

Children Heard and Seen Model School Policy: Parental Imprisonment

Policy Rationale

Having a parent in prison can be deeply traumatic for children and young people and potentially has a long-lasting detrimental impact on their school and subsequent life experiences. Studies show that schools have an important role to play in providing support at very vulnerable times through understanding their individual needs and ensuring that staff are trained to offer informed, sensitive care. This can have a significantly positive impact on children and young people's social, emotional and academic outcomes.

Policy Objectives

Our school is committed to understanding and supporting pupils, students and their families who are impacted by parental imprisonment. We commit to:

- Establishing awareness and understanding of the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people throughout the school community.
- Ensuring that pupils and students who are affected by parental imprisonment are supported through an inclusive and non-judgemental approach and ensuring that no child is blamed for or negatively impacted by their parents' circumstances.
- Utilising support services for vulnerable children and young people in a timely and appropriate manner, actively linking with other organisations who can offer support.

How We Support Children With a Parent in Prison

All staff, governors, parents, carers and significant family members will be informed of this policy and the school's commitment to supporting affected children and young people. This policy will be available on the school website and to all members of the school community on request.

The school will create an opportunity for parents to disclose that a child has a parent in prison by including this criterion in the admissions process, and making it clear that sharing this information is a pathway to extra support for their child.

If a parent, carer or significant family member informs our school that the parent of one of our pupils is in prison, we will provide information on the support available to them (internally and externally- i.e. from Children Heard and Seen). The family should be asked if they would like the child to have access to a designated person, with whom they can talk and receive emotional support, separate to the general running of the school day. It is important for the Designated Lead to ascertain from the family what the child knows and has been told.

A Designated Lead Person for Children with a Parent in Prison is identified. This is a senior member of staff with safeguarding training and responsibilities, who can liaise between home and school and keep relevant staff informed on a 'need to know' basis. This member of staff will ensure that any potentially detrimental impact of the parental imprisonment are identified and mitigated and the child or young person's future life opportunities are not negatively affected.

The Designated Lead will act as the child or young person's advocate and representative, overseeing their emotional well-being, progress and attendance. They will ensure that appropriate resources such as books are made available.

The Designated Lead will also consult and liaise with other statutory and voluntary agencies and local support services as and when appropriate. This includes but is not limited to promoting the use of an Early Help Assessment to ensure that the affected family's needs are fully understood and supported and the child's interests are prioritised throughout.

The Designated Lead will take responsibility for record keeping in line with the school's Safeguarding and Data Protection policies and procedures.

The Designated Lead will source and organise relevant whole school training to develop staff awareness, knowledge and understanding of the impacts of parental imprisonment.

Guidance for all Teachers and Staff

All staff can play a vital role in ensuring that children and young people impacted by parental imprisonment are supported within our school. The reliable and familiar routines of school can provide reassurance and a sense of safety for a child who is experiencing trauma, instability or significant change in their life. Staff training in Trauma Informed Practice as well as an awareness and understanding of emotional health and well-being will enable children and young people, including those with a parent in prison, to feel valued, safe, understood and accepted.

It may be that the family does not want the child to be spoken to about their experience but instead ask that the child's emotional wellbeing and behaviour is monitored for any changes. Other families may not wish to disclose the situation to the school at all.

Response to Issues Raised by the Child or Young Person

If a child or young person wants to share their experiences related to the imprisonment of their parent during school time, the following responses may be helpful:

- Be led by the pupil, and be sensitive to how hard it might be for them to talk about their experience
- Allow the pupil to express themselves in their own time
- Listen carefully

- Acknowledge what has been said – this should include validation and acceptance of their feelings (often, simply thanking the child for sharing their thoughts/experiences with you is a powerful form of validation)
- Offer reassurance
- Don't ask about the crime or other specific details that the child has not disclosed themselves – even though it may seem helpful to find out more, they may not know, and it is important not to make them feel they need to explain themselves. Just focus on what they tell you
- Agree future action with the pupil

If a child does disclose sensitive information about a parent in prison, it is important to acknowledge their situation and feelings, and be clear with them about who needs to be told and what might happen next, to support them. It may be useful to explain the role of the designated/named person in school and agree with the child what steps need to be taken to support them further.

At all times, staff are expected to adhere to the school's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures (see Linked Policies)

Recognising the Signs – Changes in Behaviour and Engagement

Children with a parent in prison often display changes in behaviour and emotional well-being that may appear similar to the emotional responses of children experiencing different forms of loss or bereavement.

It can also be a uniquely negative experience in terms of the stigma and isolation that a child may feel in relation to the crime. A large majority of children do not discuss their parent's imprisonment with anyone outside of their immediate family for fear of judgement or because their family has asked them not to.

It is also important to remember that there will be circumstances where the imprisonment of a parent is beneficial/positive for the child or young person, particularly in situations of domestic or sexual abuse in the home.

There are certain events subsequent to an arrest or the start of a sentence that can significantly impact a child's emotional well-being and therefore create more obvious changes in behaviour. These can include but are not limited to:

- Separation from siblings or significant family members
- Having to move home or area
- Bullying related to their parent being in prison (all reports of bullying in school should be dealt with according to the school's own Bullying Policy)
- Prison visiting or the loss of contact with the parent

- Anticipating a parent's imminent release from prison
- The release of a parent from prison and how this impacts their adjusted life

Staff responsible for the daily care of children and young people must remain vigilant and observant of changes that the child displays. It is also important to consider these children in the context of curriculum planning and being aware of how staff use language to refer to law/crime/prisons in books, lessons and assemblies to ensure that criminality is discussed in way that is not intrinsically a part of an individual but rather a negative or illegal choice. This helps children not to internalise feelings of guilt or feel conflicted in their love for their parent who has committed a crime/crimes.

Barriers to School Attendance

Attendance is always taken seriously and the school will continue to promote its importance. However, we will take into consideration the potential impact that parental incarceration may have on school attendance, and will respond to challenges on an individual basis. This may include authorisation of prison visits during the school day or supporting the potential emotional impact or raised anxiety a child or young person may experience, leading to difficulties with school attendance.

Attendance is monitored, and the necessary support is provided to reduce possible barriers to attending when concerns are raised. If attendance continues to be of concern, then the school will follow procedures outlined in their Attendance Policy (see Linked Policies).

Contact and Prison Visits

The emotional wellbeing of a child or young person could alter before and after visiting prison and this could have a direct impact on how that child feels and behaves in school. The Designated Lead or staff who work closely with the child or young person can make opportunities to prepare them positively for prison visits by supporting them to select schoolwork or create artwork to show to their parent.

It is also important to recognise that many children will not visit their parent in prison for several reasons (e.g. legal, practical, financial, geographical) and may maintain contact in other ways such as phone calls and letters. With the family's agreement, the Designated Lead or trusted members of staff may support children and young people in writing letters to their parent in prison and wherever school felt it appropriate or necessary, outside agencies could be contacted to support in the delivery of these specialised interventions.

On occasion, incarcerated parents may wish to have contact with their child facilitated through a third party rather than a family member or remaining parent. School can support this through the receiving and sending of letters, organised by the Designated Lead and with the consent of the child's family. Where appropriate, school may share evidence of progress (school reports and parent

meeting updates) with a parent in prison who has parental responsibility for their child/children. The appropriateness of such an arrangement would be assessed on a family-by-family basis.

The link below offers a selection of helpful letter templates created by Children Heard and Seen.

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Letter-template-5-2021-combined.pdf>

It is essential to note that many children may have no contact with their parent at all. There are a variety of reasons why this might happen (court order, parent/carer's choice/ child or young person's choice/ incarcerated parental choice/ pause in contact due to a prisoner transferring from prison to prison or graded status within prison changing). However, this does not mean that the child or young person won't want to talk about their parent and may ask many questions about their parent's wellbeing, and prison in general.

In these instances, the Designated Lead should signpost families to specialised intervention/support from outside agencies (for example Children Heard and Seen) in order to ensure the voices of these children are also heard and understood, regardless of the contact they have with their incarcerated parent.

Children With a Parent in an Overseas Prison

Whilst having a parent in a prison in a country outside of the UK is a rare occurrence, it is important that school is aware of the potential distress this situation could create for a child or young person. Contact with and access to their parent may be reduced and questions about their parent's welfare could be left unanswered.

Organisations and individuals that can provide support in these circumstances include

- Amnesty International
- Local Councillors and Members of Parliament

Financial Considerations

When a parent enters prison, the family may experience financial hardship. The school's Senior Leaders and designated Lead should be aware of these potential changes and the impact this could have on a family's ability to pay for school trips/ extra-curricular activities etc. If families are not already eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) status, the headteacher/designated person should signpost these when appropriate.

Links to Other Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Anti-Bullying
- Mental Health and Well-Being

- Attendance
- Behaviour and Conduct
- Special Educational Needs
- Pupil Premium and Disadvantaged Pupils

Learning More About the Impact of Parental Imprisonment on Children and Young People

Children Heard and Seen – Early Identification of Children Impacted by Parental Criminality

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Early-Identification-Report-2-1.pdf>

Children Heard and Seen – *Invisible Harms and Hierarchies of Shame: The Distinct Challenges Faced by Children with a Parent in Prison for Sexual Offences*

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Invisible-Harms-and-Hierarchies-of-Shame.pdf>

Children Heard and Seen – A Series of Blog Posts Created by Adults with Lived Experience of Parental Imprisonment

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/hidden-voices/>

National Information Centre on Children of Offenders - *COPING: Children of Prisoner's, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*

<https://www.nicco.org.uk/directory-of-research/coping-children-of-prisoners-interventions-mitigations-to-strengthen-mental-health>

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Families Outside – *Perspectives of Children and Young People with a Parent in Prison*

<https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2011/02/child-impact-statements-stage2.pdf>

The Centre for Social Justice – *The Golden Thread: Putting Family at the Heart of the Criminal Justice System*

<https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/the-golden-thread>

Useful Links and Resources

- CHILDREN HEARD AND SEEN SUPPORT OFFER AND CONTACT INFORMATION

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/support-for-families/>

- CHILDREN HEARD AND SEEN – A COLLECTION OF ADVICE, LEAFLETS, BOOKS AND FILMS, LETTER TEMPLATES

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/resources/>

- SCHOOL RESOURCE TOOLKIT

<https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/for-schools>