



HM Prison &  
Probation Service

# Engaging Families and Significant Others in the ACCT Process



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# Why engage families and significant others

## Introduction

It is important to invest the time to ask an individual who is being supported using ACCT whether they would like a family member, friend or other source of support to be involved in their care to boost the support available to them. Note: in the youth secure estate, notifying family or carers that the young person is being supported through ACCT is standard practice and they can only be excluded from this process in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where there are safeguarding proceedings in place that prevent contact with family.

**ACCT User Guidance 2021, HMPPS**

Maintaining strong relationships with family, friends and loved ones can be an important factor in supporting good outcomes for people in prison, including their wellbeing and rehabilitation.

A person's family or significant other may well be in a better position to know when something is wrong, and to spot signs of improvement. They can also offer insight into past behaviour, what is 'normal' for that person and what support has helped in the past. In this way, they can be a valuable addition to the multi-disciplinary team supporting the individual.

Lord Farmer (2017) stated that **'families (and significant others) should be properly informed about the opening of an ACCT document and able to request the opening of an ACCT document'**.

NHS England's Strategy for Health Services in the Justice System (2016-20) identifies families and carers as **'vital sources of intelligence' and states that 'where it is appropriate and they can, families and carers should be involved' in prisoner health assessments and care planning.'**

## Benefits for staff and the wider prison

- 'An intimate relationship or significant other' and 'social networks' are both protective factors in mitigating risk in prisoners **(see HMPPS Risk Toolkit: staff guidance)**. Having their families involved can help the prisoner to feel supported and reduce risk and may contribute to **helping reduce the person's risk and remove the need for further/future ACCT support**.
- An individual's family or significant other may well be in a better position to know when something is wrong, **potential triggers and to spot signs of improvement**. They might have been their primary carer in the community, they

may have contributed to care planning in the community, they may know their history of trauma and/or what can help manage their mental health.

- It can help to **build positive relationships** between a prisoners' family and the prison – helping to develop a family members' confidence in prison care (reducing calls to safer custody), encouraging families to share important risk/safeguarding information and reducing conflict.

## Benefits for the prisoner

- There is significant evidence that pro-social relationships with family and/or significant others can help individuals to recover from both physical and mental ill-health – they can **motivate**, provide essential **emotional support**, **reduce a prisoners' sense of isolation**, and help to **build a sense of self-worth**.
- Having a family member at an ACCT review may help the prisoner to feel less isolated and more supported in the meeting. This may help them to feel **calmer and more confident about contributing** to the meeting.
- It can be an opportunity for staff to share positive feedback about the prisoner in the presence of their family – **helping to build self-esteem** and improve emotional wellbeing.

## Benefits for the family/significant other

- Families will feel **more confident** that their loved ones' needs are being met and understood.
- Families have a **better understanding** of the work being undertaken by the prison to support their loved one: **'you can understand how much the prison staff do care and try to do'** (Family member).
- Families feel **listened to and engaged** in the care and support of their loved one.

## Myth busting

Myth	Reality
It takes too much time and resource to engage with families.	It can take extra time and effort to contact families and arrange their engagement. However, in the long-term family involvement can often contribute to a more settled prisoner who feels supported and less isolated, reducing risk and, potentially, the need for future ACCT support - helping to reduce future time and resource.
Prisoners will manipulate the system so they get additional contact with their families.	Most prisoners will not be using ACCTs to secure additional contact with their families.  Often we focus on someone's behaviours, and not the underlying reasons for them. It may appear at face

	<p>value that someone is after additional family contact, but we need to understand why this is. If the person is isolated in prison, they may have no other avenue of support. It may be that being in prison is the first time they have been away from their family. By understanding the underlying issue, staff can help to put appropriate support in place for them. Contacting the family service provider, may be one way to help ensure the appropriate support is provided.</p>
<p>Families will be challenging and confrontational in the ACCT meeting.</p>	<p>The majority of families will be very grateful to have the opportunity to be involved in their loved ones' care planning and are unlikely to make an ACCT meeting more challenging. In fact, having a family member present in an ACCT meeting may make the prisoner less confrontational and more settled during the meeting. Relationship building is key to mitigating the risk of confrontation – building a trusted relationship with families prior to their attendance (via phone calls, for example) or enabling them to attend with the support of a Family Engagement Worker with whom they have an established relationship is important. Involving families in this way often helps to reduce family dissatisfaction and challenge.</p>
<p>Prisoners do not want their families involved.</p>	<p>Prisoners will often say they do not want their family to be involved for a range of reasons, however helping prisoners to understand the benefits of engaging their family and what it could involve can help them to re-evaluate. See below for 'how to ask prisoners for consent'.</p>

## How to involve families & significant others

### Prisoner consent

#### Obtaining consent to share information

It is important that you obtain consent from the individual before involving a member of their family or a significant other in their ACCT Care Plan. You need to establish what level of involvement they would like there to be and what information they are happy to be shared. The Sources of Support Plan can be used to record this information. When asking an individual being supported through ACCT for their consent, it is important that you are satisfied they have the

capacity to make an informed decision. If you have any concerns about the individual's capacity, then this should be raised with the Mental Health services.

The individual must be made aware that they can withdraw their consent at any time.

### ACCT User Guidance 2021, HMPPS

- The prisoner will need to provide informed consent for their family/significant other to be involved.
- Consider asking individuals about who they might like involved if they become unwell as part of induction sessions or during key work sessions. Ensure this is logged on NOMIS and is revisited regularly – an individual may change their mind about consent at any point.
- It can be difficult to ask a prisoner to provide consent when they are very unwell or at a point of crisis. If they have initially said 'no' to family involvement it may be appropriate to revisit whether they would like to give consent in Case Review meetings.
- Consider whether there is a family member/significant other who has already been engaged in informing the prison about the individuals' health and wellbeing needs:
  - Is there a record of regular calls from a family member on the safer custody comms log?
  - Have healthcare/probation/Chaplaincy already got a relationship with members of the family?
  - Has a family member been previously involved in ACCT reviews?
  - Is the family engagement team already working with the family?
- Consider **who** is best placed to ask the prisoner for consent. Who already has a trusted relationship with the prisoner and/or their family? It might be their key worker, it might be a mental health nurse, Chaplain or it might be the Family Engagement Worker.
- Consider **how** you ask a prisoner for their consent.

*'When you were facing particular challenges or starting to struggle in the community, was there anyone who used to support you through those times? Might you like us to reach out to them so they can help us to support you while you feel unwell? What would you feel comfortable about sharing with them?'*

*'We have noticed that Mum is a really important support to you and you have a close relationship. Would it help you if Mum was at your review meeting with you?'*

*'Your partner clearly provides you with really valuable support and knows you really well – are you happy for us to contact her and talk to her about how we can make sure we are meeting your needs?'*

- Family and significant other relationships can be complex - undertake the necessary checks with the Offender Management Unit or Security, to ensure the selected contacts are appropriate/safe to support the individual and there are no restrictions in place.

## Involving the family/significant other

Consider how you might involve the family member:

- **By telephone or secure video call** – asking the family member to share their views/insight prior to the review meeting. Recorded views then shared at the meeting with prisoner and other relevant staff. The family member should then be contacted again following the meeting to update them on any planned actions.
- **In person** – family member attends review meeting.
- **Attend the review via call conference facilities** - eg spider phone/video call.
- **By email** – family member asked to contribute information prior to the meeting that will inform care planning. Ask family member specific questions to ensure concise feedback provided. Return email to family member to provide update following the meeting.

## Supporting the family/significant other

It is important that families are provided with effective support and information throughout their engagement:

### a) Support for families prior to their involvement

- Approach the nominated person sensitively, explaining your role in supporting the individual. Reassure them about the actions that are being taken to keep the individual safe.
- Ensure families understand what an ACCT is. This booklet provides a useful family-friendly explanation and can be downloaded in different languages: [www.prisonersfamilies.org/assessment-care-in-custody-and-teamwork-acct](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org/assessment-care-in-custody-and-teamwork-acct). Ideally, families should be provided with a copy of the booklet - you could send the booklet via email or post, ask the family support organisation to provide a hard copy if the family is attending a social visit or provide the prisoner with a hard copy to send to their family member.
- Provide family members with the different options of how they might be able to be involved (telephone, email or face to face).
- Ensure you have the family members' consent to be involved.

- Ask the family member if they need any support to be able to be involved – for example: translator, disability access, support from family engagement worker.
- Explain what their engagement might involve:
  - If they are attending in person – who will be at the meeting, how long will the meeting take, where the meeting will take place, who will escort them to the meeting, what they can/cannot bring into the meeting, what will be discussed, what information might they be asked to provide.
  - If they are contributing by telephone/email – what specific information do you need from them and how will you feedback to them after the meeting?

#### **b) Support for families during the meeting**

- Identify a member of staff to meet and greet them at the gate.
- If they already have a relationship with the family support provider could the worker attend the meeting with them?
- Ensure the family member is introduced to everyone in the meeting and understands what their roles are.
- Ensure the family member has the opportunity to share their views.
- Try to create a relaxed and informal environment that encourages engagement.

#### **c) Support for families after the meeting**

- It can be difficult for family members to hear or see how unwell their loved one is and they may feel upset following the meeting. The family engagement worker may be able to offer them the opportunity to sit in the visit centre following the meeting (or other safe space), have a cup of tea and debrief before travelling home.
- The family member and prisoner may appreciate the opportunity to have a social visit immediately following the meeting so that they have the chance to have a conversation outside of the formal meeting.
- Ensure that families are made aware of how they will be kept updated/informed of any further opportunity for engagement.

# Case Studies

## CASE STUDY 1



### 1. Needs of a prisoner

Carol has been self-harming since she came into prison, this has increased recently in response to her daughter being adopted.

### 2. How a family member was identified

As part of Carol's ACCT assessment, she identified her husband, Mark, as a protective factor and signed the consent form to allow the prison to speak with her husband. The consent was saved on a spreadsheet with Safer Custody and regularly updated.



### 3. Initial contact with family member

The ACCT case coordinator contacted the Prisoner Offender Manager and Public Protection team to ensure it was safe to engage Mark in Carol's care.

The ACCT case coordinator telephoned Mark to explain what being supported by ACCT means and what support is in place for Carol. Mark was invited to attend the next ACCT review meeting.

Carol was made aware of the prison's contact with Mark and has been asked to provide consent for his involvement on a regular basis.

### 4. Family member ACCT involvement

Mark attended an ACCT Review meeting which took place after a social visit (in order that Mark was not having to make numerous journeys to the prison).

In subsequent ACCT reviews the case coordinator has spoken to Mark by telephone before the meetings to get his input and speak about how he and Carol are coping with the adoption of their daughter.



### 5. Outcome

Mark appreciates being involved and now has a better understanding of those supporting his wife. He has made the prison aware of Carol's triggers and what can help.

## CASE STUDY 2

### 1. Needs of a prisoner



James is a young man who has prolifically self-harmed for many years, often very seriously, such as cutting his neck. He is on the Autistic spectrum and the prison has really struggled to manage the severity of his self-harm.

James' mother also self-harms and he has witnessed many years of domestic violence.

### 2. How a family member was identified

James identified that his one consistent and stable relationship was with his Nan.

James gave consent for his Nan to be contacted and she was invited to his ACCT reviews.



### 3. Initial contact with family member

James' Nan was contacted and she was given information about the purpose of an ACCT review and why James would like her to attend.

### 4. Family member ACCT involvement

Nan started to come along to the ACCT reviews and after some time the prison then worked with Nan and Mum to slowly encourage his mum to attend too.



### 5. Outcome

Having his Mum attend the ACCT reviews helped James to work through some of the reasons why he self-harmed and his Nan supported his Mum to contribute.



Over a period of many months the prison managed to support James to get a job - firstly in the recycling department and then in the staff mess. He has since moved on to work in the gardening department as he wants to be a landscape gardener on release. There have been a couple of occasions where he has self-harmed but they were very minor and he has found alternative ways to deal with his issues such as using music. Having the support of his Nan and Mum has had a positive impact on the whole family

# Top tips for engaging families/ carers in the ACCT process

1. Undertake necessary checks with the prisoners' OMU worker/Security Department to **ensure there are no restrictions on contact** with family members/carers.
2. Check whether there **are family members/carers already engaged**. Check on NOMIS case notes as well as contacting relevant departments including: Safer Custody, Chaplaincy, Healthcare, OMU and the Family Engagement Worker.
3. Check whether the prisoner has already given **informed consent** for a family member to be involved. If not, consider who is best placed to ask the prisoner for consent (who already has a trusted relationship with them?) and ensure the prisoner understands the benefits of their family being involved and what it will entail. Revisit consent with the prisoner regularly – for example in key work sessions or ACCT case review meetings. Ensure the family also gives informed consent to be involved.
4. Consider **who is best placed to support the family** to be involved – they might have an existing relationship with the family or have the capacity to provide ongoing support. It might be the Family Engagement Worker (FEW), ACCT case co-ordinator, Chaplain, mental health worker or Prison Offender Manager.
5. Consider **how you might want to involve the family member** or what might suit their needs best – it could be by telephone/secure video call/email prior to the review meeting or it could be in-person/via video link at a review meeting.
6. **Contact the family member prior** to their involvement to provide:
  - reassurance that actions are being taken to keep their loved one safe
  - an explanation of the ACCT process – they could be sent (by email or post) a copy of the family information booklet:  
[www.prisonersfamilies.org/assessment-care-in-custody-and-teamwork-acct](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org/assessment-care-in-custody-and-teamwork-acct)
  - an opportunity for them to identify whether they need any support to be involved (translator, disability access or support from the Family Engagement Worker)
  - an explanation of what their engagement might involve/what to expect.
7. If the family member is attending an **ACCT review in person**, ensure they receive a meet and greet at the gate/visit centre, are introduced to everyone in attendance, have the opportunity to share their views and the environment is relaxed and informal to encourage engagement.
8. Ensure the family member receives **support post-engagement as well as feedback if not attending**, as it can be difficult to hear or see how unwell their loved one is. This might involve a social visit with their loved one following an ACCT review meeting or a debrief and cup of tea with the Family Engagement Worker in the visit centre.
9. Make sure that families are kept updated and reassured about outcomes following the ACCT review/their input.