'act out' in other ways.

# Emotions and children

## Changing emotions

The emotions your child feels will change at different times as life goes along.

### **The turmoil your child feels will vary.**

This is normal.

**Emotions change because the feelings felt when a parent first goes to prison are different than when they have been in prison for many months.**

Also children's emotions change just before their parent is released and when they get back home.

You may find that one of your children is more affected than the others.

The emotions your  
child feels will vary.



## Children often feel ...

Your child may experience some of these feelings and emotions:

- Loss when a parent first goes to prison
- Shock from all the changes that follow
- Sadness after visiting mum or dad
- Fearful of the police, the system, and about what life will throw at them next
- Frightened about which family member will be arrested next
- Lonely nights without mum or dad to tuck them into bed
- Anger at parent for leaving them
- Anger at having to change schools or live with someone else
- Distressed when prison officers are rude to their carer
- Embarrassment that mum or dad is in prison
- Shame when teased and ridiculed by other children
- Worthless when bullied by other children
- The effects of stigma when other people expect them to end up in prison too
- Isolation when other children are not allowed to play with them
- Frustration that there is no money for fun things any more
- Guilt as they blame themselves for their mum or dad going to prison
- Abandoned by mum or dad and feel worthless
- Powerless to fix things and make everything OK again
- Confused about what will happen next
- Guilty about the secret that mum or dad is in prison and they are not allowed to tell anyone.



## Children of prisoners have different emotions at different times.

- Loss as they miss their brother or sister who lives somewhere else since the arrest
- Nervousness about seeing mum or dad again after a long separation
- Confusion about whether mum or dad will be the same when they come home
- Excitement when their parent comes home
- Fear when the rules change again after mum or dad are back home
- Once home from prison children can feel nervous and be distrusting that mum or dad will go away again
- Miss their mum or dad and the care they offered
- Loss of old friends and stability
- Stressed – stress can trigger anger/aggression, fits of crying, even bedwetting
- Physically ill – stress can cause headaches, stomach upsets and lethargy, upset sleeping patterns
- Confused by changes in family dynamics
- Feel insecure and frightened about their future

**Issues your child faces are complex and can spill over into: the school yard, the classroom, the local neighbourhood, their friendship group and within the family home.**

## We all cope differently

**Every child is different: different personalities, different ways of coping, different ways of expressing their feelings.**

We see children from the same family coping differently. Children of prisoners have to cope with many changes, and different emotions.

You need to remember that these emotions can be very strong and leave your child scared and vulnerable.

**Many of these emotions leave children feeling very insecure, confused and troubled.**

**All children need love and support to help them get through.**

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### READ

- > Coping with the different stages – prisons and the impact on families, page 28
  - > The impact on a child when witnessing an arrest, page 28
  - > Helping your child trust authority figures, page 30
- 



Remember, if your child gets the  
right support, they will bounce back.

# Signs that your child may need

## Some changes in behaviour to look out for in children in primary school

Psychological problems may be indicated by the following behaviours:

- Withdrawing from friends or family
- Disinterest in previously enjoyed activities
- Change of sleep pattern
- Returning to behaviour typical of a younger age such as wetting the bed or thumb-sucking
- Crying a lot
- Being very quiet all the time
- Being very noisy all the time
- Being defiant or disobedient
- Nightmares and fear of the dark
- Clinging onto you
- Creating a fantasy world.

**Sometimes you might need help to work out if the behaviour is common or normal for your child's age, stage, and sex, or if this behaviour is caused by loss or trauma from their situation.**

Positive intervention can help reduce the negative impact for the child. Creating a safe environment where the child is able to express their emotions without being judged can help reduce their anxiety and fear of losing their parent.

Often the child will have trouble trusting people therefore it is imperative to the child's wellbeing that you are open and honest whenever possible.

Where the children have formed attachments and bonds with the parent in prison, allowing the child regular contact can help reduce their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Community groups run by SHINE for Kids can be extremely useful for allowing them to express their concerns and anxieties with other children in the same situation.

## Some changes in behaviour in young people

Many older children of incarcerated parents have trouble forming healthy relationships and may engage in a variety of self-destructive behaviours. The effects can be different for each child and may manifest in a multitude of negative behaviours, some of which may include:

- Disinterest in previously enjoyed activities
- No longer visiting friends
- Low self-esteem
- Change of sleep pattern
- Uncontrollable crying at night
- Verbal or physical aggression with peers, siblings or carers
- Being victimised by bullies
- Lack of concentration on school, being disruptive
- Declining school performance or stopping education altogether
- Self-harm
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Eating disorders – stopping eating or overeating.

Although the effects are adverse for both male and female children, boys are likely to exhibit externalising behaviours such as aggression, whilst girls are more likely to exhibit internalising behaviour such as depression or eating disorders.

Positive intervention can help reduce the negative impact for the young person. It is imperative for the young person to feel comfortable to express their concerns and feelings in regards to their parent's incarceration. Creating an honest and open relationship with the young person whereby they are able to talk freely will help them reduce the guilt and stigma often associated with having a parent in prison.

# help in coping

## How to support your child

Children need to be reassured and feel safe after they have been shocked by the news that their mum or dad is in prison.

There are many things you can do to reduce the trauma your children may be feeling right now.

Children will feel the effects in different ways depending on how old they are.

**As a carer you need to actively support your child through this experience, because without that support your child may feel the effects for many years to come.**



Use this whole book as a survival guide that can help you learn how to support yourself and your child.

"... young people who were classified as being 'at risk' of engaging in delinquent behaviour but who did not do so ... demonstrated resilience [and] believed that they had control over their lives, had a more positive view and plans for the future, and a stronger sense of attachment to other people and institutions."

– Howard & Johnson, 2000:1

There are many things you can do to reduce the trauma your children may be feeling right now.

# Kids and loss

## How children show loss and sadness

Children will be sad and lonely when their mum and dad goes to prison.

This is normal.

You need to express your loss and sadness – and so does your child.

**All children are different and some children will show their sadness. Others will hide it away, but the sadness is still there.**

As a carer it can be very hard to watch your child in pain. Many carers want to take their child's sadness and pain away.

You need to understand that sadness needs to be expressed, but not always with words.

- Some children do not have the words to talk about their feelings
- Some children are ashamed to talk about their feelings
- Some children want to avoid thinking about their painful emotions
- Some children don't know how to talk about what they are going through.

## Tips for letting your child know that it is OK to talk about their loss

There are some things you can do to help your child.

**You can support your child by talking about how much you miss your family member, so that your child learns that it is OK to talk about the hard stuff.**



When you bring up these subjects remember to give your child a chance to join in the conversation and share their thoughts. Otherwise your child may learn that **you** need to talk about it, but it is not OK for **them** to try and talk about it.

Your child may think you are in too much pain and cannot cope with hearing about their sadness and so your child may stay silent.

But this sort of silence does not help your child to heal.



The next few pages have lots of hints and tips to help you support your child.

Some children will show their sadness.  
Others will hide it away.



## The need to grieve

Children with a parent in prison feel loss and need to grieve.

### **The pain some children feel is a little bit like the loss felt when someone dies.**

Your child's mum or dad is not dead but the absence your child may experience involves some of the same feelings.

This is normal and expected, and these feelings need to be expressed to heal.

At the same time your child has the added burden of shame and secrecy because having a family member in prison is stigmatised in this society.

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**READ 'Shame and isolation', page 17.**

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"Children are diverted from development tasks when they experience trauma. If the challenges are too great and exceed children's capacity to cope, emotional survival begins to take precedence over mastery of developmental tasks."

– Trzcinski et al, 2002-1:11

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## Some children are grieving for more than the loss of their mum or dad

Some children have to cope with extra changes and other losses too.

Changes that some children face almost overnight are that:

- Now they are living with a foster carer
- Now they are living with grandparents, aunty etc
- Now they are living with a family friend
- Now they are separated from their brothers or sisters
- Now they are separated from much-loved pets
- Now they are living in a new suburb
- Now they are attending a new school
- Now there is less money available
- Now there is less 'attention' for them.

These children need extra special care to help support them through these changes.

**Do not underestimate the turmoil your child will be living with if they have had to cope with not just the loss of their mum or dad, but also the loss of siblings and friends, moving house and changing schools.**

# How to support your child as

## We forget how much children know and understand

It is important that you remember that your child will know and understand much more about the changes that are taking place than you think.

**Even if you go out of your way to hide and protect them from the details, many children are experts at listening to you and observing your reactions and changes in the daily routine.**

Some children see how unhappy you are and decide to pretend that they are OK to protect your feelings.

If your child was very close to their family member who is now in prison and seems untouched by the experience, then maybe they are coving up their emotions to protect you.

**There are many things you can do to support your child even though they are acting like everything is OK.**

## Getting professional help

Not all children and young people need professional help, counselling or support groups.

If your child was very close to their parent who is now in prison then your child may need a little bit of extra care and support to cope.

Keep in mind your child does not need to 'get over it' or 'move on'; the emotions felt are real and normal.

Your child needs to be allowed to take their time sorting through these emotions.

**How your child will express these feelings may vary a lot but what matters most is that your child feels that someone else understands what they are feeling.**

It is normal for your child to have a slight change in appetite, sleep patterns, interest in school or friends or hobbies or he or she may get tired very easily.

This is normal in the beginning while they are coping with the shock and loss.

After about two weeks you probably will see an improvement.

If you don't see an improvement it is a good idea to reach out and check with a worker who understands what is normal for a child of that age.

**Contact SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW/ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**

**You can ask to reverse the charge.**



What matters most is that your child feels that someone else understands what they are feeling.

# they are grieving



## Supporting your child by spending time together

Some children will not want to talk about it, but will feel supported if you spend time with them doing activities they enjoy.

**It is important not to speak about your child's parent as though they are useless, a lost cause, worthless or stupid. This does nothing to support a child who loves her/his parent and is in pain.**

It is OK to be silent while you spend time together.

- Play together with glitter, paints and glue
- Go for a bush walk together
- Play games together
- Watch a game of football on TV together
- Listen to music together
- Do the washing up together
- Play with the family pet together
- Blow bubbles together
- Read a magazine together
- Play a board game or card game
- Kick a ball around
- Read a book together
- Clean up their bedroom together
- Play with dolls or play dress ups
- Do each other's make-up
- Invent stories together
- Sing a song together.

## Listening to your child

It can be their grandma, uncle or family friend, but your child needs to know that someone will listen to them and try to understand them.

**It is more important to listen than to have all the answers or be able to fix everything.**

Your child needs to feel safe, be reassured that they are loved, have permission to be upset, sad and cry and you can set the example for them.

**This is important to help your child bounce back and recover from the shock and confusion.**

Children as young as three years old try to make sense of recent changes and may ask:

"Why did this happen?"

"Where is daddy?"

"When will daddy come home?"

**It is important that you answer these questions as honestly as you can.**

If you don't know the answer, and many of you will not, then you can explain that "daddy still loves you and has to be away for a while, but will come home as soon as he can".

## Your child has the right to feel many emotions

Your child has every right to be fearful, uncertain, sad, angry, lonely, confused, frustrated and have lots of questions they want answered. It's normal, natural and healthy to have these feelings and questions.

Some of these feelings can make your child feel bad inside.

Some of these feelings can be very strong and your child may not know what to do with these feelings.

## Emotional outburst and the family

It can be very hard for a carer to watch their child change and disrupt the family, but changes in behaviour are sometimes a child's clumsy way of dealing with their emotions.

This tells you that your child does need help to cope with the powerful feelings they are experiencing.

The best way you can support your child is by getting them extra help from organisations who understand the ways that children and young people express their emotions.

It does not make you a bad parent if you are confused and do not know how to help your child.

You need to remember that it is not normal for a child to no longer see their parent every day because they are in prison.

And because of this your child has scary and confusing feelings that they have to work through.

**Do not forget that your child misses their mum or dad every day and needs to be encouraged to express their feelings.**

**Contact SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW/ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**



## Anger – just a scared kid!

**Remember, usually these outbursts tell you that your child is scared and does not know how to cope with feeling frightened.**

Be careful that you do not fall into the trap of encouraging your child to bury their emotions, ignoring their feelings or being so busy doing things that they do not have time to notice that they are upset about the loss of their mum or dad.

It sometimes seems easier to say this sort of thing to your child:

- “Stop shouting.”
- “Stop being angry.”
- “Stop kicking things.”

But this does not fix the problem and your child may be even more angry and frustrated after you say it.

## Showing your child that you understand

You could try saying something to help open up a conversation between the two of you.

Maybe try saying something like this to your child:

“Are you angry because your father went to prison?”

“I am sometimes angry at daddy too, sometimes it helps to talk about it.”

“Maybe you could go outside and kick the ball around. You will feel better after you let off some steam.”

This will help teach your child how to cope with the emotions that they are feeling.

## Getting help for your child

If you feel powerless and don't know how to help your child and you can see that their behaviour has changed since mum or dad went to prison then you can get help.

You are not alone.

You may feel overwhelmed but there is help out there.

**Even in the smallest town or community there are organisations that can help you understand what your child is going through and offer you helpful hints and tips to manage your child's behaviour.**

The sooner you reach out for help the better it is for your child.

**If your child was very close to the parent in prison then it is normal for their emotional reactions to be quite strong.**

**Contact SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW/ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**



The sooner you reach  
out for help the better it  
is for your child.

# How to cope with special days

## Tips for working through your own emotions

- Allow yourself to be sad and to miss them
- It is normal to feel sad that your family member is not with you
- Finding a way to express what you are feeling may help you to feel better
- Talk to someone to help get it 'off your chest'
- Write your thoughts down
- Draw a picture or light a candle
- Find a quiet spot to remember all the good things about the person
- **Remember some of your happy times together**
- **Share some stories and memories with your child**
- Go and do something that you used to do together
- Write a letter to your family member
- Try to treat yourself to something you enjoy doing
- Avoid making any major decisions until after the occasion is over
- Avoid bottling stuff up in case the tension builds up inside you
- It's OK to feel angry at your loved one – you could try to punch some pillows
- Go for a fast-paced walk to help get stuff off your chest.

## Helping your child cope

When the rest of society is celebrating special days or religious holidays children with a parent in prison sometimes feel even sadder or miss their mum or dad more.

On birthdays, religious celebrations and holidays, Mother's Day or Father's Day your child can feel especially sad.

**Sometimes things that you may not think about – like the grand final on TV, a trip to the zoo or bringing home good results from a school test – will make your child sad, because they cannot share the event with their mum or dad.**

As a carer you can help your child by helping to make it normal and a subject that is OK to talk about and also by allowing your child to be sad.

You can help your child by making it OK to talk about and by allowing them to be sad.

# and birthdays

## Things you can do to help

Talk with your family and friends about how best to celebrate and include your family member on the special day even though they are away.

Remember to encourage your child to talk about these events and the loss they are feeling.

You can do this by sharing some of your own feelings.

Your child might not be sure if they should talk about their missing parent or not.



If everyone at school in your child's class made a Mother's Day card or painting then your child may be confused about what to do with it.

It is a good idea to check with your child about school when special days are happening.

Get into the habit of talking openly with your child about their mum or dad.

If the prison allows you to mail the card to their mum then you can write out the envelope together and walk to the post box to post it off – then your child will feel less sad, because they know their mum or dad will see all their hard work.

If the prison will not let you give the card or painting then together you could choose a place on a wall to hang the card, so mum or dad can see it when they come home.

You could get crafty and get a shoebox, and your child can decorate it and call it a “mum box” or a “dad box” and put special things into the box throughout the year for mum or dad to enjoy when they come home.

If your children prefer it you could make up a box for each child to put things in.

**Simply getting an exercise book so your child can write stories, ideas, draw pictures and stick things inside will create a great 'book of memories' to show to mum or dad when they come home.**

Your child could keep a diary to write down their thoughts, feelings, activities, successes to share with their mum and dad when they return home.

## Activities to share with your child to acknowledge special days

- Write a poem for daddy
- Help your child make a birthday card for mummy
- Share a birthday cake together and your child can blow out the candles for their absent parent
- Help your child to make mum or dad a present and keep it for when they come home
- You can make a game of planning what you will do next year when your child's mum or dad is back at home.



Only make a game out of planning for a special event or a party if you are pretty sure that they will be out of prison then and be back living with you.

Your child will believe you and next year be very disappointed if mummy or daddy does not come back home after all.

**READ 'The impact of "broken promises" on your child', page 38.**

# Children need and deserve ho

When a parent suddenly disappears from the family home and goes into prison, many children feel confused and scared and sometimes feel as though their world has been shaken up as they work out that they cannot control everything that happens.

**The best way for your child to begin to feel stable again is to be allowed to make choices and decisions.**

This may be an important factor in your child coping well with all the changes they are living with.

## Share information and let your child decide

Keep in mind that depending on the age of the child, it is important for you to give your child options and information, so they can make good choices and feel more in control after the shock of their parent going into prison.

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“There is plenty of research evidence available to endorse efforts to maintain, or even strengthen, family ties between prisoners and their relatives. There is also evidence to show how re-offending can be reduced when family ties are maintained.”

– Katz, Young Minds Magazine 62:1

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## Listen to your child

It is important that you encourage your child to talk about what they think or feel.

Listen hard to them telling you their feelings.

Give them time to speak about what is on their mind.



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Perhaps a quick hug or maybe a cuddle on the couch will reassure them while they talk to you.

You know your child best and you know the best way to comfort your child.

If you have more than one child they might want to talk to you without their brother or sister listening.

Or maybe they feel stronger as a group and it doesn't worry them.

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**It is important for you to think about what will be best for your child.**

## Take the pressure off yourself

It is very important for you to give your child a chance to talk about their feelings.

You need to encourage your child to talk about it because that can help them to heal.

If you are worried about what your child might ask you and that you will not be able to answer all their questions.

No-one expects you to 'get it right' all the time.

Your child will understand if you don't have all the answers to their questions.

You can try a few different styles and see what works with your child.

The next few pages can give you lots of ideas.

# nesty, truth, and choices



## Be honest when you talk to your child

It is very important to your child's wellbeing that you are truthful so they know that they can trust you.

Do not lie or pretend that you know the answer when your child asks you a hard question, or your child may feel betrayed when they find out that you lied.

During these difficult times it is very important that your child knows that they can rely on you and trust you.



**Remember, since their mum or dad went to prison your child has had to cope with lots of changes and confusion about why their mum or dad are no longer around to tuck them into bed at night and these changes make most kids feel insecure.**

It is important that you be aware that your child needs to feel secure again.

Truth plays a big role in creating the feeling of safety and security.

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**READ 'The impact of "broken promises" on your child', page 38.**

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## If you are not sure how to answer a question then it is OK to say ...

"I don't know – let's ask dad next time we visit."

"I don't know the answer – let's phone up the prison and see if we can find out together."

"I think it is 'this or that', but I'm not sure, let's ask next time we see the worker."

"I don't know – let's read the book and see what it says."

"I'm not sure if we can afford it – let me think about it after I pay these bills."

## How to help your child feel safe to talk about it

### **Most children need to feel safe and secure before they talk about their feelings.**

Many children feel so scared and confused that it is unhelpful for them to feel extra pressure to talk about it.

This can feel like bullying to a child who is distressed and confused.

You need to be patient, calm and relaxed.

Your child will pick up on these signals and it will help them to feel secure and nurtured.

If you have more than one child you may find they do not want to speak about their feelings in front of their brothers and sisters.

This is common and understandable.

You may need to set up the situation so that your child can talk to you without others hearing.

You need to be  
patient, calm  
and relaxed.

## What can you do if your child does not want to talk about it?

### **Some children prefer to speak to someone outside of the family.**

You might want to consider who else your child could feel comfortable talking to.

This could be a school teacher, school counsellor, family friend or favourite aunty.

If there is nobody else you could try to get your child into a mentor program and this person could be the one they feel comfortable talking to.



Remember to be very gentle and don't push, or your child may become distant or scared of you – and they need to know that they can trust you right now more than ever.

Some children need to be alone while they think and feel the emotions inside them.

This is OK for some children.

### **Your child might open up and talk to you while you are driving in the car together or while you are cooking dinner, but at other times not say anything.**

Look out for which way is best to support each of your children.

### **Each child will probably have a different style and feel comfortable in different situations.**

This is normal and expected.

## Reach out

### **It is very important that you reach out for help if you think your child is not coping well.**

If you are worried about your child, reach out, and talk to a worker or friend to get another viewpoint. Perhaps ask your friends, or your child's school teacher. You could even very gently ask your child's friends how they think your child is coping.

### **The sooner your child gets help the healthier and happier they will be and the faster your child will bounce back.**

**Contact SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW/ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**



# The impact of violence on children

## Violence causes emotional harm as well

**Living with domestic violence can cause physical and emotional harm to children and young people.**

Violence and the threat of violence at home can create fear and can destroy normal family functioning.

Any form of violence or threat of violence in the home also affects children. Children and young people don't have to see the violence to be affected by it.

For optimal development, children and young people need to grow up in a secure and nurturing environment. Where domestic or family violence exists, the home is not safe or secure and children are scared about what might happen to them and the people they love.

Studies show that children who have witnessed domestic violence and or exposed to anger and fear, are more likely to:

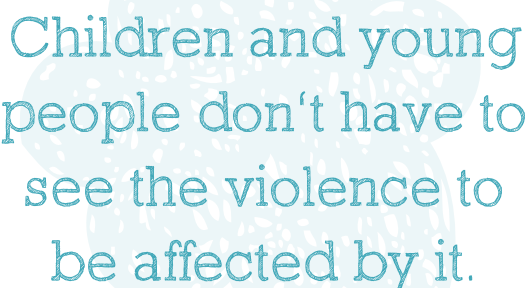
- show aggressive behaviour e.g. bullying
- develop phobias and insomnia
- experience anxiety
- show symptoms of depression
- have diminished self esteem
- poor concentration at school and problem-solving skills
- have reduced social competence skills, including low levels of empathy
- show emotional distress
- have physical complaints
- 'regressive' symptoms such as increased bedwetting or delayed language development
- more anxiety over separation from parents may affect children's ability to learn to get along with other children
- repeat the violence in their own families, or choose partners who are violent

**Seek help for you and your children if you are exposed to domestic violence – it does impact on your children's future.**

## Help is not far away

**Kids' Help Line 1800 551 800**  
**Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463**

Both lines are open 24 hours, 7 days. Interpreters are available.



Children and young people don't have to see the violence to be affected by it.

# The impact of substance abuse on children

## Parental substance misuse is highly disruptive to family functioning

Most investigations have concluded that children of substance abuse either being alcohol or illicit drugs of any kind are at elevated risk for negative outcomes with specific concerns.

### **Parental substance abuse interrupts a child's normal development and places them at higher risk for emotional, physical and mental health problems.**

Because parents who abuse alcohol or other drugs are more likely to be involved with domestic violence, divorce, unemployment, mental illness and legal problems, their ability to parent effectively is severely compromised.

Anecdotal evidence from service providers suggests that children raised in families characterised by illicit drug use can often display a range of dysfunctional child behaviours such as:

- Fear of abandonment, separation and insecurity
- Depression and anxiety
- Fear of losing their carer
- Fear of being left alone
- Self-blame for their parent's departure
- Collecting food and hoarding it; overeating
- Intense fear of sirens and the police
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Sleeping difficulties
- Aggression
- Diminished ability to concentrate
- Nihilistic or fatalistic orientations toward the future
- Poor attachment behaviour
- A tendency to choose risky behaviour, including the use of alcohol or other drugs later in life
- High rates of child behaviour problems.

It has also been suggested that many children exposed to a drug-using lifestyle are misdiagnosed with ADHD when they are actually suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Parental substance misuse is also connected to child maltreatment. The risk of child abuse and neglect is substantially higher in families with drug-abusing parents.

Consult your family doctor or a mental health professional — getting help early on can help to get back on track and develop more effective coping skills, often preventing further problems.



# Explaining prisons to children

# Information about prisons

## How the prison system works

It can be scary and confusing when you have a family member in prison.

At first you will not understand the rules and regulations.

Most carers tell us it is difficult and frustrating trying to make sense of the prison system.

It can feel as though the system is designed to make life hard for you.

**You may need to learn how to be assertive to get the information you need. Sometimes a friend or worker can support you make phone calls and speak on your behalf.**

You probably have lots of questions about your family member:

- When can you see them?
- How are they being treated?
- When will they be able to come home?
- What can you do to help your family member?

## You need information

There are two places to get information from:

1. Correctional services and
2. Support groups for prisoners and their families

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**READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' to get their phone numbers, page 82.**

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## Correctional services

The contact details for these and all other state or territory justice systems are listed on page 84 of this book.

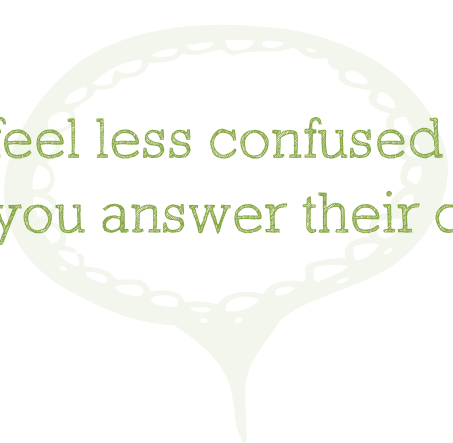
You will have lots of questions.

Most people find that the more information they have the less they worry about their family member.

Your child will have lots of questions about the prison system.

**Your child will feel less confused and worried if you answer their questions honestly.**

Your child will feel less confused and worried if you answer their questions honestly.



## Questions you can ask correctional services

This booklet does not answer every question because the rules change all the time and are different in every State.

You can ask correctional services in your State all sorts of questions about your family member:

- Where is your family member located?
- Will they stay at this prison?
- Is your family member safe?
- How to put money in their bank account?
- What is inmate buy-up?
- Can I phone my family member?
- How often can your family member phone you?
- Why do inmates get moved from prison to prison?
- Can I contact my family member while they are being transported?
- What is the procedure when they first arrive in prison?
- Can my family member see a doctor, get medication, see a psychologist?
- Where did you put my family member's possessions after the arrest?
- Can they attend special classes, or continue their education?
- Are alcohol and drug courses available?
- Are anger management courses available?
- What is protection or limited association?
- What is segregation?
- Are there any disability services?
- Is there an Aboriginal Unit and programs?
- Do you have a booklet about visiting?
- Do you have a booklet about families?
- Is there a booklet about what inmates do all day?

## Complaints

The process for making a complaint does vary from State to State so check with your local support agency about the options open to you to make a complaint.

There are other ways to make complaint – write a letter to the Manager or Governor of the prison; contact the Ombudsman's office; and inmates can also request to see the official visitors who visit their prison.

Each prison has a clear system for inmates to make complaints.

If your family member in prison has a complaint it is best if they contact the person in charge so the complaint can be sorted out quickly.

If *you* have a complaint you should write a letter to the Manager or Governor of the prison and explain your issue or problem.

**Sometimes it helps to get a friend to help you write the letter and get your ideas written down clearly.**

## Support groups for prisoners and their families

Prisoner support organisations will help you get information you need to help you visit the prison your family member is in.

The rules vary from prison to prison and state to state so this booklet has a directory of Australian prisoners' and their families' support groups on the back page for you to find telephone numbers.

**You local support group will be able to give you information, brochures, videos, DVDs or CDs containing information to help you understand 'how it all works'.**

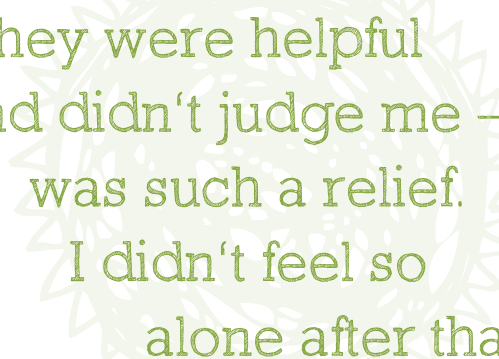
## Services offered

Your local prisoner support organisation has the right skills and knowledge to help you in many ways.

This list is just some of the services they offer:

- Assist with transport to visit regional prisons
- Family support
- Specific support to children of prisoners
- Carer support groups, grandparents' groups
- Therapeutic group for children and adults
- Mentoring programs for adults and children
- Assistance with keeping children and young people connected to their mum or dad
- Guidance and support
- Telephone counselling
- Workers who will not judge you or your family
- Housing and employment assistance
- Financial support and budgeting
- Emergency accommodation
- Advocacy support
- Guidance about who to talk to within Corrections to get your specific questions answered
- Advice on how to tell your children
- Advice on telling friends and family
- Local prison visit information
- Post-release support
- Helping connect you with other support agencies
- Helping you understand the court system
- Transferring money into an inmate's prison bank account from their regular bank account
- Storing the possessions your family member was arrested with.

**Many carers tell us that the prison chaplain or families of prisoners' support groups know most of the answers to these questions or can help you find out the information that you need.**



**"They were helpful and didn't judge me – it was such a relief. I didn't feel so alone after that."**

# Understanding prison visits



## Visit checklist

The rules vary from State to State so you need to check with your local prison before you visit. You need to find out the following information:

- Do you need to book the visit in advance?
- Which days of the week can you visit?
- What time during the day can you visit?
- How long does the visit go for?
- How many people can visit at once?
- What phone number to call to book a visit?
- What ID do you need to bring to visit an inmate?
- Will we be able to touch or hug our family member?
- Are you allowed to bring in money, cigarettes, food and drink?
- Are there vending machines with cans of drink and snacks?
- What coins do they take?
- Are there lockers for your mobile phone, wallet, jewellery? (It is safer to leave valuables at home.)
- Are you allowed to bring clothes, books, magazines, photos in to give to your family member?

**You may be allowed to bring in some items but you will need to hand them to the officers to check over and they give them to your family member.**

## Child-related questions

- Are you allowed to hug and kiss your family member?
- Can your child use the toilet during the visit?
- Is your child allowed to visit?
- Are you allowed to bring in a baby stroller/pram?
- What ID do you need for your child?
- What age can your child visit by themselves? (Usually 18 years old)
- Is there any play equipment in the visit area for your child?
- Are children provided with an activity kit during the visit?
- Is there any childcare available?



**Remember to check what things you are allowed to take in on a visit.**

**If you take items in that are banned your visit may be stopped.**

The rules vary, so you need to check with your prison before you visit.

## Be prepared for a last-minute change of plans

Inmates can be moved from one location to another without any warning.

It is a good idea to phone up the day before you visit to make sure they are still at that location.

**Even if you have booked a visit weeks ahead, your family member may have been moved to another prison or another area.**

If your family member has no telephone credit, or is still in transport they may not be able to let you know ahead of time about the change.

If your family member has been in trouble they may not be allowed visitors this week.

**Most carers find this out the hard way – after travelling to the prison and going home disappointed, frustrated and angry.**

If you are travelling for many days to visit your family member make sure you phone up to check that they have not been moved to another prison.

Don't wait till you arrive in the final town before you phone up and check.

If they have been moved then you will need to go back home again, but at least you didn't travel the whole distance before you found out the bad news.

**Apart from the expense and the time you have wasted, it is traumatic for you and your child to arrive at the visit area only to be turned away because your family member has been relocated somewhere else.**

## What is lock down?

Lock downs can happen at random times in the prison.

It means that all inmates get locked in their cells.

This can be done for security reasons and there may be no warning for it.

You may arrive at a prison visit only to find out that the prison is in lock down and you won't be able to visit.

## Telling your child the visit has been cancelled

If you do find out that your next planned visit cannot go ahead make sure you have calmed down before you tell your child.

Your calmness will help let your child know that everything is OK.

If you are angry and frustrated at the system when you tell your child he or she may get upset also.

You will need to explain why the visit was cancelled.

Sometimes simply saying "they won't let us see mummy today, but we will try and see mummy next week" is enough information to make sense to your child and reassure them that they will see mum next week.



Imagine if your child has been naughty in the weeks leading up to the visit and you said, "If you don't do so-and-so I will not take you in to see your father."

Then soon after you find out that you cannot go visit their father after all, because he has been relocated to another prison.

Your child will be devastated and feel guilty and blame themselves because they were naughty the week before.

## More on visits

Try to arrive early because each prison is set up differently and there is often more than one visit area and you may get lost.

When you arrive at the visit area you may find yourself in a long queue waiting to fill in forms and then being forced to wait again.

It can be frustrating when you first start to visit, because you do not know what to do, or even if you are in the right queue.

You can ask other families who are waiting in line.

Even if you are shy and nervous find the courage to ask if you are in the correct spot other wise you might get to the front of the line and find out you needed to be in the other queue.

Not only will you be frustrated and upset, but this will reduce the time you can spend with your family member.

You will need to fill in a visitor's form.

Check with an officer behind the counter to find out what you have to do.

## It is also good to talk to other people waiting in line

- It helps to fill the time
- You are showing your child that the people are friendly and this will reassure your child
- You can ask lots of questions and they might know the answers
- It may help you to stay calm
- You may learn helpful tips from other visitors
- You may make a new friend and see them next time you visit
- If there are other children around you can explain to your child that they are also visiting their mum or dad
- Your child may make friends with other children who are nearby.

## How will you be treated during visits

### **Some officers are very friendly and helpful.**

The role of an officer during visits is to make sure nothing illegal gets in or out of prison.

This means that they watch and check everything.

Officers are there to assist you to have a safe visit with your family member.

Most officers are friendly and helpful and treat everyone with respect.

Many carers find that if they are friendly to officers they are more likely to be helpful and nice in return.

You are providing your child with a very good role model.

Your child will see your positive attitude and this may help reassure your child that their mum or dad is being well treated.

Sometimes the officers are very busy, with lots of people waiting and they forget to be friendly.

To help stop your child from getting worried you could say...

"She is very busy today and that is why the officer is not smiling."

"He is very busy today, and has not had time for lunch, that is why the officer was talking loudly."

The system can feel  
like it's set up to  
make your life harder.

# How to tell your child their pa

**Children deserve the truth and have a right to know where their parent has gone.**

Why is it hard to tell your child?

There is no single easy answer to this question.

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**READ more in “The impact of stigma on children”, page 15.**

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Older children and young people can read this section for themselves to help them understand more about what is going on.

Many carers have told us they did not know what to say to their children.

There are many ways to explain to your child that their mum or dad is in prison.

The age of the child and what will make sense to them helps to give you the answer to this difficult question.

You are the best judge of how much information to give to make it easier for your child.

**It is OK to tell your child that you are upset and you do not know all the answers yet.**

Your decision needs to be based on what is best for your child.

You need to think and plan about what you are going to say. You need to have time to answer questions and comfort your child after you have told them.

**When you tell children of any age, just share a little bit of information to start off with and let your child ask more questions in their own time. They need time to take it all in.**

You may need to explain it a few times to your child before they can take it in.

Remember your child might still be in shock and the brain does not remember information very well when someone is in shock.

**Sometimes parents in prison do not want their child to know about their new situation but any child has a right to know where their mum or dad has gone.**

It is simpler to tell your child  
the truth as soon as possible.

# rent is in prison



## Different families, different approaches

### **Every child will try to make sense of what has happened.**

Some families get all the children together so they all find out at same time.

Some families decide to tell each child separately, so that each child can feel comfortable to react and ask the questions that are important to them.

Some families tell older children first.

**Then older brothers and sisters can help you explain to the younger children where mum or dad has gone.**

## When is the best time to tell your child?

You need to tell your child before the first prison visit.

It is simpler to tell your child the truth as soon as possible.

It is important to make your child feel safe and you can help with this by being calm. If you need to, then, take a day or two to calm down yourself before you tell your child.

**It is important that somebody explains to your child in the first few days because otherwise your child may find out accidentally in the playground or from watching TV and freak out if no one is around to reassure them and explain the situation properly.**

Sometimes children already have an idea about what has happened so the quicker you tell them the less confusion there will be.

**Remember, if you do not tell your child the truth, your child will find out, and may not trust you in the future.**



Remember children are very good at listening into conversations and hearing about things even while their parents still think it is a secret.

When your child is older and finds out the truth, they will probably feel betrayed and hurt by your lies.

## Who is the best person to tell your child?

**You could think about inviting your child's favourite adult to be nearby when you tell your child. This can help your child if they want to talk more about it, but may be worried about upsetting you more. This favourite person can be there as a support person for your child.**

If your child was very close to the parent in prison, if it is at all possible, make sure your child can visit soon after being told.

### **If a visit is impossible find out if your child can visit via a Video Visit or telephone call.**

If your child is closest to you then it will be easier for your child if you explain it to them.

If you are a foster carer it may be best for your child's favourite aunty or grandpa or long term family friend to explain it to them.

This will help your child to feel secure.

## Children have the right to know where their parent has gone and deserve the truth

**Children become nervous and confused if the answers you give do not make sense.**

If you decide to lie and make up a story that their parent is away at school or TAFE, gone into the army, working interstate, or in hospital, you need to remember three things:

1. That it can be very hard to keep to the story and your child will notice any changes in the story and become confused and might start asking questions that are difficult to answer.
2. **That when your child is older and finds out the truth, they will probably feel betrayed and hurt by your lies.**
3. That as life goes along your child may overhear a conversation you have with a friend, a phone call or something in the playground, and your child may be shocked and not trust you for a long time because they found out that you did not tell the truth.
4. Your child may accidentally find out from a school friend that their parent is in prison and be very surprised and hurt to learn that you haven't told them the truth yourself.

Children can deal with the truth but  
find it difficult to deal with lies.

## Ten important things your child needs to understand

When you tell your child you need to make sure that you explain ten things to them during this conversation.

1. It is not their fault – they didn't do anything wrong.
2. Their mum or dad still loves them.
3. Their mum or dad does not want to be separated from them.
4. Their mum or dad would come home if they could.
5. How often they will be able to see their mum or dad – every few weeks or not until they are moved closer.
6. Some things will change and they will be living with aunty, grandma or foster carer.
7. It is OK to still love and miss their mum or dad.
8. It is OK to be angry or sad sometimes.
9. When children make mistakes or break the rules there are different punishments such as not being allowed to watch TV, play with friends for a weekend.
10. When adults make mistakes or break the law, the punishment might be to pay a fine or be sent to prison for a while.

## Telling older children and young people

**Older children will need more information and will have many questions after you have told them.**

Sometimes they already know that their parent breaks the law. Some of these older kids have been living in fear – waiting for mum or dad to be arrested.

**Provide them with the basic facts and allow your child to set the pace about how much information they want.**

If you do not know the answer to “how long will mum or dad be in prison for?”, then tell your child honestly or they may resent you for not telling them the truth.

Your child needs to feel like they can trust you right now.

**Children can deal with the truth but find it difficult to deal with lies.**

It's okay to miss their mum or dad.

It's okay to be angry and sad sometimes.

## Suggestions about what to say to older children and young people

Answer their questions as honestly as you can.

“Dad was arrested for shoplifting.”

“Mum was caught scoring drugs last night.”

“The police came to break up the fight and your dad was arrested – your mum is OK. She went to hospital last night they put her broken arm in a plaster. She is back home now asleep.”

“I don’t know how long dad will be in prison, but we can go visit him next week.”

“I don’t know how long mum will be in prison, but she is too far away so we cannot go and visit her.”

“You will be able to talk to her on the phone or via video link up unless they move her closer or you can write her a letter.”

## Telling young children with your actions and words

Be careful about how you act when you tell your child.

**If you look upset, or tell your child with a harsh tone of voice, your child will think they did something wrong regardless of what you say.**

It might be hard, but speak to your child with a smile on your face.

**Anything you can do to reassure your child will help your child to cope well with the news.**

Each step of the way reassure your child that they did nothing wrong and nothing bad is going to happen to them.

If they ask too many questions you can just say that they aren’t old enough to understand yet.

Younger children can understand the basic idea of right and wrong.

**Even a three-year-old understands that if you make a mistake or break the rules you may be punished.**

It is OK to cry a little bit together after you tell your child.

**It is good to hug and cuddle your child while you are explaining it to them.**

Be careful how you act when you tell your child.



## Suggestions about what to say to young children

Answer their questions as honestly as you can.

You could say:

“She stole something.”

“He hurt someone.”

“Daddy took something that did not belong to him, it was wrong.”

“Because daddy broke the rules he is being punished.”

“Daddy has to go and live in a special house for 3 summers (or 3 birthdays) and when you are 6 years old, then, daddy will come home.”

“Mummy has had to go and live somewhere else because she broke the rules and is being punished.”

**It is important for your child to know basic information.**

## Building your child’s emotional connection to their mum or dad

The next section of this survival guide explains when children are allowed to visit their mum or dad there are clear emotional benefits to a child’s wellbeing.

**Throughout this survival guide there are many tips and hints to help you understand how to support your child.**

There are a range of fun activities you and your child can do at home to help your child feel connected to their mum or dad as time goes by.

These activities can give your child an outlet or a focus for the emotional journey they are on.

These activities are also a very good way for your child to welcome their mum or dad back home.

These activities are also a good way to break the ice when your child’s mum or dad come home.

These activities can act as a trip down memory lane later on when your child starts to reconnect with their mum or dad.

Children in foster care can feel very isolated and alone but these activities can help children feel hopeful that one day they will be reunited with their mum or dad.

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**READ all about these activities in ‘How to cope with special days and birthdays’ on page 53.**

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# It is important for children to visit their mum or dad

Your child needs contact with the parent in prison for their relationship to continue in a meaningful way.

It also helps the child adjust to and heal from the separation.

Your child will get the most positive effects out of face-to-face visits.

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"Children need to know that their parent has not left their life completely, and that they still have a significant place in their parent's life. Maintaining meaningful contact with a child during a period of incarceration can assist in the reunification process with that child once the parent is released (Standing Committee on Social Issues 1997, p.65)."

– Woodward, 2003:16

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Visits can help your child adjust to the loss of their mum or dad.

## How children benefit from seeing their mum or dad

**Children have the right to see their parent if they want to.**

**Children need to be able to say that they do not want to see their mum or dad.**

Your child may change his/her mind later on.

Visits can help your child adjust to the loss of their mum or dad.

This can help your child stay on track and it makes it much easier for your child to adjust when their mum or dad comes home later on.

Regular visits help give your child a routine and sense of security that they can continue to see their mum or dad.

This can help heal your child and stop them from feeling all alone and abandoned by their mum or dad.

**The officers have a duty to keep children and adult visitors safe during visits.**

If you make a big effort to support your child, we find most children adjust quickly to the strangeness of visiting a prison.

It is often more confusing and upsetting for children to never see their parent.

**The decision to visit should be based on your own family situation and how close your child was to their parent.**

If your partner is in prison but they are not your child's parent then it may not be helpful for your child to visit them.

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**READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' that you can contact for more information and get advice based on your own situation, page 84.**

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# How visits can reassure and help your child to heal >

There are many reasons why it is helpful to your child's wellbeing to visit their parent in prison.

**Most children, of any age, have many questions about where their parent has gone and why they have not come home.**

Children have seen movies or TV shows about prisons or been told things by other children and if they do not get to visit their mum or dad most children will try to imagine how their mum or dad are living.

**Children will also imagine how their mum or dad are being treated as they try and make sense of their world.**

Truthful answers help stop children from worrying and imagining that things that are worse than they really are.

**It is common for a child's sense of security to be interrupted when a parent disappears and this can result in fear and distrust of others.**

Visits allow children to ask these questions, get answers and see for themselves.

**Children are reassured by seeing with their own two eyes and this can help them to sleep well knowing that mum or dad are safe and still love them.**

## Children are reassured by seeing their parent

Children need direct, first-hand information about their parent. They:

- Learn that mum or dad are safe and well, and they are being well treated and looked after
- Are relieved that their mum or dad is eating good food and they look healthy
- Are reassured that their parent misses them and loves them
- Learn about the work mum or dad does in prison, who they share a room with and that they are able to watch TV after dinner
- Learn that mum or dad love and miss them because they play, hug and cuddle them
- Are reassured when mum or dad talks to them and helps to silence the child's fears and anxieties by explaining that they didn't leave because their child did something wrong
- Are reassured when mum or dad tells them they would come home right away if they could
- Can confront their mum or dad and give their parent a chance to explain their actions and take responsibility for their crime and apologise for disrupting their lives and sense of security
- Ask their parent directly about when they are going to come home
- Are reassured by their parent explaining to them that they didn't do anything wrong
- Are reassured by their parent explaining that they did something wrong and that's why they are in prison – he or she is being punished
- Can start to resolve some of their anger and frustration that they have stored up against their mum or dad
- Are able to discuss and share what is going on in their life, with school, friends, family, a birthday party they attended, a recent school excursion to the zoo
- Are able to share how their older brother helped them with their homework, just like their mum used to.

## Visits help break the sense of isolation



For foster children who desperately need to feel secure, these visits are the only real contact they have with another family member.

This ongoing connection with their parent builds children's self esteem particularly when at school these children compare their family situation to others and are reminded that they don't have a mum or dad at home.

When children regularly visit their mum or dad they are reassured that they are not so different after all, they have a mum or dad but their parent is absent.

If their parent was able to come home right away they would.

We recommend  
weekly visits for the  
first three weeks.

## How often should your child visit their mum or dad?

It is important for your child to see their mum or dad regularly.

**If your child had a close and loving connection with their mum or dad in prison, then, if it is practical, we recommend strongly that your child should see their mum or dad regularly.**

When your child and their mum or dad are first separated we recommend weekly visits for the first three weeks.

**After three weeks we recommend visiting less often, because your child needs to be able to do normal things and not spend every weekend in prison visit areas seeing their mum or dad.**

In between visits phone calls, sending letters or cards are a good way to keep up the contact and allow your child to feel connected to their mum or dad.

**It is important to ask your child how often they want to see their mum or dad.**

Your child also needs to be able to stay connected to their old life before their mum or dad went to prison.

It is important for your child to still see friends, go out on weekends and play sport like they used to before mum or dad went to prison.

**If you want your child to continue with activities but you can no longer afford them, ask a support group to help you out – they may pay for sporting club fees, soccer boots or dance classes so your child does not miss out.**

If your child spends every weekend visiting the prison they will lose contact with their community.

When a child stops doing their usual activities and other things they enjoy it can damage their sense of self and confidence.

**You have a responsibility to balance making sure that your child is able to see their mum or dad with your child's need to have friends, interests, hobbies. In short, a life!**

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READ 'Deciding how often to visit', page 22.

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**If your child is not settling down in the first few weeks after mum or dad went to prison then they may need to see mum or dad more often.**

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We recommend you get extra advice from a worker or counsellor to make sure extra visits are the answer.

If visiting the parent is not helping your child to heal their emotions, sometimes other therapy is needed before visits will be successful.

**Maybe your child will benefit from talking to and playing with other children in the same situation. Check if your local prisoner support organisation offers group work, drop-in or childcare programs.**

**Contact SHINE for Kids**  
**NSW/ACT (02) 9714 3000**  
**Victoria (03) 9687 5200**




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READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' for contact numbers, page 82.

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## **In some prisons there are special visits and activities for children**

**During school holidays there may be special days with long visits for children only.**

In NSW SHINE for Kids Child and Family Centres are often close to the prison so that your child can spend some time playing with other children in the same situation.

Ask your prison if they have visitors centre where you can drop in to get assistance for your child.

**Child and Family Centres offer children of all ages a chance to play, make new friends and have fun.**

Some prisons offer all-day visits for young children to spend time with their mum.

Some prisons offer programs focused on maintaining the inmate's relationship with their children.



**Children find it hard to sit still for long periods of time.**

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**When visiting a prison the first time it's a good idea to ring ahead and find out what's on offer before you get there.**

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## How can I get help if I cannot take my child to see their parent in prison?

There are many reasons why you may need assistance to help your child keep up regular contact with their parent.

Some carers do not want to see the family member that is in prison.

Some families live too far away from the prison to visit regularly.

Some carers are working during visit times.

Some families cannot afford the expense.

### **There are four common answers to this question.**

- You can ask friends or family to take your child to visit for you.
- You can ask a support agency to take your child to visit for you.
- You can ask if the prison can offer any financial support to cover expenses.
- You can ask if the prison offers Video Visits so you do not have to drive hundreds of kilometres to reach the prison, but can visit via video technology from a local centre – Video Visits are a great way to visit State to State.

## When is it not good for my child to see their mum or dad in prison?

Most children are reassured by seeing their parent but in some special cases it is better not to let your child visit their mum or dad.

You may need to get expert advice to help you make the decision.

If you are unsure, contact your local support group for prisoners and their families and they will be able to give you advice based on your own situation.

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**READ 'Australian Directory of Support Groups for Prisoners and their Families' for contact numbers, page 82.**

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Here are some reasons why it may not be good for you child to visit their mum or dad:

- Sometimes there are legal reasons why your child cannot see their mum or dad
- If your child and the parent in prison did not see each other very often before going to prison
- If your child is scared of their parent in prison
- If you know your child's parent has been bashed up or injured and has bruises showing, then it is a good idea not to let your child visit because they will worry and be scared for their mum or dad.

Sometimes there are very good reasons for children not to see their mum or dad in prison.

**If you have a partner with whom you have only lived for a short amount of time before they go to prison, and that partner is not your child's parent, sometimes it is better that you do not take your child to visit because they are unlikely to be suffering from strong emotional reactions now that your partner is in prison.**

They may start to react emotionally if they are taken into a strange visit area to meet a person who is not very close to them.

**Think about if you are confusing your need to see your partner and not thinking about the needs of your child.**

You can visit your partner regularly but leave your child at home.



In some locations SHINE for Kids Child and Family Centres are able to offer childminding while you visit your partner. SHINE for Kids also provides art, craft and diversionary activities for children visiting parents in the visiting areas of several NSW, ACT and Victorian prisons. Check with SHINE for Kids for more information.

A list of all our locations and contact details in NSW, ACT and Victoria is on page 87.

## Contact by letter and phone

Your child can have contact with their mum or dad by personal visits, letters, or phone calls.

In between visits, telephone calls and letters can help bridge the gap and will help your child feel like their mum or dad is thinking about them and loves them.

This can help make your child feel secure about the future.

**Sometimes the children have so little to say during a telephone conversation that it seems that the conversation is meaningless, yet hearing the parent's voice, even for a short time, may be more reassuring than it seems.**

There are things you can do to help make the phone call or letter more interesting.

This can help your child to feel close to and loved by their mum or dad in prison.

You can help by reminding your child's parent about news and special dates so that they can talk about the event with their child.

It is easy for a parent in prison to lose track of the date because they are separated from normal things and routine.

When a parent forgets to talk about a special date children can feel disappointed and upset.

**Mail from a parent in prison is important to children.**

A postcard acknowledging an accomplishment or remembering a birthday or holiday, means a lot to all children.

Your child has little else to connect them to their parents, so mail from their mum or dad is important.

Your child can also write letters to their mum or dad.

If they are not good at writing then maybe your child could send a picture.

# Making visits positive and happy

## All about visits

**Children benefit emotionally from seeing their mum or dad on a regular basis.**

**Visits will usually reassure and nurture your child and help with healing the pain they have been living with.**

Visiting can be stressful and tiring for carers and kids. It takes a lot of effort to make the visit enjoyable.

In some prison visit areas there are activity kits and play equipment for children, but most do not have anything to make visits enjoyable for children.

If you are visiting behind glass – on a box visit – then your child may be upset because they cannot touch mum or dad.

It is often a long hard day with families travelling by bus and train or many kilometres to get to the prison.

**When you arrive, everything will seem strange: big gates and high fences, concrete everywhere you look, locked doors, uniforms, sniffer dogs, family members dressed in strange clothes, metal detectors, people queued up, limited privacy during the visit itself.**

You need to help prepare your child as best you can, by being honest and describing what will go on.

**Perhaps consider going alone to visit the first time so that you can share your experience with your child before they visit for the first time.**

Again, be honest with your child.

This way your child will be less frightened about the visit because they have an idea of what to expect and this can help make sense of it all.

## Getting ready to visit – a few days before

Before you visit you can show young children photos of their parent and explain that in two days time you are going to the big house to visit mummy or daddy.

This gives your child a chance to get excited about seeing their parent.

You can ask them to think about what special news they have to tell their mum or dad.

You can give your child ideas about what to talk about with mum or dad.

Ideas are subjects such as:

- That recent trip to the 'mini golf'
- The name of their new pet
- The name of their new 'best friend'
- That great game of footy in the park last week
- Getting 6 out of 10 for your maths test.

You can help reassure your child that their parent does want to hear all their news so your child does not need to worry about making mum or dad upset when they find out what they have been missing out on.

**Some children need to talk about it for a few weeks before they are ready to visit.**

## Video Visits

Using technology to keep in touch is a good way to stay connected with your family member when you are interstate or overseas.

Check with the prison whether this is available and then check with SHINE for Kids that we can assist you with this service.

## Making the travel interesting

You can explain how you will travel there (that it will take two hours to get there and you will go on a bus and a train.)

Try to make the journey interesting if you are travelling a long distance maybe play Hangman, Noughts and Crosses or “I spy with my little eye” or talk about the scenery whizzing past.

You can start to tell your child about what to expect and the visit rules.

Try and make that time enjoyable also and tell your child that they will see mummy or daddy soon.

Explain what the sniffer dogs are there for.

Point out other children in the queue and explain that they are also going to see someone they love.

**At the end of the visit try and leave the room to go home before their mum or dad is due to go back – it is easier for your child to leave first.**

## Describe to your child what to expect

The parent in prison can help by describing how it all works to your child over the phone or by letter before the first visit.

Visit rules do vary so you need to find out from your local prison.

**It is best if you have gone to visit by yourself first, so you can see how it all works, ask officers questions and then explain it to your child before their first visit.**

Explain to your child:

- What the visit room looks like
- What mum or dad will be wearing
- What the officers wear – a special uniform – often blue
- That you will go through a metal detector
- That you put all your things in a locker
- That you will have to queue for a long time to get to your turn
- If your child is wearing a baseball cap or has toys in their pocket these will need to go in the locker
- That if the sniffer dogs are there your child is not allowed to touch or pat the dog
- That sometimes chairs and tables are bolted to the floor.

**Make sure there are no drugs or weapons on you or your child when you visit.**

It is best if you have gone to visit  
by yourself first, so you can explain it to  
your child before their first visit.

## Some common visit rules to be aware of

Find out from your local prison what the rules are.

Sometimes your child can give mum or dad a kiss and a hug when you arrive and leave; sometimes this will not be possible.

**Sometimes mum or dad will be in a small room sitting behind glass and this can be confusing for a child. You can help reassure your child by telling them that their parent loves you very much, but during this visit they are not allowed to hug or kiss you.**

Sometimes your child is allowed to sit on mum or dad's knee during the visit.

If mum or dad are called away during the visit your child needs to sit quietly waiting for them to come back.

If there is a jungle gym for your child to play on, usually you or their parent must be standing beside the equipment while they play.

Sometimes there is a toy cupboard and your child can get one toy to play with.

Your child needs to do what the prison officers ask of them.

Your child is not allowed to run around or scream or the man in uniform will come over and tell your child to stop.

Your child may request their mum or dad to get food from the vending machine but often the inmate is not allowed to.

Sometimes if you buy lollies or chips you will have to break open the packet and leave them on the table, and not walk around with them.

## Some suggestions for telling your child about the visit rules

“We will need to wait quietly in line to hand in our forms.”

“We will sit down and wait until it is our turn – even if we get bored.”

“Sometimes you have to go to the toilet before the visit starts.”

“Security sometimes checks your pockets, under your collar, and in the cuff of your pants or shirt.”

“There will be lots of people there and it may be very noisy and busy.”



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**Remember there are lots of support services out there to help you and your children get through all these extra challenges.**

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People who  
can help you  
on your journey

# Australian Directory of Support for their Families

<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>	SHINE for Kids Co-operative Ltd
	Prisoners Aid NSW
	Community Restorative Centre (CRC)
	Prison Fellowship Australia – NSW
	Justice Action (Prison Issues/Reform)
	Yulawirri Nurai Indigenous Association Inc.
	Glebe House Limited
	Guthrie House Co-op Ltd (NSW)
	Rainbow Lodge
	Link-Up NSW
	Link-Up NSW – St Marys
	Bundajalung Tribal Society (Namatjira Haven)
	New Horizons Enterprises Ltd
	Western Housing (youth housing under age 21 in Western Sydney)
	KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc.
<b>QUEENSLAND</b>	Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Inc. (ACRO)
	ACRO Home Assist Secure
	Sisters Inside Inc.
	Prison Transport
	Prison Fellowship Australia – QLD Council
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>	Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Services in South Australia (OARS)
	Prison Fellowship Australia – SA
<b>VICTORIA</b>	SHINE for Kids Co-operative Ltd
	Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO)
	Whitelion Incorporated
	Australian Community Support Organisation
	Brosnan Centre Victoria
	Jesuit Social Services
	CONCERN Australia
	Prison Fellowship Australia – Victoria
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>	Outcare Prisoners support service in Western Australia
	Prison Fellowship Australia – WA
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY</b>	Prison Fellowship Australia – NT
	Darwin Prisoners Aid Association
	Prisoners Aid & Rehabilitation Association of Alice Springs Inc.
<b>TASMANIA</b>	Whitelion
	Tasmanian Association of Prisoner Support Services (TAPSS)
	XCELL Salvation Army Prison Support Service
<b>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</b>	Prisoners Aid ACT
<b>CORRECTIVE SERVICES</b>	Corrective Services NSW
	Corrections Victoria
	Queensland Corrective Services
	ACT Corrective Services
	SA Department for Corrective Services
	WA Department of Corrective Services
	Northern Territory Corrective Services
	Corrective Services Tasmania

# Part Groups for Prisoners and

(02) 9714 3000	www.shineforkids.org.au	nsw@shineforkids.org.au
(02) 9737 8822		c.baird@commander360.com
(02) 9288 8700	www.crcnsw.org.au	info@crcnsw.org.au
(02) 9896 1255	www.pfi.org.au/nsw	nsw.office@prisonfellowship.org.au
(02) 9283 0123	www.justiceaction.org.au	ja@justiceaction.org.au
(02) 4973 5560		yulawirrin@optusnet.com.au
(02) 9566 4630	www.glebehouse.org.au	moveout@bigpond.net.au
(02) 9564 5977	www.guthriehouse.com	info@guthriehouse.com
(02) 9660 7695		rainbow1@bigpond.net.au
1800 624 332, (02) 4759 1911	www.linkupnsw.org.au	linkup@nsw.link-up.org.au
(02) 8840 1006		
(02) 6621 6992, (02) 6628 1098	www.namatjirahaven.com.au	bundajalung@nor.com.au
(02) 9490 0000, 0423 770 250	www.newhorizons.net.au	
(02) 9637 9511	www.westernhousingforyouth.net	info@why.net.au
(02) 8782 0300	www.kari.com.au	Use website's contact form
(07) 3262 6001 (head office)	www.acro.com.au	acro@acro.com.au
(07) 3862 2500		acro_has@acro.com.au
(07) 3844 5066	www.sistersinside.com.au	admin@sistersinside.com.au
1800 334 379	www.prisontransport.com.au	Use website's contact form
(07) 3399 3190	www.pfi.org.au/qld	qld.office@prisonfellowship.org.au
(08) 8218 0700	www.oars.org.au	oars@oars.org.au, services@oars.org.au
(08) 8272 0323	www.pfi.org.au/sa	sa.office@prisonfellowship.org.au
(03) 9687 5200	www.shineforkids.org.au	vic@shineforkids.org.au
(03) 9605 1900, 1800 049 871	www.vacro.org.au	info@vacro.org.au
(03) 8354 0800, 1300 669 600	www.whitelion.asn.au	whitelion@whitelion.asn.au
	www.acso.org.au	Use website's contact form
(03) 9387 1233	www.jss.org.au	brosnan@jss.org.au
(03) 9421 7600	www.jss.org.au/programmes/com_justice.html	jss@jss.org.au
(03) 9416 1104	www.concernaustralia.org.au	info@concernaustralia.org.au
(03) 9848 1224	www.pfi.org.au/vic, www.extraordinarylives.org.au	vic.office@prisonfellowship.org.au
(08) 6263 8622	www.outcare.com.au	outcare@outcare.com.au
(08) 9228 4649	www.pfi.org.au/wa	wa.office@prisonfellowship.org.au
(08) 8955 1202	www.pfi.org.au/nt	eharland@bigpond.net.au
(08) 8981 5928, (08) 8927 3777		
(08) 8953 3054	www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au	
(03) 6234 5030, (03) 6331 2900	www.whitelion.asn.au	whitelion@whitelion.asn.au
(03) 6225 5042	www.freewebs.com/australianprisonfoundation	tapssinc@bigpond.com
(03) 6234 1870		prisonsupportservice@aus.salvationarmy.org
0450 960 896	www.paact.org.au	Use website's contact form
Head Office (02) 8346 1333	www.dcs.nsw.gov.au	Use website's contact form
(03) 8684 0000 1300 365 111 (regional callers)	www.justice.vic.gov.au	
(07) 3227 6055, (07) 3227 7111	www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au	Use website's contact form
(02) 6207 0888	www.cs.act.gov.au	
(08) 8226 9000	www.corrections.sa.gov.au	dcs@sa.gov.au
(08) 9264 1711, 131217	www.correctiveservices.wa.gov.au	Use website's contact form
(08) 8935 7466	www.correctionalservices.nt.gov.au	ntcsinquiries@nt.gov.au
(03) 6233 3201	www.justice.tas.gov.au/correctiveservices	correctiveservices@justice.tas.gov.au

# About SHINE for Kids

## Our Vision

**Building futures where kids can “shine”.**

## Our Purpose

**SHINE for Kids works with and for young Australians affected by family member involvement in the criminal justice system. We support them and help create hope, we inspire them to reach their potential, we nurture their growth and we empower them to succeed.**

## Our Core Values

### Child-focused

- We will focus on the best interests of children and young people at all times
- We will consult children and young people and consider their issues

### Integrity

- We will treat people consistently and with respect
- We will respect confidentiality
- We will act lawfully and ethically
- We will fulfil commitments we have made

### Empowerment

- We will provide children and young people, their families and carers with the necessary tools to achieve each child's fullest potential
- We will encourage people to accept responsibility and be accountable for their actions
- We will celebrate and recognise achievements, innovation and initiative

## Our services

SHINE for Kids is a not-for-profit organisation supporting children, young people and their families affected by parental involvement in the criminal justice system by providing a range of proven programs that focus on building resilience in children to give them the foundations for a healthy future.

The services offered by SHINE for Kids are based on the question: “What is in the best interest of the child?” They have been developed since 1982 through working exclusively with children and families affected by parental involvement in the criminal justice system.

Our programs employ qualified, experienced staff and are generously supported by volunteers who have undergone specialised training and security checks.

SHINE for Kids provides a range of programs across NSW, Victoria and the ACT, and supports families across Australia via its Video Visits and by telephone.

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**The SHINE for Kids programs and services vary between Child and Family Centres and from prison to prison. Check our website [www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au) for details.**

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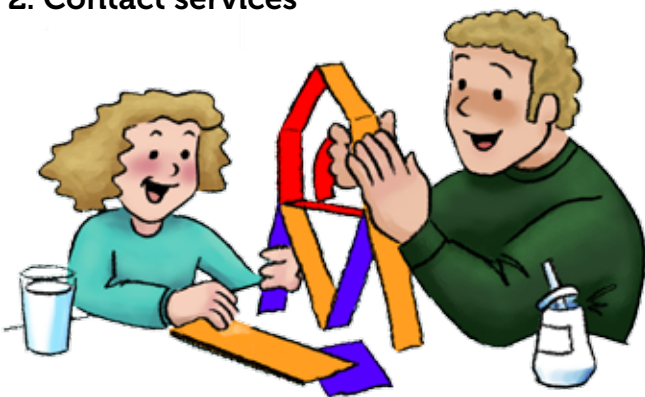


## 1. Child and family activities

SHINE for Kids provides a range of initiatives aimed at reducing the isolation that children face due to having a parent in the criminal justice system. We allow children an opportunity to feel supported, have fun and enjoy visiting their mum or dad in prison with:

- Prison Invisits Program
- Child and Family Centres
- Childminding
- Children's activities

## 2. Contact services



These services focus on building and maintaining positive relationships between the child and their imprisoned parent, and assistance to succeed educationally and reach their potential.

Providing individual support to a child can include:

- Children's Supported Transport Service – to visit their parent in prison
- Child/Parent Activity Days held within prisons
- Video Visits – keeping families connected over long distances with video conferencing
- Child and family support
- 'Story Time' – recording mum or dad reading a story to send to their children.



## 3. Community programs

- Referral services connecting children and families with local services to meet their needs
- Advice and support

## 4. Group Work programs

Group Work focuses on children and young people and their carers by providing opportunities to interact together in structured, fun activities. These help reduce their isolation, build resilience and develop positive communication, as well as learning and applying strategies to effect change. Group Work includes:

- Peer support groups held in the community or in schools
- School Holiday Outings
- Daytrips
- Carers' groups

## 5. Mentoring programs for young people

These programs offer a child or young person consistency, stability and healthy options for dealing with life through a supportive, caring and non-judgmental relationship with an adult mentor.

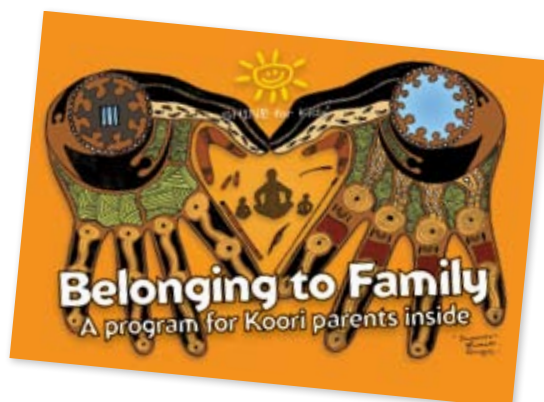


In the community mentoring, trained volunteers accompany their mentee fortnightly in activities and events which enhance their development and self esteem.

This program also supports young people in the juvenile justice system for a successful return to the community.

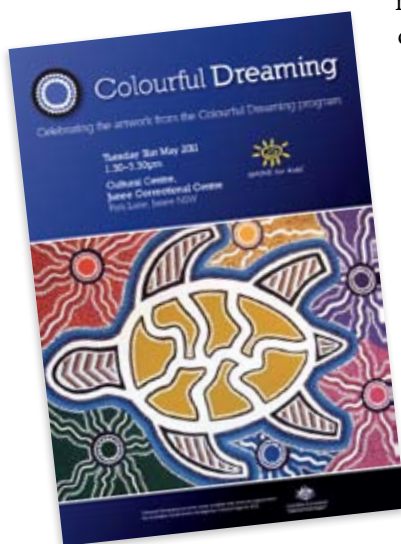
## 6. Aboriginal cultural programs

SHINE for Kids' programs for Aboriginal parents in prison and their children and families are designed to strengthen their sense of connection to their culture, families and community.



'**Belonging to Family**' is for Koori parents in the Mid North Correctional Centre and their families. We help them to become the best parent and partner they can be, with a closer, healthier bond with their kids. We also support them during and after release to help stay out of prison and be with their family.

'**Colourful Dreaming**' allows Aboriginal children with a parent in prison to explore personal challenges and increase their sense of cultural identity through artwork, culminating in a travelling exhibition. Contact is promoted between the children, their imprisoned fathers and Wiradjuri Elders. The program is conducted in the Riverina community and Junee Correctional Centre.



## 7. Research and advocacy

SHINE for Kids believes strongly in giving children of prisoners a voice.

Research and advocacy provide the opportunity to share SHINE for Kids' knowledge, experience and expertise of working with children and families of prisoners with the sector and community, enabling best practice and the reduction of stigma and isolation faced by these children and families.

SHINE for Kids undertakes the following:

- Research projects that record the challenges and needs facing the children of prisoners
- Advocacy on behalf of families of prisoners
- Community education seminars to support workers in working with children and families of prisoners and to raise awareness of the issues that face children and families of prisoners
- Providing solutions to ensure that children of prisoners are not disadvantaged
- Informing and engaging with policy makers
- Developing resources which support children and families of prisoners
- Providing expert advice to other service providers
- Community education seminars.



# Contact us or visit our Centres

## New South Wales

[nsw@shineforkids.org.au](mailto:nsw@shineforkids.org.au)

Location	Street address	Postal address	Phone	Fax
Silverwater and head office	Silverwater Correctional Complex Holker Street, Silverwater	PO Box 67 Ermington NSW 1700	(02) 9714 3000	(02) 9714 3030
Parklea	Parklea Correctional Complex 66 Sentry Drive, Parklea	PO Box 6148 Blacktown NSW 2148	(02) 9933 7900	(02) 9933 7977
Windsor	John Morony Correctional Complex The Northern Road, Berkshire Park	PO Box 5804 South Windsor NSW 2756	(02) 4573 3900	(02) 4573 3933
Kariong	Frank Baxter Juvenile Justice Centre (worker located) 21 Kangoo Road, Somersby	PO Box 702 Kariong NSW 2250	(02) 4340 3836	(02) 4340 3862
Bathurst	64 Vittoria Street (Mitchell Highway), Bathurst	PO Box 2105 Bathurst NSW 2795	(02) 6328 9900	(02) 6328 9933
Cessnock	Cessnock Correctional Centre 1 Alunga Avenue, Cessnock	1 Alunga Avenue Cessnock NSW 2325	(02) 4993 6800	(02) 4993 6888
Wellington	6703 Mudgee Road, Wellington	6703 Mudgee Road Wellington NSW 2820	(02) 6845 5000	(02) 6845 5055
Junee	Junee Correctional Centre Park Lane, Junee	c/- Junee Correctional Centre Park Lane, Junee	(02) 6934 6000	(02) 6934 6006
Kempsey	370 Aldavilla Road, Aldavilla	PO Box 3694 West Kempsey NSW 2140	(02) 6561 3800	(02) 6561 3833

## Australian Capital Territory

[act@shineforkids.org.au](mailto:act@shineforkids.org.au)

Location	Street address	Postal address	Phone	Fax
Canberra	Alexander Maconochie Centre (worker located) Monaro Highway, Hume	PO Box 7248 Canberra ACT 2610	(02) 6207 2572	(02) 9714 3030 (via head office)

## Victoria

[victoria@shineforkids.org.au](mailto:victoria@shineforkids.org.au)

Location	Street address	Postal address	Phone	Fax
Melbourne office	Level 1, 38–40 Byron Street, Footscray	PO Box 2645 Footscray VIC 3011	(03) 9688 2900	(03) 9688 2977
Lara	Barwon Prison 1140 Bacchus Marsh Road, Lara			
Ravenhall	Dame Phyllis Frost Centre 101–201 Riding Boundary Road, Ravenhall			
	Metropolitan Remand Centre Middle Road, Ravenhall			

# Feedback

## We welcome your comments

Feedback is always welcome in relation to any aspect of SHINE for Kids. It is treated as strictly confidential and can be addressed to:

**CEO, SHINE for Kids**  
**PO Box 67**  
**Ermington NSW 1700**  
**phone (02) 9714 3000**  
**fax (02) 9714 3030**  
**[ceo@shineforkids.org.au](mailto:ceo@shineforkids.org.au)**



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It's hard enough for adults to cope with all the changes and emotions they experience when a family member is in prison.

We all need to remember that it is often even harder for children and young people.



This book is a survival guide for families when a parent first goes to prison. Children and their carers often feel very alone as they struggle to face a variety of difficulties. This book offers insights to help guide and inform carers of children of prisoners about the different issues children and young people can face on a daily basis, and provides suggestions and ideas to help carers give their families the best opportunity for a positive future.

[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)



SHINE for Kids®

support - hope - inspire - nurture - empower