



Children affected by imprisonment

Schools Toolkit - Primary



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Around 100,000 children and young people have a parent in prison on any given day in England and Wales. There is no statutory recording of children impacted when someone they love, including a parent, is sent to prison. Estimates for the number of children affected by parental imprisonment in the UK in a year vary, with the most recent being as high as 312,000. These children have never found their way into being adequately represented in government policy.

Every day, there are children in the UK who wake up and go to school after having their homes raided or witnessing their parents arrested.

Every day, some children sit in class worrying about the outcome of a day in court and whether or not their loved one will be there when they get home.

Every day, there are children missing school to go and visit someone they love in prison.

Every day, children have to leave their family home to go to kinship or foster care while their parents are in prison. This can often mean changing schools – affecting their routines, friendships and relationships with teachers and other trusted adults. Due to social stigma, some children may keep secrets about where mum or dad are.

At Pact, we believe these children and young people deserve to be heard. This toolkit aims to support teachers in empowering children and young people to overcome the stigma, shame, and embarrassment surrounding familial imprisonment while supporting the Welsh curriculum's four purposes and supporting students in becoming ethically informed citizens.

The toolkit contains:

- PSHE Lesson Plans from age 5 to 11.
- An animated short film to support lesson plans for older children. It shows the journey of a child and young person as they see their mum arrested, sent to prison, and then released.
- A book, 'While Mummy is Away' for the younger children's lesson. This is designed to address the fear and worry children often feel about prison, to show a prisoner's daily routine and compare it to a child's typical day at school.
- A school policy framework
- A jigsaw (younger children) and board game (older children) to support a one-to-one conversation with a practitioner about the experience and impact of prison visits.

We are calling on school practitioners to use these lesson plans to introduce the topic of imprisonment to all children.

We believe these resources will:

- Give practitioners the confidence to talk about imprisonment.
- Create space for a whole class to discuss who might be affected by imprisonment and how.
- Ensure children who are affected know that family imprisonment is not a shameful subject, and some people want to listen to how they feel.
- Allow students to understand, empathise and find ways to support their peers affected by imprisonment.

Safeguarding children and young people

Children experience the loss of a parent or loved one to imprisonment in different ways. Some may have been aware of the criminal activity or behaviour. Some may have witnessed a traumatic arrest. Some may have been shielded from arrests and court proceedings and only told once the person was sentenced. Feelings of grief, guilt and shame are common, as are relief.

When talking about imprisonment in your classroom or setting, you may be aware of children or young people affected. In this case, it is advisable to prepare the child or young person for the lesson in advance so they can decide whether they feel ready to participate and make a plan for them in case they need to leave the room. You can discuss with them how they might like to be supported afterwards and who they feel it is best to do this. For young children and Early Years, circle time activities can be one-to-one if preferred.

Children's level of understanding can differ by age and emotional maturity, depending on what they know about the situation. Some parents or carers may choose not to fully explain where the loved one is or why they are there. With younger children you know are affected by imprisonment, it is helpful to speak to the parent or carer to find out what level of knowledge the child has to avoid contradicting what they have been told at home.

Due to the stigma and shame around imprisonment, it is also quite possible that you do not know everyone in your class who is affected. Having a teaching assistant or other support staff member in the classroom with you may be helpful in case a child becomes distressed and needs support. Make space following the lesson for anyone who may need to talk further.

For follow-up one-to-one sessions, there is a board game or jigsaw, which can be used as a talking tool to encourage children and young people to talk about visiting prison and, in turn, open up about how imprisonment impacts them.

Further resources for discussion and support

- Pact's website offers a range of videos, animations and access to our book 'Locked Out: helping children cope with the imprisonment of a loved one' - www.prisonadvice.org.uk
- The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO) website is a resource directory for families and professionals - www.nicco.org.uk
- Prisoner Families Helpline and website:
 - 0808 808 2003 (freephone, including most mobiles)
 - The website includes videos for families showing realities of life in UK prisons - www.prisonersfamilies.org

For further advice and training, please contact us at cyp@prisonadvice.org.uk

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A photograph of a man in a grey shirt hugging a young boy in a red hoodie from behind. They are in a classroom with a window featuring a geometric pattern. Other children are seated at tables in the foreground.

Pact Schools Toolkit

Missing someone you love

PSHE Lesson Plan | 5 - 7 Years



Learning outcomes

- To recognise and name some different feelings that people experience.
- To talk about feelings around change and loss and how to feel better.
- To identify people in our lives who care about us and make us happy.

Teacher guidance

You can use the story and questions in circle time with a group or as a one-to-one activity with a child who you know is affected by imprisonment.

The story and conversations discuss the imprisonment of a loved one, which can be a difficult topic for children to process and can lead to mixed emotions, including anger and grief. They also cover themes of loss and missing someone. Please take time to consider other children for whom these themes may particularly impact, perhaps due to bereavement or family breakdown.

It is important to be aware that if a child is affected by imprisonment, you may not know, and the child may not fully understand.

Practitioners will need to be aware of any changes in behaviour in the days following the session and be responsive to children's needs for comfort and reassurance.



Reading

Read 'While Mummy is Away' once through to the group or child.

Exploring

Ask the class to identify where Annie's mummy has gone and why. Reread this section and clarify for them. Reassure them that prison is only for grown-ups, and they only go there if they have broken an important rule. You may need to check their understanding here.

Ask what they know about prison and use this opportunity to address any misconceptions. Reread the part of the book that shows Annie's idea of prison and what it is like.

Go through the daily routine included in the story. Explain that prison is much like school, but you sleep over and share a bedroom with a friend. Highlight the images and similarities of Annie and her mummy's typical day.

Explore how Annie might feel about Mum being in prison. Ask the group or child who Annie could talk to if she is worried or sad. Who do they talk to when they are worried or sad?

Show the image of Annie sending a picture to her mummy. Ask how Annie might feel making the picture and how Mummy will feel when she gets it. Explain that people in prison can write letters, use the telephone and even have visits from their family sometimes.

Ending

Ask the children to draw a picture for someone they love, and then ask them how it made them feel to draw it and how the person will feel when they receive it.


Follow on activities

After discussing a difficult topic, it is important to offer a range of immersive activities so that children have the space needed to process their emotions. This could be:

- **Outdoor play** - some children may benefit from unstructured outdoor play to reinforce their sense of freedom and space.
- **Small world play** - children may want to act out some of the feelings experienced during the story. Provide toys that they can use to represent homes and families or characters, such as police, and items such as fences. This will allow children to further explore the story's themes and act out the emotions that arose.
- **Sensory Play** - encourage sensory activities to help children self-regulate after experiencing strong emotions.

Keep a watchful eye for signs of distress and be ready to comfort those in need.

Consider following circle time with a sensory scavenger hunt: take the children outdoors and have them find something heavy, rough, jumpable, and crawlable.

A photograph showing a man, a young boy, and a woman sitting together in a room. The man is on the left, looking towards the boy. The boy is in the center, smiling. The woman is on the right, looking towards the boy. They appear to be in a classroom or a community center.

Stay alert to signs of distress and offer reassurance to those who need it



Who is affected by imprisonment?

PSHE Lesson Plan | 7 -11 Years



Learning outcomes

- Students will consider how they would feel if someone they loved went to prison, identifying the questions they would have and what their worries might be.
- They will identify trusted adults they can talk to safely about their worries and how they might like to be supported.
- Students will think about the impact of bullying and gossip.
- They will identify where to find factual information about complex issues.
- Students will reflect upon keeping secrets and how that can make us feel.

Teacher guidance

The video and conversations in this session cover themes of imprisonment, loss and family trauma. Please consider children for whom this may be a current or recent issue and how you will manage this. If a child is affected by imprisonment, you may not know. Offer an opportunity for any young person to speak to someone one-on-one after the session.



Resources

- Videos: 'A Journey into Prison' and 'Zac's Story'
- Flipchart and pens or smartboard
- Worksheet: trusted adults

Activity 1 - setting the scene

Watch 'A Journey Into Prison' (available at www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

Ask the class what words they think of when they think about prison. Write these on the board. Then, ask where their impressions of prison come from (TV, films, books, music etc)

Activity 2 - Zac's story

Watch 'Zac's Story' until 'sentence'.

Discuss what has happened so far.

Ask, "What questions might Zac have about his mum, her offence and prison?" Write these on the board.

Then discuss: "Where could Zac turn to have his questions answered?" Include key figures in school.

Discuss:

- How did Zac react when people at school were whispering about his Mum?
- How do you think this made Zac feel?
- If you were Zac's friend, how would you help him?

Activity 3 - secrets

Watch 'Zac's Story' from start to finish again. Complete the activity below as a written task (Trusted Adults Worksheet) or as a group discussion

using the questions below:

- Zac's Grandma doesn't want to talk about his mum being in prison. Why do you think that might be?
- Is this something Zac should keep a secret?
- Is there another trusted adult that Zac could talk to?
- How might it help Zac if he told a trusted adult about his worries?

Recap/Close

Show the class Pact's online resources so they know where to find more information. Identify to the class who they can talk to school if anything discussed today has affected them.



Worksheet: trusted adults

Zac's Grandma doesn't want to talk about his mum and can't seem to answer his questions about prison.

1. Why do you think that could be?

2. Is this something Zac should keep a secret?

3. Is there another trusted adult that Zac could talk to?

4. How might it help Zac if he told a trusted adult about his worries?