



Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

Information for neurodivergent visitors and their families



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Visiting a prison

Visiting a prison can feel hard, especially the first time. There are rules to follow and new things to learn.

At Pact, we want every family to feel safe and welcome when they visit. If you or your child is neurodivergent or has sensory needs, the visit might feel stressful.

This guide explains:

- what happens during security checks
- what the visit space is like
- things that might feel loud, bright, or busy

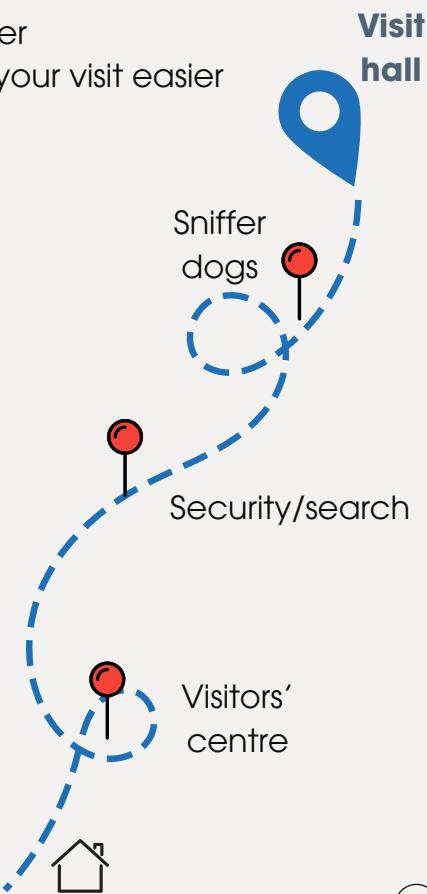
It also shows:

- what support the prison might offer
- how to ask for changes to make your visit easier

Preparing for a visit

Before you visit, we suggest you contact the Family Services team at the prison. They can help by:

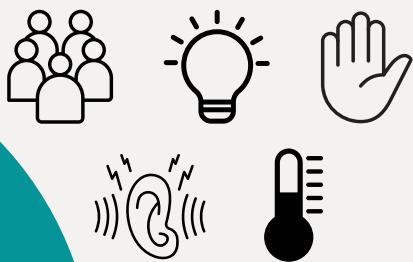
- Talking you through the visit journey from arriving at the visitors' centre, going through security, to getting to the visit hall. They can describe the environment, what happens at each stage and may even have pictures to share to help you prepare.



Go to: www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisons
for the contact details of each prison's
family services team

- The family services team will be able to tell you if there are any alternative waiting spaces or outdoor areas available for you to use whilst waiting.
- They can explain the security procedures, including what you can't bring into a prison and the clothes you can/can't wear, which will help you prepare.
- They will be able to suggest quieter visiting days/times. Some sites now have specially planned visit sessions to support people with neurodiversity. Some sites offer quieter visiting rooms that you can pre-book. The family services team can help you understand what is available and what might work for you.
- They will be able to tell you what aids (such as headphones, glasses, fidget toys) are already available in the visit hall. And if there is a specific comfort item you would like to request to bring in to support you, they can help you with this process (see p 6&7).
- Complete the Communication Passport (p8) and bring it to your visit. It will help staff understand how to support you.

Look out for posters along your journey through the prison which explain what to expect in terms of environment and sensory triggers



Visitors' centre

When you first arrive at the prison, you'll go to the visitors' centre. This is where you'll book in for your visit, show your ID, and place your items in a locker. You may have to wait here for a while.

Potential Triggers



The visit centre can be busy, with lots of people coming and going and children playing.



This environment can be quite noisy, with people talking, phones ringing and staff radios.



There may be bright lights or a lack of natural light.



Visitors' centres can get quite warm, and the doors may be opening and closing regularly, affecting the temperature.

What might help

Speak to the family services team to ask if there is a better time to arrive to minimise your waiting time, but still allow enough time for you to book in and get organised to go into the prison.

Ask the staff if there is a quieter place where you can wait, such as a side room or an outdoor space.

You can use headphones, sunglasses and fidget items as needed in the visitors' centre.

Double-check before leaving the visitors' centre that you have left everything in your locker that you need to. This will avoid having to return to your locker.

Security

When you leave the visitors' centre, you'll go to the prison main gate. In most prisons, you'll go through a search process. This is similar to airport security and can include walking through a metal detector, a rub-down search, and going past sniffer dogs.

Potential Triggers



You may need to queue, and it can be crowded in a small space.



This environment can be noisy, with people talking, machines beeping, and staff radios making noise.



There may be a lack of natural light or windows.



The search area may get quite warm.



The search may involve a rub down by a member of staff and/or staff may use a metal detector "wand" moved over the body (without touching).



You may need to go through an air-lock door, where you're briefly closed in a small space while one door closes and one opens.



At some prisons, they may have drug detection dogs. They will need to sniff you, but will not jump up or bark.

What might help

Speak to visitors' centre staff about going through security before the rest of the group, or wait until the end of the queue. This will make the experience quieter and less crowded.

Complete a Communication Passport (pg 8) before your visit, so that security staff understand how to support you/your child during the search process.

The journey from security to the visits hall

The journey from the security area to the Visit Hall is different at each prison. It may involve going inside and outside and waiting at different points while doors or gates are unlocked or locked (which can be loud). When outside, vehicles may be moving around.

Visit hall

Each visit hall is different, but when you arrive, you'll be given a table to sit at. Your family member may be waiting for you, or you may need to wait for them to arrive. There is usually a tea bar for refreshments. There is usually a play area, and family services staff will be nearby to support you.

-  This environment can be quite noisy, with people talking, children playing and staff radios. Noises in the hall can echo.
-  There may be a lack of natural light or windows.
-  The visit hall can get quite warm.
-  The tea bar may serve hot food and drinks, which can cause smells and add to the noise. There may be queues near the tea bar.
-  There will be a play area which can be busy with children coming and going.

What might help

Ask staff if there is a quieter visit space available to pre-book or if you can be given a table away from the tea bar and play area so it's quieter.

Make staff aware of aids such as headphones or sunglasses that can help you/your child regulate or toys, games and activities that can distract from the environment.

Requesting reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, an individual with a disability (which includes conditions such as autism and ADHD) has a right to request “reasonable adjustments” to allow them to access a service.

Requests for reasonable adjustments in the case of neurodiversity can include things like:

- Noise-cancelling headphones are available for use during security screening and in the visit hall.
- Requesting permission to go through security separately from the main group.
- Requesting to be seated in a certain part of the visit hall or use of a private room (where available).

Putting your reasonable adjustment request in writing (letter or email) in advance of your visit will give the prison time to consider and accommodate your/your child’s needs.

Key Points to remember:

It’s important to understand that some requests can’t be granted by the prison. For example, they can’t let anyone skip security checks, as keeping the prison safe is their top priority.

You **do not need to provide “proof”** of the disability or a written formal diagnosis, but you should provide detail of how the disability affects you/your child.

Writing Your Request

In a formal request, you should:

Explain how you/ your child is disabled under the Equality Act

Explain what adjustments you/your child needs - for example adjustments to a process, extra time or support or additional equipment

Explain **how** you/your child are disadvantaged without the adjustments

Your family services team can support you by:

Providing the name and address (postal or email) to send your letter to.

Giving you a template to help you when writing your letter.



Key Points:



Keep a copy of your letter, for your records.

For letters like this, you should normally expect a reply in 14 days.

You might want to delay booking your next visit until after you've had a response from the prison.

My Communication Passport



Name:

Relationship to the

Age:

person I'm visiting:

Processes, sensory stimulants or environments I might find difficult:

Things I can do to help me regulate/feel calm:

How staff can help if I become upset or disregulated:

Toys, games and activities I enjoy:



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