

# Working With Parents In Prison



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## Working With Parents In Prison

As a professional, be that teacher, support worker or social worker, it can be challenging to engage with young people when a parent has been incarcerated, it can create additional obstacles and challenges for our practice.

This is a quick guide to interacting with parents in prisons if you're not sure where to start. The imprisonment of a household member is known to have a significant impact on children. The main objective behind this go-to guide is to make it accessible for all professionals to understand that contact with parents of children who are known to them is vital wherever possible.

It is imperative for professionals to remember that being in prison does not mean parents lose Parental Responsibility of their children and they should seek to work with these parents as they do with parents in the community

## Finding out where a parent/carer is:

If you know someone has gone into prison but you're not sure which one, the Prisoner Location Service can help. This is an email service which checks for the person that you are looking for and seeks their permission for this information to be made known to you. For this reason, this can take a couple of weeks to process. Include as much of the following information as you can in an email and send it to [findaprisoner@justice.gov.uk](mailto:findaprisoner@justice.gov.uk):

- Your name, or the organisation you represent
- Your date of birth
- Your address including postcode
- Name of the person you want to find
- The reason you want to find them - for example you're their Social Worker, or a family member
- Any other names they may have used
- Their date of birth

# Methods of Contact

## Prison Voicemail

Prison voicemail is a way to deliver a verbal message to a prisoner, particularly if something needs to be explained or the person's literacy is poor. You can find details about the system at [www.prisonvoicemail.com](http://www.prisonvoicemail.com). You can use a pay-as-you-go plan or pay for the service at different levels of account. It allows you to leave a voice message for someone, then for them to pick it up at the cost of a landline call. They can even leave you voicemails back.

## Email A Prisoner

Prisoners don't have access to their private outside email addresses in prison. This service allows you to send an email to a prisoner, which is then printed by the prison and delivered to the prisoner with their other daily mail. You need to subscribe to the service, and messages cost around 40p per email. The prisoner will usually receive the message by the next day and will be able to reply if you select that option. You can find out more: [www.emailaprisoner.com](http://www.emailaprisoner.com).

## Telephone Call

Prisoners can't make calls from prisons at any time of day. They have an allotted amount of time on the phone which they normally use to speak with their families and loved ones. They also must use their PIN credit which means that it costs money to make calls. In addition to this, any number that the prisoner is calling must be approved by the prison and added to their PIN, which can take a little time. This can be frustrating for outside professionals who cannot receive a call-back in the usual way.

## Writing a Letter

You can write to the person in prison once you know where they are, which is also a good way to send in forms and other paperwork, such as minutes and reports. If you are sending documents that require the prisoner to respond, it is a good idea to include a stamped envelope for them to use. Prisoners buy paper, envelopes, and stamps from their 'canteen' sheet (a list of pre-approved items such as stationery and toiletries that they are permitted to purchase). If they haven't already got an envelope and stamp, it may take time for them to purchase these items, receive them, and get the letter back to you. You should address the letter using the prisoner's name and prison number and send it to the prison address. Mail is usually checked by censors and/or dogs, for any inappropriate content and forwarded on to prisoners.

## Holding Meetings

In many cases, people in prison are excluded from meetings concerning their family as the meetings are held in the community. To ensure engagement, it can be very effective and empowering for these meetings to be held in a way that allows the person to be included. This usually takes some time to arrange and prepare, and has some things to bear in mind, such as the timing (prisoners are locked up for certain times each day, such as lunchtimes), advance notice (officers will need to be allocated to escort a person to a meeting room, or to take them from their place of work), and technology (e.g., Teams works in some prisons, but Zoom does not).

## Face to Face

Family Service Workers are normally able to assist with getting someone to join a meeting by phone or video call, with a good amount of notice to arrange. Even better is arranging to hold important meetings in person at the prison. Most prisons have a meeting room that can be used to facilitate group meetings, which allows the person in prison the important opportunity to engage fully in the meeting. If required, a support worker may also be able to accompany the person to the meeting and provide pre- and post-meeting support. Again, this will differ by prison and the family service contact details can be found here: <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prison-visitors-guides>.

## Video Link

Most prisons will have access to a video link system that can be used by external professionals. In some cases, this is a better alternative to a telephone call or a letter as the prisoner can see you and this may be more contact. You can also ask the prison's family worker for this to be arranged. These video calls can be used for all types of meetings such as Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups, parenting assessments or even just one to one with the prisoner, to deliver updates and information. These video calls can even be set up weekly, monthly, or quarterly.

## Arranging a Visit

You can book a legal visit (also sometimes called a professional visit) to see a person in prison. The visits normally take place in booths with less opportunity to be overheard by other visitors. You will still need to take ID when visiting and will be subject to the same restrictions and searching procedures as other visitors. Every prison has a different number or email for booking a legal visit, and you can find information on each prison in England and Wales here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-England-and-Wales>. If you are delivering difficult news to someone on your visit, please remember to tell the visits officer on duty at the start of your visit and inform them how it went and how the prisoner was at the end of the visit. This will help them to manage visits effectively and be able to identify prisoners who may need additional support following their visit.

## Methods of Contact

### Family and Child Visits

You can accompany a child or family member to a prison visit. These are typically held in busy visits halls and are likely to be with other people. It depends on the prison as to how much there is for children to do. For example, some visits halls have a play area, and some may just have some colouring or books to use at the table. Please speak with the family worker involved so that they can try to tailor the visit to the child's needs and interests. If you are having a special visit such as a supervised contact, assessment meeting or final contact meeting, or if the family member you are accompanying has a disability or additional needs, the prison may be able to accommodate this in a sensitive way. Some prisons have a family room, or other spaces which are more private than the visit hall. You can contact the families teams for additional help to book visits. As noted above, you can visit this website which will tell you who is the right person to contact: [https:// www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prison-visitorsguides](https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prison-visitorsguides).

### Family Days

Many prisons routinely hold Family Days where children and families can come and visit for a longer period than the normal social visit. They are usually around holidays and school breaks and are themed with activities. These days might include crafts, games, food, sometimes photos and much more. These are great opportunities for children to bond with their parent and spend more quality time together. If you would like the child to attend these, please contact the assigned family worker to start the process and they will guide you around this.

### What more can I do?

- Sentence Planning and Release You may be interested in being involved in sentence and release planning. Each prisoner will be assigned a person who manages their sentence plan, usually called a Prison Offender Manager (POM). By contacting this person (call the prison Switchboard and ask to speak with the Offender Management Unit to find out who this is) you can do more things that support the parent in prison, such as:

- Have open communication with the staff involved - you may be able to contribute to what work, courses, or education they might need to do.
- Ask questions and see what is expected of them from the Criminal Justice System, and whether you can support them around this.
- Look at ways you can support them when they are back in the community and be part of their plans for release.
- Ask for reports and assessments to help with your planning and involvement.

### Permanency Planning

Prison staff can also be a great aid to help you in permanency planning for the child. Most people in prison will want to use their time in prison to work on themselves, mend broken relationships and set themselves up for success after their sentence. Their time in prison can be used towards building a strong and positive relationship with their children as opposed to having it deteriorate.

## Support and Resources

If you are having difficulty with anything to do with prisons, the Prisoners' Families Helpline has a freephone number and is open from 9am – 8pm on weekdays, and weekends from 10am – 3pm.

You can call them on **0808 808 2003**, and they also have a dedicated website with good Information on each part of the prisoner's journey: [https:// www.prisonersfamilies.org/](https://www.prisonersfamilies.org/).

### Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust)

Pact is a charity that provide a range of different support services to prisoners and people with convictions, and their families. Most prisons in the UK have Family Services and, in most cases, family workers can assist with a multitude of matters but more importantly, offer support in facilitating contact between the Local Authority and the parent in prison, as well as between the parent in prison and their children. When working with a parent in prison, you can find out who the worker is at a prison by visiting: <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prison-visitorsguides>



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