

**Policy for the Education of Young People under the age of 18 with a Parent or Close Relative in Prison or at Risk of a Custodial Sentence**

**Context**

Young learners with a parent in prison should be regarded as true victims of their parents’ crimes, often achieving poor outcomes and a high probability of them growing up in poverty and disadvantage. Some of them have complex needs and are from socially excluded families. Research[[1]](#footnote-1) identifies this group as having high level risks of vulnerability and safeguarding with the potential for future offending behaviour, exclusion from college, poor attendance and poor academic achievement.

**Purpose**

City College Peterborough is committed to support the young people who have a parent or close relative in prison. This policy has been endorsed by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LSCB and subsequently the college body on 20th September 2018

The aims of this policy are:

* to raise awareness of the needs of the learners of City College Peterborough with a parent or close relative in prison
* to secure the educational achievement and attendance of those learners during their time in our college
* to promote their social inclusion and equal opportunities within our college community

How will we achieve these aims?

1. All staff and parents will be informed of this policy and the college’s commitment to support learners with a parent/close relative in prison. This policy will be available on the college website and to parents on request
2. The document ‘Risks to Learners of Prisoners’ information (Appendix 1) will be available on the college website
3. Guidance on ‘Information Sharing and the Seven Golden Rules (Appendix 2) will be available on the college website
4. A member of the college staff will be appointed as ‘Designated Person for Young Learners of Prisoners’ and their role will include:

* Keeping the Deputy Principal fully informed of learners with a parent in prison
* Liaise with other relevant college staff on a ‘need to know’ basis
* Provide a point of contact in the college for external agencies in order to share information
* Liaise with the family and seek their consent to provide additional support for the learner as necessary
* Liaise with other statutory and voluntary agencies as appropriate
* Promote the use of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) to identify the needs of the learner unless a Core Assessment has been completed
* Consider calling a multi-agency meeting to address the needs of the learner and to identify a key worker for that learner following the completion of a EHA
* Consider the use of an individual education plan for the learner concerned
* Monitor the achievement, attendance and behavior of the learner with a parent in prison
* Act as an advocate for young learners with a parent in prison, particularly if the learner is a Looked After Child (LAC) as LAC have poor levels of visiting a parent in prison.
* Consider purchase of books and resources on the subject of prisons and prisoners for the college library
* Keep appropriate and current records with reference to information sharing guidance

1. If a parent informs our college that the parent or other close relative of one of our learners is in prison, we will provide information on the support available to them (Appendix 3)
2. Wherever appropriate our college will include a parent with parental responsibility who is in prison, in the education of the young person by making and maintaining contact with that parent. This will be done by forwarding copies of any college report or newsletter, supplying photographs of examples of work and encouraging the learner to suggest other ways that contact may be maintained

**Guidance for Teachers and staff on practical measures to support**

All staff have a vital role to play in ensuring that a young learner affected by imprisonment is supported within our college. The secure, stable and consistent routines of college can provide reassurance for a learner who is experiencing difficulties in their personal life and an awareness of the emotional health and well-being of our learners will enable all learners to feel valued and safe, including those with a parent in prison.

Staff will not necessarily be aware that a learner has a relative in prison. In some cases a learner may confide in a member of staff or drop hints and clues through college work or in conversation.

A member of staff does not need to let the learner know that he or she knows that their parent is in prison as the learner may be unwilling to discuss the issue with anyone in college. It may be that the family of the learner merely wish the learner’s performance and behaviour be monitored for any change.

**Confiding**

If a learner raises issues concerning the imprisonment of a parent during college time, the following responses may be helpful:

* Allow the learner to express him or herself
* Listen carefully
* Acknowledge what is said
* Reassure the learner
* Agree future action with the learner

Adhere to the basic principles of responding to any disclosure

* See the learner as an individual with their own specific needs
* Be non-judgmental – the learner has not committed a crime
* Don’t ask about the crime
* Acknowledge the learner’s preferences
* Follow safeguarding principles if appropriate

**Who to inform – Need to know**

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

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Recognising the signs – changes in behaviour and performance

Children of prisoners may exhibit changes in behaviour and performance that can be likened to a young person’s emotional response as in divorce or bereavement. Clearly, the experience of having a parent in prison is about ‘loss.’ The learner’s, and the family’s resilience to this loss will determine how it impacts on the learner in their behavior and performance at college. There are certain events that can make these changes in a learner more apparent and these can include:

* The arrest of parent, carer or sibling
* Finding out about the imprisonment
* A visit to a parent in prison
* A home visit by a parent from prison
* The release of a parent from prison

The following are possible changes in learners with a parent in prison

* Moodiness
* Chattering
* Bullying
* Difficulty with peers
* Appearing upset
* Appearing withdrawn
* Showing a lack of concentration
* Showing a lack of interest
* Antagonism towards authority
* Tiredness

However, for some young people, the removal of a parent to prison may be beneficial to the learner and behaviour and performance in the classroom may improve.

**Bullying**

Many children of prisoners report being teased or bullied at college. Any form of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the college’s anti-bullying policy.

**Attendance issues**

Our college takes attendance very seriously and will always promote the importance of attendance. However, we will be considerate of the difficulties that a learner with a parent in prison, or at risk of imprisonment may face e.g.

* The learner is in court with, or visiting the prisoner some distance from home
* The learner is providing support for the remaining parent or siblings, as a young carer
* The learner is having difficulty coping with college or is being teased or bullied about having a parent in prison and is becoming disaffected

Attendance will be monitored and if it becomes a concern the college will refer to appropriate agencies for support.

**Particular problems**

Prison visits

Teachers say that performance and behaviour of children of prisoners can become more erratic at the time of a prison visit.

If teachers or other staff, have good relationships with learners who are happy to confide in them, there may be opportunities to allow learners to take samples of work to show parents when visiting. However, reports or written work, drawings or artwork can be sent by post or email. Although prisoners do not have open access to email, it may be possible for the learner to send email from college to a prison email address for the information of their parent. Photographic attachments or college work or events may also be sent in this way.

Financial implications

A family may experience significant loss in income with a parent in prison and face severe hardship. Teachers would be aware of the potential difficulties for children of prisoners finding the money for college trips and resources in college. An EHA may have identified these issues and support already put into place.

**Children of prisoners held overseas**

This is a relatively rare occurrence for our community but can be all the more distressing with a lack of access, distance and unanswered concerns about a prisoner’s welfare.

Organizations and individuals that can provide support in these circumstances include

* Amnesty International
* Local councilors and member of Parliament
* Prisoners Abroad

**Date: 20th September 2018**

**Policy review date: 20th September 2019**

**Appendix 1**

*What are the risks to children of prisoners achieving their full potential?*

* Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems

compared to their peers.

* The sudden removal of a parent from the family creates feelings of separation and loss and may affect the emotional health of the learner
* Parental imprisonment can lead learners to experience stigma, bullying and teasing
* Young person’s caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment, and learners are often subject to unstable care arrangements
* During the consultation with parents in prison bullying of their children was the greatest concern. Several parents also voiced their concerns that their own children had bullied other children
* Discrimination from members of the local community can have major implications for the children of parents in prison
* Children of parents in prison may be exposed to substance misuse by family members and their peers
* Children of prisoners may experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers
* Some families choose not to inform schools and colleges that a learner has a parent in prison. Yet, having a parent in prison can lead to poor attendance, lack of support and isolation for the young person
* Children of prisoners may have to take on more responsibility in the household or take on a caring role
* Children of prisoners may have higher levels of anxiety or worry that prevent them from participating fully in learning
* Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers
* 65% of boys with a convicted parent, go on to offend
* Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption
* 72% of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison
* Costs of visiting the parent in prison may prevent the child from visiting their parent

**Appendix 2**

**Information Sharing**

Seven golden rules for information sharing

1. Remember that the General Data Protection Regulations are not a barrier to sharing information but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.

2. Be open and honest with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

3. Seek advice if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.

4. Share with consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.

5. Consider safety and well-being: Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.

6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure: Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

**Appendix 3**

**Education of a Young Person with a Parent or Close Relative in Prison – Information for Parents and Carers**

**The impact on a child**

A family has to deal with many changes when a parent or relative goes to prison. Initially there may be a delay in finding out where they have gone or before any visits can be arranged. For a child there may be a sense of confusion and loss and this could affect their behaviour and ability to learn

One difficulty is deciding what to say to the children to explain where the parent is. Some families want to protect the children from distress and create a story such as the parent is working away but this could be difficult to continue if a prison visit is possible. There is also the possibility that the children will find out the truth from someone else

Action for Prisoners’ Families recommends that the key question parents should ask themselves is, ‘When and what shall I tell the children?’ rather than, ‘Shall I tell the children?’ Although difficult, the advice from groups who work with families of prisoners is to be truthful but to be prepared for questions. Action for Children’s Families have produced a useful guide ‘Telling the Children – a guide for the partners and families of prisoners’ that gives practical advice on how to tell children.

Research and experience tells us that children who are worried, upset or anxious can find it very difficult to concentrate and learn in the classroom. They may be embarrassed or angry about having a parent in prison and this may affect the way that they behave in college. Living arrangements and financial circumstances may also change leading to money difficulties in the payment for equipment or college trips and events. This may lead to new emotions and feelings for the child concerned and could have a negative impact on their education and attendance at college.

**Who can help?**

City College Peterborough is committed to supporting young learners with a parent in prison so that they can continue and succeed with their education.

There are also a number of other national charities and organisations that can offer advice and support for young people and families of someone in prison.

Schools and Colleges can offer children of prisoners a stable environment where routines and staff generally remain the same at a time when their personal life could be one of change and uncertainty. All college staff are experienced in keeping confidential information about their learners and will support learners in order for them to achieve the best that they can during their time at our college.

Therefore, it is advisable to inform the Deputy Principal or other member of staff that you know, if a parent or relative of one of our learners is in prison. It may be that you can arrange a meeting to discuss ways that your child can be supported. This support could range from staff monitoring the learner to offering more individual support with open discussion and support about their parent or relative in prison.

Once you have informed a member of staff, we may suggest additional support that can be obtained through an early help assessment process. This is commonly known as ‘EHA’ which stands for ‘Early Help Assessment’. If you agree to this assessment being completed you can state which agencies you are prepared to share the assessment information with, so you are in control of who has access to the information. An ‘EHA’ may identify additional support for you or your family.

As a college we have to monitor the attendance and punctuality of all learners. Please inform the college of any absence in advance so that consideration may be given to classifying the absence as an ‘authorised absence.’ Working with the college on attendance may avoid the risk of incurring any fixed penalty fines for the learner’s absence from college.

**In summary**

* The education of a learner with a parent or relative in prison can be disrupted
* Advice from experts is for families to tell the young person the truth about their parent or relative being in prison
* Life for the learner and family following the parent being sent to prison could change radically
* All staff and governors of City College Peterborough are committed to supporting young learners with a parent or relative in prison
* Informing a member of staff at our college that you have a relative in prison will help the learner as we will be able to offer appropriate support and monitor the young person’s education and attendance
* We will treat this information in confidence
* Staff of our college will work with you to find the best ways to support the learner
* An ‘EHA’ may be suggested as a way to get extra support tailored for yourfamily’s needs. You control who shares this information

1. The Bromley Briefings published by The Prison Reform Trust December 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)