

INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

What about me?

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Families can be affected by imprisonment just as much as a prisoner can be and sometimes more so. When a relative is detained abroad, the difficulties felt by their family in the UK are often multiplied as they struggle to understand a foreign system and keep contact with the person in prison. Many people suffer from isolation and loneliness, often made worse by a lack of support and understanding from other family members, friends or the outside community.

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1 On learning of the arrest

Shock was probably the first emotion you experienced. With this comes all the distress of trying to understand what has happened as well as trying to find one's way through the difficulties of a foreign system. The impact of being separated from one's partner or close relative can be felt in many different ways and can be influenced by different factors, such as:

- the nature of your relationship with your partner / relative; how close you were both emotionally and in practical terms (whether you were living together, whether you shared responsibility for children, whether you spoke on the phone regularly, for example).
- how much support you can expect to receive from family, friends and your local community
- your feelings about your partner's / relative's arrest and the nature of the alleged offence
- how well you take care of yourself - physically (e.g. making sure you eat good meals) and emotionally (having people to talk to and share what you are going through).

2 Things you may need to sort out

2.1 Money

You may need to claim state benefits or sort out debts. In addition, you may be faced with suddenly having to find money for your partner / relative's needs (money for surviving in the prison and/or legal costs) and you may also be trying to get together enough money to visit. It is important to get advice at an early stage from a Citizens Advice Bureau, Law Centre or Debtline rather than ignoring the problems. You may also need to consider that there may be a need for on-going financial support to your partner / relative and how to budget for this. One of the later chapters in this booklet deals with these issues.

2.2 Housing

You may need to change the details of a claim for Housing Benefit or apply for Income Support / Housing Benefit if you can no longer afford the rent or mortgage. If your relative or partner was living in separate accommodation, you may be able to help them claim benefits for housing costs. Remand prisoners can, in some circumstances, claim housing benefit for up to 52 weeks. Sentenced prisoners can only claim if they are likely to serve 13 weeks or less in custody. If your relative or partner is unable to claim these benefits, you may need to make arrangements to collect and store their belongings. Councils cannot store a person's belongings or furniture. You should contact the landlord to make arrangement if the accommodation has to be given up. If the accommodation was provided by the Council or local Housing Association, it may be possible to give up the tenancy in exchange for an agreement for the person to be re-housed in similar accommodation when they get released from prison.

2.3 what to tell other people

You will need to decide how much to tell the rest of your family, friends and neighbours. Unfortunately, you may not be able to stop other people knowing about your situation which means there may be times when you face people saying hurtful things or doing things which upset you. In the case of an arrest with media coverage, prejudices in the local community may be strong. You are likely to need support from those close to you or to seek support from others who have been or are going through similar experiences. Contacting an organisation called MediaWise where there is high media coverage may be helpful. You can also ask Prisoners Abroad or one of the Family support groups listed below to put you in contact with other family members in similar situations

3 Longer term

3.1 What about your own feelings?

The grief caused by separation from one's partner or close relative who has been imprisoned abroad can be indescribable. Grief is a complicated emotion and every experience is personal. The amount of pain and how long it lasts can vary greatly. Some people find it helpful to identify different stages in their emotional reaction:

- shock, disbelief, numbness, a terrible sense of tiredness
- acute and painful sense of loss
- anger at the person or anger at oneself, guilt
- gradual recovery from the intense pain and coping with everyday life

The feelings of loneliness, of worry and of simply missing the person who is in prison abroad may mean that you need to find some source of support, either through friends or other family members or through one of the organisations listed below. Having someone to talk to and off-load some of your feelings is really important. Coping can also be made easier by:

- being realistic - not expecting to sort everything out at once
- looking after your physical well-being (diet, exercise etc.)
- making time for your own needs, relieving stress, expressing your feelings - letting yourself cry, allowing yourself to be angry
- trying to not to look too far ahead - situations change
- seeing your G.P. if you need help with sleeping or with feelings of depression

4 Useful organisations

4.1 Nationwide organisations

- **ACTION FOR PRISONERS' FAMILIES (APF)**

Riverbank House
1 Putney Bridge Approach
LONDON
SW6 3JD
Tel: 020 7384 1987
Fax: 020 7384 1855
Website: www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

APF is the national federation of services supporting families of prisoners. APF co-ordinates the Prisoners' Families Helpline along with several other organisations. APF produces a number of useful booklets (see below) about issues faced by families of prisoners which are available to order from the website.

- **DRIVERS & FAMILIES HELPLINE**

7 Sinclair Court,
Wykeham Street,
Scarborough
YO11 7SA
Tel. 017243 351425

Provides support and campaigns on the issue of lorry drivers arrested abroad.

- **OUTMATES**

Community House
South Street
Bromley
BR1 1RH
Tel: 020 8665 9562

Outmates offer support to families, partners and friends of prisoners as well as to prisoners, ex-prisoners and young offenders. The organisation provides practical help (e.g. with social services, unemployment office, housing etc.) as well as emotional support, counselling, group gatherings, surgeries and courses.

- **PACT (Prison Advice & Care Trust)**

Family Support Service
254 Caledonian Road
LONDON
N1 0NG

Tel: 020 7278 3981

Email: familysupport@pack.uk.net

Provides telephone information and advice for prisoners' families and for anybody else affected by imprisonment. Also provides overnight accommodation for families visiting relatives held in London, and a drop-in centre for prisoners' families in North London. Again, practical information is more for families with a relative detained in the UK, but PACT are still willing to provide a listening ear and talk through your difficulties.

- **PRISONERS' FAMILIES HELPLINE**

Tel: 0808 808 2003 (free from within the UK)

Website: www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk

The Prisoners' Families Helpline is a free and confidential service for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a close family member or friend. Practical information (e.g. information concerning the prison system, release, probation etc.) is geared towards relatives of UK prisoners, but the helpline also offers non-judgemental support, a listening ear and a chance to talk things through.

- **SAMARITANS**

Tel. 08457 90 90 90

Website: www.samaritans.org

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. You don't have to be suicidal to call. Samaritans are available to talk to people who are worried about something, feel upset or confused, or if you just want to talk to someone.

- **SHARP**

83a Wyle Cop

Shrewsbury

SY1 1UT

Tel: 01743 245365

Fax: 01743 245365

Website: www.s-h-a-r-p.org.uk

Support, help and advice for prisoners' families or friends, anywhere in the UK

- **MEDIAWISE**

25 Easton Business Centre,

Felix Road,

Bristol BS5 0HE

Tel. 0117 941 5889

Fax: 0117 941 5848

Website: www.mediawise.org.uk

Provides advice and support to those affected by unfair or inaccurate media coverage and to anyone considering selling stories to the press.

4.2 Local organisations

- **CONTACT**

Tel: 0870 0102569

Website: www.contactcsg.org

Advice, information and support for prisoners' families in Cheshire. Can provide assistance and advice nationally by telephone.

- **FFOPS (Family and Friends of Prisoners)**

Tel: 01792 458645

Offers information, practical and emotional support to family and friends of prisoners in Wales.

- **HOPE**

18 Stevenson Street

Glasgow

G40 2ST

Tel: 0141 552 0229

Website: www.hopescotland.com

Runs support projects for families of prisoners and helps families in finding employment. Also runs a throughcare scheme to assist released prisoners with resettlement.

- **NEPACS (North East Prison After Care Society)**

22 Old Elvet

Durham City

DH1 3HW

Tel: 0191 384 3096

Website: www.nepacs.co.uk

Supports prisoners, ex-offenders and families in Durham, Cleveland, Northumberland, North Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear.

- **POPS (Partners of Prisoners and Family Support Groups)**

Valentine House

1079 Rochdale Road

Blackley

Manchester

M9 8AJ

Tel/Fax: 0161 702 1000

Website: www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Benefit advice and telephone support for families of prisoners. Can provide assistance nationally by telephone but in some circumstances can provide a family casework to families based in Manchester which can include home visits.

- **PRISONERS' FAMILIES AND FRIENDS SERVICE**

20 Trinity Street

London

SE1 1DB

Tel: 0808 808 3444

Website: <http://home.btclick.com/pffs>

The aims of the service are to provide the families and friends of anyone sentenced to imprisonment or remanded in custody with advice, information, friendship and support. In the London area, home visitors can visit families in their own homes if this is appropriate and welcome.

- **SCOTTISH PRISONERS' FAMILIES HELPLINE**

Tel: 0500 839383 (free from within the UK)

Website: www.familiesoutside.org.uk

Information and support for prisoners' families and friends in Scotland

5 Useful publications

- **“Sent to Prison”**

A booklet for individuals experiencing the imprisonment of a family member. It explains the impact on the family from the point of view of initial arrest to imprisonment itself, providing helpful information ranging from the changes in family circumstances and the practical considerations of imprisonment, to becoming familiar with prison jargon.

- **“Living With Separation”**

This booklet explains the impact that separation from a loved one can have on you, your imprisoned partner or family member and your children. It also offers practical help concerning how to cope with your changing role and how to maintain your relationship.

- **“Keeping In Touch”**

This booklet provides useful advice and information about visiting your partner or relative, and explores other ways you can keep in touch, such as letters and phone calls which help you to maintain a relationship and to cope better with the situation.

These three booklets are available from Action for Prisoners' Families (see above for contact details), and are available as part of a series of five booklets called “The Outsiders” (the other two booklets are “Telling the Children” and “Preparing for Release”). The practical information in all five booklets (e.g. about visiting and contact) is designed for people detained in the UK.

- **“Outside Help”**

Practical information on keeping in touch, money, accommodation, and preparing for release. UK-orientated but some useful information also. Available from N.A.C.R.O., 169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU.

Tel. 0171 840 6464. Freephone 0800 0181 259

- **“The Outsiders - a survival guide for prisoners’ partners and families”**

This is a book which deals with imprisonment (albeit in the UK) from the families’ perspective, looking at issues such as living with separation, maintaining a relationship, parenting, and release. Published by the N.I.A.C.R.O. 169 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 1SQ. Tel. 01232 320157

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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