



## Children with a Parent in Prison

We do not know exactly how many children are affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales each year, as no one collects any data either at court or when a parent arrives in custody. However, it is estimated that **approximately 300,000<sup>1</sup> children are impacted each year**, including upwards of 17,000 who lose their mother – most likely their primary carer – to imprisonment<sup>2</sup>.

### Some facts:

- Children of imprisoned parents receive no support from the state.
- 95% of children whose mother is imprisoned will have to move out of their home, and only 9% will be cared for by their fathers<sup>3</sup>.
- Those who take on children's care are neither assessed for suitability nor do they receive financial help or any other form of support, despite the fact that there is a significant cost to caring for an additional child or children, and not only financial.
- As the children are emotionally and physically distressed due to the separation from their parents the children often need 'intensive parenting' which carers struggle to do when their role as carers for children in need is not recognised officially.
- These carers – family members who have taken on these children – may need to give up work in order to care for the children, and if in receipt of benefits are not classed as 'carers' and are therefore pressured to make themselves available for work in order to continue receiving benefits without which they would lose their housing and their income.
- According to research children whose primary carers are imprisoned often have to move home, carer and school in addition to losing their parent. Their entire life is disrupted and yet the children are not identified as children in need, and no service is allocated extra funding for them. Many move to areas where there is no school place available for them and because they do not fall within a group which is given priority eg 'looked after children' they spend time out of education.

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<sup>1</sup> National Information Centre on Children of Offenders, 2020. (Available [here](#))

<sup>2</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019. *The Right To Family Life: Children Whose Mothers Are In Prison*, p3. (Available [here](#))

<sup>3</sup> Baroness Jean Corston, 2007. *A Review Of Women With Particular Vulnerabilities In The Criminal Justice System*. (Available [here](#)).

- Often children experience great difficulty in accessing prison visits to their parents due to the distances at which mothers in particular are held from their locality, and the cost of making the journeys. 1 in 5 women is held more than 100 miles away from her home<sup>4</sup> and there is not proper provision made to uphold children's rights to contact with their parents.
- It is not unusual for children whose parent is imprisoned to develop emotional and behavioural problems after their separation from their parent.
- Globally, research has found that children who experience parental imprisonment as a child are more likely than their counterparts to die before the age of 65, to have mental health problems, to earn less than their counterparts as adults, and to stop education at a younger age than is the norm<sup>5</sup>.
- They are often children who are already experiencing multiple disadvantages, much like children who are before the court in care proceedings under section 31 of the Children Act, and yet when their parent is removed there is absolutely no provision for them.

During the Covid-19 pandemic there have been particular issues for children since social visits were stopped. Video visits were not put in place to mitigate the loss for children in all prisons and so children have gone for several months without contact with their parents. Although phone calls have continued these are difficult to access for pre-verbal and disabled children.

## What can I do to help?

Pray:

- For those in leadership to find ways to keep people safe but also to allow children to see their parents in prison again.
- For the government to act on the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee who are concerned that children's right to family life is being breached by the current regime.
- For children who are missing their mums and dads.
- For parents and carers taking care of those children who can't answer the question, 'When will I see my Daddy again?'
- For prisoners who are struggling without contact from their families, particularly those who are separated from very young children who may not remember them when contact is re-established.

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<sup>4</sup> Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009. *Short Study on Women Offenders*. (Available [here](#))

<sup>5</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019. *The Right To Family Life: Children Whose Mothers Are In Prison*, p6-7. (Available [here](#))

## Act

### 1. Write to your MP.

Below are a list of recommendations more generally, but if you want to focus the letter on the current situation, ask them to ask the Government to ensure that all children at least have access to weekly video visits with their parents, and that social visits between children and parents are a priority.

You can also write to:

- The Minister for Children and Families : Vicky Ford MP
- The Minister for Prisons and Probation: Lucy Frazer MP
- The Lord Chancellor : Robert Buckland QC MP

### 2. Support the Angel Tree programme

*Angel Tree* gives parents in prison the opportunity to send a Christmas present to their children. Christmas is especially difficult for prisoners and their children.



*Angel Tree* lessens the devastation experienced as a result of parental absence by not only helping families connect and build relationships, but by providing children with much-needed joy.

Prison Fellowship began planning early in the year for Angel Tree 2020, to ensure that no matter what the current restrictions still in place, thousands of children will still be able to receive a gift from their parent in prison, bringing joy on Christmas morning, and strengthening that vital relationship.

It costs £20 for each gift. You can make a donation on our website, or organise a fundraiser at your church or with your community.

### 3. Raise awareness in your local area

Statistically there will be a child with a parent in prison, or who has experienced parental imprisonment, in most schools in the UK, but most people have never thought about the challenges these children face. By becoming informed and talking with your friends, neighbours and churches you can start to open up the conversation so that they no longer remain invisible and forgotten.

## Possible points for letter writing to your MP or other person in leadership

1. Upon reception into custody either on remand or when sentenced, there should be a duty to ascertain whether a person in prison is the parent of dependent children and for that information to be recorded and shared as appropriate
2. Such children should be identified as children in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This should be automatic and apply across every local authority in England and Wales
3. Such children should be supported by extra financial resources being made available to those who take on their care during the period of parental imprisonment
4. The adults who take on the care of such children should be recognised as carers meaning that should they have to give up work and receive state benefits they will not be expected to be available for work and be sanctioned for their non availability
5. Such children should be supported to visit their parents through better supported visiting schemes including payment for taxis when prisons are a long way from train and bus stations
6. Prison visiting times should be set with regard to the times at which children are at school and their adult carers may be at work
7. Extra payments should be made to schools who have enrolled children of prisoners to make it possible to provide the children with extra resource and support (including pastoral and learning support)
8. Healthcare professionals, social workers, teachers, legal professionals, prison staff should be trained so that they understand the trauma involved for children in being separated from their parents
9. Families should be given support to come together again after imprisonment, where this is the desire of the children and parent and there are no risks to the children. This means that women being released from prison who have no housing should be prioritised for housing with their children. They should not be told that because their children don't live with them they are not priority as they cannot have their children with them if they have no accommodation.