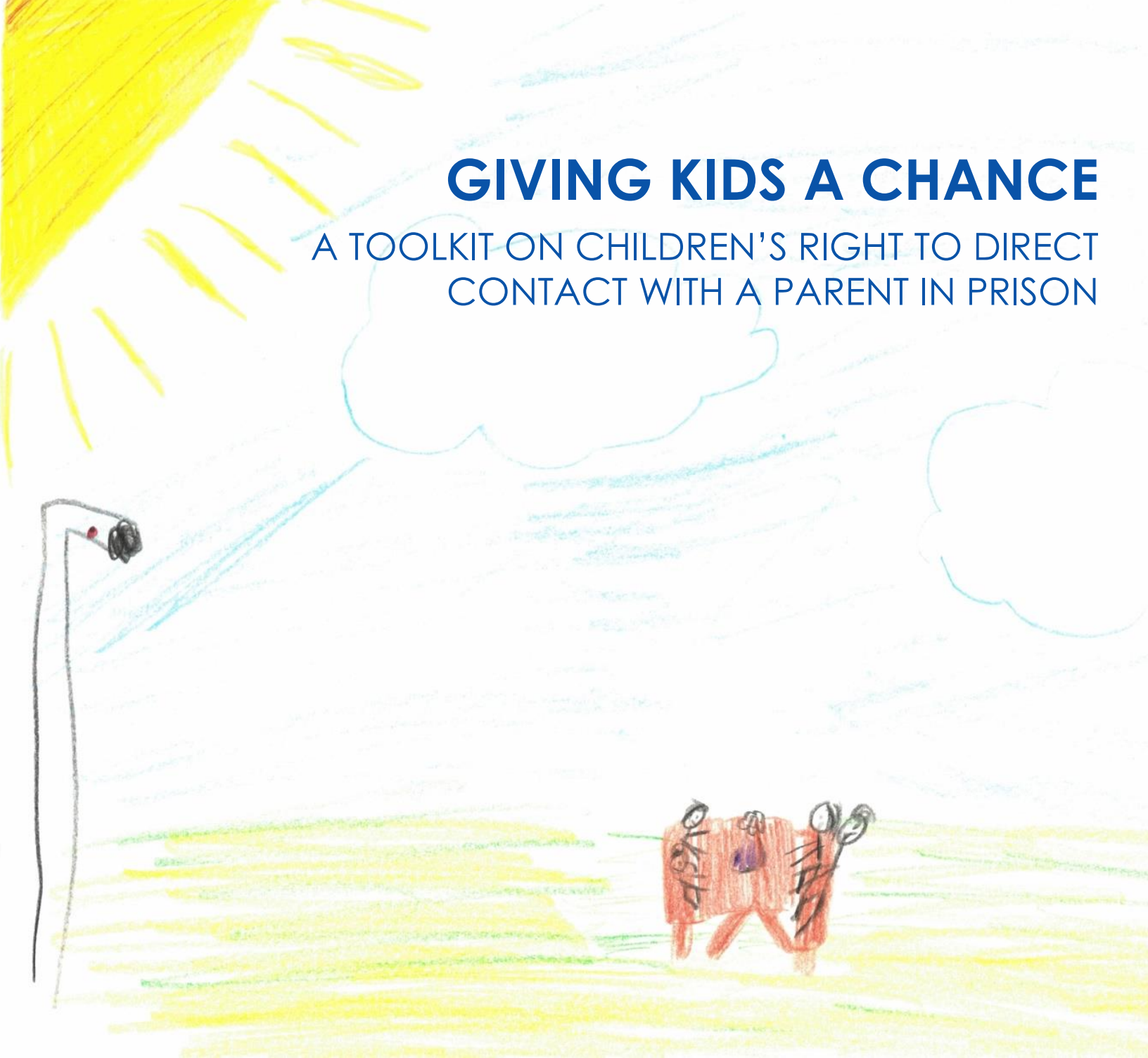


# GIVING KIDS A CHANCE

A TOOLKIT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO DIRECT CONTACT WITH A PARENT IN PRISON



CHILDREN OF  
PRISONERS EUROPE





Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) is a pan-European network of non-profit organisations working on behalf of children separated from an imprisoned parent. The network encourages innovative perspectives and practices to ensure that children with an imprisoned parent fully enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and that action is taken to enable their well-being and development.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRISON VISITS FOR CHILDREN WITH A PARENT IN PRISON

Child psychologists, social workers, researchers and other child welfare professionals are in consensus that the imprisonment of a parent can have long-lasting adverse consequences on the lives of children when they are not supported, and that reasonable steps should be taken to help mitigate the harm of child-parent separation.<sup>1</sup> Direct contact between a child and their imprisoned parent when in the best interest of the child is one of several crucial means of support for children impacted by parental imprisonment, alongside the provision of financial assistance, parenting support and alternative forms of punishment, such as non-custodial home detention and community service.<sup>2</sup>

Without adequate support, parental separation can have a range of ill effects, from separation anxieties, feelings of abandonment and internalised stigmatisation to what has been described as ‘distress’, ‘disruption’, ‘deprivation’ and ‘developmental effects.’<sup>3</sup> One study led to the inclusion of parental imprisonment on a list of ten Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that can adversely impact children, namely physical, emotional and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, mental illness, violence towards a mother, divorce and substance abuse.<sup>4</sup> Findings from the EU-funded COPING Project revealed that children with imprisoned parents have a 25 to 50 per cent greater risk of mental health problems than children in the general population, especially among children older than 11 years of age. The COPING Project also gave clear evidence that the preservation of family relations through open communication with caregivers, support from extended family and especially through sustaining relationships with imprisoned parents, were fundamental to mitigating risk and fostering resilience in children.

In relation to prison visits specifically, the COPING Project showed that for a majority of children, ‘regular contact with the imprisoned parent and maintaining the child-parent relationship was crucial for their emotional well-being and capacity for resilience.’<sup>5</sup> For children to be able to maintain regular contact with their parent in prison, prison guidelines need to be implemented to create and facilitate a child-friendly visiting environment through training prison staff on child-appropriate techniques and behaviour, and guidelines should accord with and reinforce this training through monitoring mechanisms.

Children need to be given options when it comes to determining conditions, mode and frequency of prison visits to parents who are incarcerated.

— Consensus forged during COPE Forum on children visiting prisons, June 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief note on language: any mention of ‘imprisonment’ in this toolkit refers to any kind of detention associated with the criminal justice system, beginning with detention in police custody, to pre-trial detention and detention during trial, to the service of a sentence in detention facilities including jails, prisons and penitentiaries.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, A. D., & Wainaina-Woźna, A. E. (Eds.) (2013), *Children of Prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health* [COPING Project], University of Huddersfield, UK; Murray, J. & Farrington, D. (2008), ‘The Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children,’ *Crime & Justice* 37(1), 133-206.

<sup>3</sup> Millar, H., & Dandurand, Y. (2018), ‘The Best Interests of the Child and the Sentencing of Offenders with Parental Responsibilities,’ *Criminal Law Forum* 29, 232.

<sup>4</sup> Felitti, V.J. et al. (1998), ‘Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,’ *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14(4), 245-258.

<sup>5</sup> COPING Project, 99.

## Direct child-parent contact as a way of fostering child well-being and resilience

Children are afforded the right to direct contact with a parent in prison under article 9.3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

*States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and **direct contact** with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests [emphasis added].*

Direct contact in the context of prison visits entails in-person, face-to-face contact with the parent in prison, whereas indirect contact includes communicating by telephone, video call, email or post. Both forms of contact have value in terms of keeping children connected to their parent in prison, but direct contact especially has been shown to be critical for the development of children's coping skills and emotional resilience,<sup>6</sup> as well as in creating 'positive change in parent-child relationship quality compared to mail and phone contact.'<sup>7</sup> The COPING Project found restrictions on physical contact between the imprisoned parent and visitors to be one of the main causes of dissatisfaction for children and families, impeding younger children's comprehension about their parent's whereabouts and well-being.

### Indirect contact as a stopgap measure during Covid-19 prison lockdowns

Indirect contact in the form of telephone and video calls has been instrumental in keeping children connected to parents in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its attendant prison lockdowns, which continue to be a reality for a majority of countries at the time of this writing in late 2020. Members from around the COPE network have reported certain unique benefits of video calls, like the fact that they allow children to show parents in prison their rooms or their toys and allow parents in prison to join the family at the dinner table, see the family dog and witness key moments in their child(ren)'s lives.

While novel, the introduction of video calls has also brought with it significant problems. The issue of access to video-capable technology has in some cases been prohibitive to families without computers or smartphones. And for those with internet access, video technology is not always reliable, with lags, connection issues and abrupt cut-offs that can be particularly frustrating when a parent in prison has a time limit per call. As with phone calls, connecting with infants and young children over a screen is a challenge at best; infants and toddlers especially rely upon touch and scent to attach to a parent. This fact alone makes clear the primacy of in-person visits and physical contact for infants and toddlers most importantly. For this reason and many others, it is imperative that video visits not take the place of in-person visits, which are crucial for child-parent bonding and in upholding UNCRC article 9.3.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, J. (2005), 'The effects of imprisonment on family and children of prisoners,' in A. Liebling and S. Maruna (Eds.), *The Effects of Imprisonment*, (Uffculme Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing), 442-464.

<sup>7</sup> Haverkate, D. L. & Wright, K. A. (2020), 'The differential effects of prison contact on parent-child relationship quality and child behavioral changes,' *Corrections: Policy, Practice and Research* 5(3), 222-244.

## Facilitating prison visits through sensible allocation and child-friendly procedures

Ease of visiting detention facilities can be a determining factor in maintaining child-parent relationships when a parent is in prison. The COPING Project found that in many country contexts, long, exhausting, stressful journeys to prison were commonplace, especially in large countries, and expensive transportation costs were not uniformly provided for or subsidised.



*On one hand the journey is nice because at last I am going to meet my mum, but on the other hand it is very tiring because there are a lot of changes of buses and trams. Sometimes it is cold, and we have to wait for a long time at the bus stops. It takes us three hours one way to get there. I feel like I travel through half of Poland to be able to meet my mum.*

— Ula, age 13, Poland

The experience of entering prison for a visit with a parent can be a uniquely traumatising experience for a child or young person, as they are exposed to intimidating security equipment and procedures involving sniffer dogs and invasive frisking policies in some country contexts and depending on the security level of the detention facility. It is essential that child-friendly practices and procedures be implemented, and that children's needs and other demands not become subordinate to the prison routine. Prison staff who have received training for child-friendly protocols and procedures can offer sensitive frontline family contact because they understand the impact of imprisonment on the families and children and the need to treat them sensitively and appropriately. The design of child-friendly visiting spaces within prisons can also go a long way towards softening the potentially traumatising effects of the prison environment. Visiting spaces should be comfortable – in some cases they are designed like a living room – and have toys, activities for younger children and older children alike, and access to food and drink.

## The child-parent bond as a support for social ties and dynamic security

Supporting the child-parent bond when mothers and fathers are in prison also acts as a preventive factor for the imprisoned parent, who suffers a loss of autonomy by virtue of their circumstances but who can be included in family and community life through maintaining a relationship with their child. Providing support to help alleviate shame, low self-esteem and guilt and granting parents opportunities to remain aware of their children's daily activities, be consulted on decisions concerning the child, and exercise parental authority can empower offenders, particularly within a context in which responsibility is taken away.<sup>8</sup> Research on prison visits has

<sup>8</sup> Eds. Philbrick, K., Ayre., L. and Lynn, H. (2014), *Children of imprisoned parents: European perspectives on good practice*, Children of Prisoners Europe, Montrouge, FR.

shown that the maintenance of social ties and sources of social support are important for re-entry and reducing recidivism after being released from prison.<sup>9</sup>

From a security perspective, support for the child-parent bond, protection of child rights and meeting children's needs are compatible with the security concerns of a prison and should be among the many security considerations made when children and families visit prison. Fostering child-parent contact has been shown to benefit the prison atmosphere, making for a calmer, more serene environment. Described as dynamic security, this provision of support relies on increased prison staff awareness of the holistic benefits of supporting the child-parent bond, which can lead to positive reciprocal relationships when prison administrations and staff work with prisoners to support them as parents.

### **Parental imprisonment during the Covid-19 pandemic: Greater incidence of parents not telling children the truth**

During sessions of an intra-network seminar with COPE representatives from Norway, Catalonia, Scotland and Cyprus, focused on prison visits during the Covid-19 pandemic, it came to light that there was a greater incidence of failing to explain to children the true reason for a parent's absence. This may be for numerous reasons, including that parents and caregivers were themselves coping with the upheaval of day-to-day life caused by the pandemic; that virtual visits hid the fact that the parent was in prison; or that separation from imprisoned parents increased during the pandemic. Being the subject of criminal justice procedures and imprisonment in and of itself poses enough of a lifestyle upheaval so as to drive a parent or carer not to tell the truth. Indeed, parents tell children what they as parents themselves can cope with. And the stigma associated with imprisonment affects the actions of all: prisoners and parents in not telling the children about the imprisonment; and children when they do/do not learn from their parents and are told/not told to share this with their peers, who may in turn then stigmatise them.

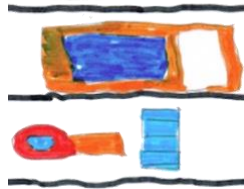
Not telling children the truth can have far-reaching adverse impacts on children and disregards their right to be heard in decisions affecting them (Article 12, paragraph 2 of the UNCRC). According to one review of the literature on issues and difficulties for the families of prisoners, possible repercussions of deceiving children include inhibiting their ability to work through emotional issues linked to the parent's absence; a tendency to demonise the parent and the prison world, with a heightened focus on the parent's 'terrible' crime; externalisation of children's behaviour in destructive or delinquent acts; and loss of faith in authority if the child learns of the parent's imprisonment from a third party such as a peer at school or through the media. Learning this important truth from others can also lead to a child's loss of trust in their bond with their parents. Not telling the truth, and consequently covering it up within the family, is also associated with a phenomenon known as ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss has been identified as one of the most stressful kinds of loss, with children being excluded from the process of grieving the loss of the parent, which opens up opportunities for acceptance and closure. Ambiguous loss, stigma and uncertainty have been cited as factors in children of detainees' withdrawal, depression or externalised anti-social behaviour.

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<sup>9</sup> La Vigne, N. G. et al. (2005), 'Examining the effect of incarceration and in-prison family contact on prisoners' family relationships,' *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 21(4), 314–335.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 concerning children with imprisoned parents, written to encourage member States to make criminal justice procedures more child-friendly, is to date the foremost guide for implementing child-friendly policies, procedures and practices. The following section uses the relevant articles from the Recommendation as a framework for implementation and draws from COPE's *Implementation Guidance Document for Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5* to provide examples of good practice related to child-friendly prison visits from members throughout the COPE network.



### I. Maintaining child-parent relationships



**Article 30:** *Special measures shall be taken to encourage and enable imprisoned parents to maintain regular and meaningful contact and relations with their children, thus safeguarding their development. Restrictions imposed on contact between prisoners and their children shall be implemented only exceptionally, for the shortest period possible, in order to alleviate the negative impact the restriction might have on children and to protect their right to an emotional and continuing bond with their imprisoned parent.*

**Good practice:** Preserve the right to child-parent contact, when in the child's best interest.

- Restrictions imposed on a parent in prison should make exception for child-parent contact, with priority given to direct, in-person contact.
- Prisons can offer programmes or requirements a prisoner must accomplish to minimise the length of restrictions imposed.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- The Swedish prison service imposes visitation restrictions in cases where the parent has a history of abusive behaviour but will lift these restrictions after the prisoner participates in treatment, such as Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme, shows progress and demonstrates that they understand the consequences of their actions.



**Article 31:** *A child's right to direct contact shall be respected, even in cases where disciplinary sanctions or measures are taken against the imprisoned parent. In cases where security requirements are so extreme as to necessitate non-contact visits, additional measures shall be taken to ensure that the child-parent bond is supported.*

**Good practice:** Prioritise direct, in-person contact between child and their parent in prison; phone and video calls should be considered supplementary forms of contact.

- Create child-friendly spaces and activities inside of non-contact visit facilities, including creative activities for connecting across a partition.



- Use video calls and other forms of telecommunication or letters for short periods when non-contact visits have been imposed, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- As a response to Covid-19-related prison lockdowns in the UK, the organisation Barnardo's wrote a guide (see Appendix) offering creative ideas for engaging with children during video calls and non-contact visits, with tips for both imprisoned parents and for the caregiver on the child's side of the screen.



**II. Getting to prison**



**Article 16:** *Apart from considerations regarding requirements of administration of justice, safety and security, the allocation of an imprisoned parent to a particular prison, shall, where appropriate and in the best interests of their child, be done so as to facilitate maintaining child-parent contact, relations and visits without undue burden either financially or geographically.*

**Good practice:** Allocate prisoners near their children and facilitate travel to prisons.

- When assigning sentenced parents to a detention facility, consider allocation near to home when possible and in the best interest of the child.
- The allocation of a parent should not place any financial burden on a child's ability to maintain contact with a parent. Provide families with information about public or private funding possibilities if the travel cost to visit is prohibitive.
- Put families in contact with the appropriate government and non-governmental organisations who can facilitate travel.
- Publish a guide for families living abroad with the information they will need to enter the country to visit a parent in prison.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- The prison administration of Cyprus has a budget specifically for transporting children to and from prison during visiting hours (Cyprus only has one prison).
- Germany's prison administrations allow inmates who have been allocated to far-flung prisons to transfer temporarily to prisons that are closer to families.<sup>10</sup>
- The UK's Assisted Prison Visits Scheme provides financial support to low-income families to ensure regular contact between children and imprisoned parents.<sup>11</sup>



**Article 22:** *When a child's parent is imprisoned far away from home, visits shall be arranged in a flexible manner, which may include allowing prisoners to combine their visit entitlements.*

<sup>10</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), *Establishing Baselines*.

<sup>11</sup> Philbrick, K., Ayre, E. & Lynn, H. (2014). *Children of Imprisoned Parents: European perspectives on good practices*, Children of Prisoners Europe (Montrouge, FR), 93.

**Good practice:** Improve flexibility in cases where frequent visits are not possible.


- Allow detainees to combine visit entitlements in the interest of the child's right to maintain contact with their parent.
- Explore the feasibility of providing financial resources or subsidies for transit costs where they do not exist.
- Reach out to NGOs or national authorities to partner in programmes that provide subsidised transport.
- Provide families with information about existing programmes offered by the state and NGOs to facilitate travel to distantly incarcerated parents.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- In Russia, prison visits may last several days in a row and the family stays in the prison, or in its immediate vicinity, during this period because of the long-distance travel involved.<sup>12</sup>
- Prison administrations in German Lander allow inmates to transfer temporarily to prisons that are closer to families.<sup>13</sup>



### III. Planning a visit: The first visit and planning future visits

 **Article 17:** *Children should normally be allowed to visit an imprisoned parent within a week following the parent's detention and, on a regular and frequent basis, from then on. Child-friendly visits should be authorised in principle once a week, with shorter, more frequent visits allowed for very young children, as appropriate.*

**Good practice:** Ensure that regular visits to parents in prison are the status quo, when in the best interest of the child.

- Studies in Denmark and the UK have demonstrated the importance of an early first visit in reassuring children that their parent is safe, and that parental imprisonment is not experienced as abandonment.
- Attention should be paid to supporting the child-parent bond from the moment of a parent's arrest, with regular in-person visits being prioritised as soon as possible, especially for young children in the early stages of bonding with their parents.
- Children and young people should be given options to visit in person or have a phone or video call and should be given the opportunity to reflect on their experience once the visit is over.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe (2018), *Explanatory Memorandum*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), *Establishing Baselines*.

<sup>14</sup> These insights and more (see 'Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic: New learning on child-parent connections,' page 25) were introduced by Professor Ann Adalist-Estrin, Director of the National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated (USA) at Rutgers University, Camden during COPE's annual Forum for Reflection and Exchange, a part of COPE's Annual Network Meeting, held 13 June 2020.

- In certain contexts, child-centred visits can be offered in addition to regular visits and are not always counted as part of the maximum number of hours allowed for visits. They can also be longer than standard visits.<sup>15</sup>



**Article 18:** *Visits shall be organised so as not to interfere with other elements of the child's life, such as school attendance. If weekly visits are not feasible, proportionately longer, less frequent visits allowing for greater child-parent interaction should be facilitated.*

**Good practice:** Maintain a flexible, child-focused visiting schedule, taking the child's school schedule into account when designing family visiting hours.

- Reach out to children and parents to see if the visiting schedule is convenient for the children and their caregivers. Ask how the schedule can be improved.
- Consider implementing a system for booking visits by phone in advance, which can help children plan visits that do not conflict with the rest of their everyday lives.
- Explore implementing visits that vary proportionally in frequency and length depending on children's availability to see their parent.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- Finland and Slovakia, among other national prison administrations, reserve weekends for family visits, and prisons in Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate hold a weekly 'family day.'<sup>16</sup>



**Article 19:** *In cases where the current caregiver is not available to accompany a child's visit, alternative solutions should be sought, such as accompanying by a qualified professional or representative of an organisation working in this field or another person as appropriate.*

**Good practice:** Standardise procedures to provide child-sensitive accompaniment.

- Children are entitled to contact in their own right and as such, a trained and child-sensitive third party, representing either the prison service, social service or NGO, should accompany a visiting child into the prison and through security procedures.
- Seek out and develop channels of communication with NGOs that will provide child-sensitive people to accompany children into prison and through security.
- Standard practices should be in place to facilitate communication between children, prison services, social services and NGOs.
- In places where there is a lack of NGO support, social workers should be provided to buffer the impact of the prison environment on a child.
- A caregiver's inability or unwillingness to visit the imprisoned parent (due to circumstances of illness, divorce, family breakdown, etc.), should not infringe upon a child's right to visit their parent.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- Affiliates of the NGO Fédération Relais Enfants Parents, which functions throughout France, Belgium and Switzerland, organise prison visits wherein volunteers, working with

<sup>15</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), *Establishing Baselines*, 100.


<sup>16</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), *Establishing Baselines*, 6.

support from child psychologists and social workers, accompany children throughout the visiting process.<sup>17</sup>

- Swedish NGO Solrosen provides volunteers and professionals trained to accompany children to prison or on custody visits.<sup>18</sup>
- Catalonia's Niños Sin Barreras accompanies children on visits when caretakers are not available; social workers from professional treatment teams are responsible for coordinating with Niños Sin Barreras.<sup>19</sup>
- Italy has outlined a standardised framework accompanying children's visits in Article 2 of their Memorandum of Understanding, which states that children under the age of 12 are provided with options for accompaniment to prison if they cannot be accompanied by a parent or guardian.<sup>20</sup>



#### IV. Inside the prison: Child-friendly visiting spaces and procedures

 **Article 23:** *Any security checks on children shall be carried out in a child-friendly manner that respects children's dignity and right to privacy, as well as their right to physical and psychological integrity and safety. Any intrusive searches on children, including body cavity searches, shall be prohibited.*

**Good practice:** Conduct searches in a child-sensitive and respectful manner.

- During security screenings, it is imperative that children are not harmed psychologically or otherwise as a result of insensitive searches.
- The child should be prepared before the body search takes place and be informed how the procedure will be carried out, with reference to the child's age and maturity.
- Introduce any search dogs to children as if they were being introduced to a pet.
- Something as simple as the prison officer bending down to the child's level when searching them prior to entry to the prison can reduce the tension in a security check.
- Prison officers carrying out security procedures can explain to children what they are doing and why.<sup>21</sup>
- Child-sensitive officers often develop their own ways of searching children in a playful manner, preserving their integrity in as unobtrusive a manner as possible – pretending to look for treasure, for example, or using their electronic search baton as a fairy wand.
- Analogies with searches for air travel can be useful in normalising the process and destigmatising the need for such checks.

#### Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:

<sup>17</sup> Philbrick, K., Ayre, E. & Lynn, H. (2014), 153.

<sup>18</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>20</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018). 'Implementation Guide: Italian Memorandum of Understanding on Children of Imprisoned Parents.'

<sup>21</sup> Philbrick, K., Ayre, E. & Lynn, H. (2014), 94.

- Swedish prison guards aim to make the body search more playful and less unpleasant by using a hand puppet that distracts from the use of a portable detector<sup>22</sup>.



**Article 24:** *Any searches of prisoners prior to visits shall be conducted in a manner which respects their human dignity in order to enable them to interact positively with their children during visits. As far as possible, children shall be authorised to leave the visiting area prior to the imprisoned parent, as this can be traumatic for some children. Where prisoners are provided with clothes by prison authorities, this clothing shall not offend their dignity, particularly during visits with their children.*

**Good practice:** Preserve a prisoner's dignity, especially before a visit, thereby giving them the greatest opportunity to interact positively with their children and inhabit their role as parent.

- Have parents wear normal clothing instead of uniforms when their children are visiting.
- Ensure that any searches or security measures for prisoners before visits with children are uncontentious and preserve a prisoner's dignity. A prisoner with a positive attitude coming into the visit will have a more meaningful and effective interaction with their child.
- Invite visitors to leave the visiting area first, because the end of the visit may be particularly difficult for children and parents and children seeing their parent leave in response to prison officers' orders can exacerbate this difficulty.



**Article 33:** *To ensure child protection and well-being, every effort shall be made to enhance mutual respect and tolerance and prevent potentially harmful behaviour between prisoners, their children and families, prison staff or other persons working in or visiting the prison. Good order, safety and security, in particular dynamic security, underpin all efforts to maintain a friendly and positive atmosphere in prison.*

**Good practice:** Children should witness positive and respectful interactions between adults in prison and should be protected from potential harm.

- Protect children visiting prison with robust child protection policies and procedures.
- Optimising visits and developing relationships with families contributes to dynamic security, good order, improved safety and prisoner engagement in positive activities. During staff training, emphasise that children do not pose a threat to security but rather they can have a positive impact on the prison environment. Imprisoned parents who have regular contact with their children have been shown to have fewer behaviour issues, and studies have shown that the prison atmosphere is calmer after a visit.<sup>23</sup>
- Encourage and reward positive, respectful interactions between prison staff and detainees, especially during visits when children are present. This will reduce tension between all parties involved: staff, prisoners and children.
- Use training as an opportunity to raise awareness about the stereotypes and biases staff bring with them; allow prison officers to explore their own attitudes and mindsets.<sup>24</sup>
- Encourage prison staff to be positive role models for prisoners.

### **Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

<sup>22</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 40.

<sup>23</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), 'Implementation guide: Italian memorandum of understanding on children with imprisoned parents', 11.

<sup>24</sup> Philbrick, K., Ayre, E. & Lynn, H. (2014), 142.

- The Ministry of Justice in Germany's Schleswig-Holstein provides prison staff training focused on family relations and emphasising the importance of supporting prisoners to deepen links to their children.<sup>25</sup>



## V. Visiting spaces



**Article 20:** *A designated children's space shall be provided in prison waiting and visiting rooms (with a bottle warmer, a changing table, toys, books, drawing materials, games, etc.) where children can feel safe, welcome and respected. Prison visits shall provide an environment conducive to play and interaction with the parent. Consideration should also be given to permitting visits to take place in the vicinity of the detention facility, with a view to promoting, maintaining and developing child-parent relationships in as normal a setting as possible.*

**Good practice:** Create child-friendly visiting spaces that soften the impact of potentially stressful prison visits and allow for normal interaction between child and parent.

- Ensure that visiting spaces where children will be present meet country specific minimum standards for hygiene, ventilation and light, and that they are adapted to use by children, including utilities for taking care of infant children (changing diapers; heating meals, toys, etc.) and furniture that is adapted to use by children of different ages.<sup>26</sup>
- Consider in some cases allowing for visits in other locations in the vicinity of the prison, which, if the environment is suitable, may offer a more relaxed atmosphere because children avoid some of the more intrusive prison security regulations.
- Consider making the location of child-centred visits less restrictive – areas where children can move about more freely and have access to physical activities, such as a swimming pool, gardens, gymnasium or play area.<sup>27</sup>
- This could also be an opportunity to partner with NGOs or national authorities who can provide their support by helping to organise and equip these spaces with toys, changing tables, bottle warmers, etc.
- The thoughtful curation of these spaces by child-friendly staff, ensuring that play areas are clean and equipped with age-appropriate toys, is paramount.
- These facilities should be accessible to children with disabilities.

### **Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- As of 2015, all Finnish prisons are required to have special visiting rooms for children who come to see their parent, where children are allowed physical contact with their parents. Imprisoned parents can also apply for special 'family visits,' up to a few days in length, which take place in rooms that resemble a living room, with a table, a couch and toys for

<sup>25</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe (2018), *Explanatory Memorandum*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Philbrick, K., Ayre, E. & Lynn, H. (2014), 100.

children and their parents to play with.<sup>28</sup> Finland's Vanaja Open Prison has a separate family house, where the family meeting can be arranged for a period of several days. Family houses contain four apartments of different sizes.<sup>29</sup>

- COPE's Italian partner, Bambinisenzasbarre, introduced 'Spazio Giallo' – children's waiting areas in prisons that are painted yellow and that have toys and activities, allowing children an opportunity to play while waiting to see their parent. Children follow a brightly decorated path laid out with giant footsteps as they approach the prison to make the experience less scary.<sup>30</sup>
- Scottish and Irish prisons, as well as some prisons throughout England and Wales, offer Visiting Centre facilities where families can meet with prison employees and volunteer workers and receive information on matters relating to imprisonment.<sup>31</sup>
- Ireland's Limerick Prison overhauled their Family Room, previously bland and without age-appropriate toys for children, renaming it the 'Sitting Room' to emphasise the kinds of relationships and activities formed in a family's home and to encourage dialogue and positive conversation. The Sitting Room is divided into two areas – one for parents and social workers, another expressly for children to play.<sup>32</sup>
- COPE member Relais Enfants-Parents Asbl has 'trilieux' spaces in several Belgian prisons that provide three different environments where children can play, create things or relax and read with their parents, depending on their mood and age. In certain prisons, a special committee of imprisoned parents sets up the 'trilieux' area with toys and books in preparation for the visit.<sup>33</sup>
- France offers Unités de Vie Familiale where the families of prisoners can visit with an imprisoned parent for up to three days at a private apartment facility at certain prisons<sup>34</sup>.



## VI. Training prison staff on child-friendly procedures



**Article 21:** *Measures should be taken to ensure that the visit context is respectful to the child's dignity and right to privacy, including facilitating access and visits for children with special needs.*

**Good practice:** When training prison staff, include guidelines for treating children respectfully and appropriately, including specific guidelines considering children in a situation of disability.

- Except in cases when a child could be harmed, privacy should be afforded to both child and parent during visits.

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<sup>28</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), 'Implementation guide: Italian memorandum of understanding on children with imprisoned parents', 20.

<sup>29</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe, Forum for reflection and exchange: Promoting the child-parent relationship through a partnership model, 13 June 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2018), 'Implementation guide: Italian memorandum of understanding on children with imprisoned parents', 20.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 104.

- When designing visiting spaces, ensure their accessibility to people in a situation of disability. Accommodations such as private visiting rooms should be made available to children with special needs such as autism.
- Provide specific information to visitors with disabilities, including information about public transport to the prison and the layout of the prison's handicap accessibility. Information provided should be in an accessible format.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- Prisons in the UK allow children with autism and other specific needs to visit with parents in private rooms.
- The Swedish prison service disseminates information for people with hearing impairments on the Prison Service homepage. In Belgium, the website of the Federal Public Service of Justice is accessible to people with a disability, obtaining an Any Surfer Label, a quality label for accessible websites.
- In Croatia, prison staff help guests with special needs, adapting the environment to allow for accessible prison visits or cooperating with the Association of Deaf and Blind when necessary.<sup>35</sup>



**Article 46:** *Staff who come into contact with children and their imprisoned parents shall respect their rights and dignity. Prison administrations should select, appoint and resource designated 'children's and/or family officers' whose role should include support for children and their imprisoned parents, facilitate visits in child-friendly settings, provide guidance and information, in particular to children newly confronted with the prison environment, and liaise with relevant agencies, professionals and associations on matters related to children and their imprisoned parents.*

**Good practice:** Provide training to staff to mitigate the potentially traumatising effects for children of the prison environment.

- Prisons should train staff members – especially those in direct contact with children visiting the prison – about children's needs and rights.
- Suggest that prison management appoint trained and specialised prison officers whose role is to support children and their imprisoned parents during each visit; the officers chosen to participate in the training should be decided by the heads of the prison administration.<sup>36</sup>

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- The Danish Prison and Probation Service appoints 'child officers' in every prison who are trained to be aware of the family relations of the prisoners, of the importance of having appropriate visiting facilities and to provide information to the family. Child officers are trained to make special arrangements for visiting children, creating the conditions for parents in prison to maintain good and evolving relations with their child, and work with NGOs that support children with a parent in prison.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 20.

<sup>36</sup> Children of Prisoners Europe (2017), Implementation guide: Italian memorandum of understanding on children with imprisoned parents, 24.

<sup>37</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 35.



- In Ireland, Family Liaison Officers are selected and trained to deliver a parenting programme both within the prison and also within the community.<sup>38</sup>
- Family Liaison Officers in Finland speak with prisoners about their children and support prisoners to preserve healthy family relations.
- The Finnish prison service's 'Let's Talk about Children' programme works with prison social workers to discuss the role of prison staff in the treatment of affected children.<sup>39</sup>
- Every Swedish prison has a trained 'children's ombudsman' who serves as an advocate for the best interests of children with imprisoned parents.<sup>40</sup>
- Since 2018, COPE has collaborated with NGOs and prison services in Bulgaria and Poland on a programme called Papa Plus, which aims to raise awareness among prison personnel on how their daily work can incorporate children's rights and needs. Papa Plus encourages a shift in the way imprisoned fathers and their children are seen by prison staff and other professionals whose work directly or indirectly impacts their lives, with the ultimate goals of enhancing the protection of children's rights and well-being by supporting the bond between father and child, and in so doing creating a more respectful and calm prison atmosphere.



## VII. Indirect contact between in-person visits



**Article 25:** *In accordance with national law and practice, the use of information and communication technology (video-conferencing, mobile and other telephone systems, internet, including webcam and chat functions, etc.) shall be facilitated between face-to-face visits and should not involve excessive costs. Imprisoned parents shall be assisted with the costs of communicating with their children if their means do not allow it. These means of communication should never be seen as an alternative which replaces face-to-face contact between children and their imprisoned parents.*

**Good practice:** Ensure access to phone and video calls to allow parents and children to remain in contact between in-person visits.

- Ensure that telephone calling is available to all parents and likewise that families have access to the necessary technology and services in order to connect. Lack of access to video calling technologies for families has been a prohibitive factor in keeping children connected with parents in prison during the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Muth, B., Warner, K., Gogia, K. & Walker, G. (2016), *A Critique of the Prison Re-entry Discourse: Futurity, Presence and Common-sense*, *The Prison Journal* Vol, 96(3), 395.

- In cases where telephone and video conferencing require a fee from individual prisoners, steps should be taken to make those services accessible for everyone.
- Consider partnering with government or non-governmental actors to subsidise the cost of calls from prison if they are prohibitive.
- Phone and video calls should never take the place of in-person child-parent visits. Implementation of phone and video calls during the Covid-19 pandemic should be seen as a stopgap measure to keep children connected to parents during Covid-associated prison lockdowns; in-person visits should not be supplanted in the long run but should be treated as an additional option when children are given the choice to visit in person or via telecommunications.

### **Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- The Covid-19 pandemic and its associated prison lockdowns across the majority of Europe led to the rapid implementation of video calling technologies to replace in-person visits. Prison administrations were greatly supported by child and family support NGOs facilitating rapid implementation of video technologies and providing counselling services to children online and via telephone hotlines. Some examples of implementation from around the COPE network are as follows:
  - ‘Treatment Teams’ from Catalonia’s Prison Service, including social workers, educators, lawyers and psychologists along with cultural mediators and artistic monitors, mobilised their teams to respond to the suspension of family visits with ways to keep families in frequent touch with detainees, introducing remote visiting, extended telephone access and weekly videocalls. The treatment teams work together to call families to give support and information, notifying them about suspended visits and new procedures, including for maintaining contact with prisoners. A member of the treatment team also provides technical support and responds to detainees’ concerns about their family after the call.
  - The prison service in the Netherlands invested in tablets to provide video visits as an option during prison lockdowns, and volunteers from COPE member Exodus have helped families install necessary videoconferencing apps.
  - The Swedish correctional service was quick to allow inmates to make phone calls to their families for free, but it wasn’t until COPE members Solrosen and Bufff put together a press release with the child rights organisation Erikshjälpen urging the correctional service to allow videoconferencing between parents and children that video visits were implemented. Solrosen was also able to continue to offer counselling to imprisoned parents through phone calls and Skype sessions.
  - In Italy, Bambinisenzasbarre has been collaborating with Bollate Prison (Milan) and Italian Social Services on experimental three-way video calls, allowing children and detained parents to meet with the neutral presence of a Bambinisenzasbarre professional, in the interest of preserving the child’s rights.
  - COPE member Parents in Action RODA formed a mutual agreement with the UNICEF Office for Croatia and the Croatian Ministry of Justice that was instrumental in introducing video visits in 13 correctional facilities in the Republic of Croatia, and crucial for prisoners to be able to communicate with their families.



**Article 26:** *Rules for making and receiving telephone calls and other forms of communication with children shall be applied flexibly to maximise communication*


*between imprisoned parents and their children. When feasible, children should be authorised to initiate telephone communications with their imprisoned parents.*

**Good practice:** Approach the question of telecommunication between child and parent with flexibility, considering the best interests of the child.

- If possible, allow children to initiate phone or video calls to a parent in prison, increasing their sense of autonomy in their relationship with their parent and reassuring them that their parent is reachable, as well as allowing for different schedules.
- Allow parents in prison to receive phone calls from minor children.
- Improve access to video calls for children and parents in prison.



## VIII. Leaves of absence and special visits

 **Article 28:** *Child-parent activities should include extended prison visits for special occasions (Mother's Day, Father's Day, end of year holidays, etc.) and other visits to further the child-parent relationship, in addition to regular visits. Consideration on such occasions should be given to prison and other staff in visiting areas being dressed less formally, in an effort to normalise the atmosphere.*

**Good practice:** Programme special events on holidays and special occasions to promote the formation of stronger familial bonds and create positive memories for children and young people.

- Positive festive experiences provide both the opportunity for prisons to help foster meaningful child-parent contact and for the rigid tone of the prison atmosphere to be softened.
- Reach out to NGOs with experience hosting holiday parties or visits to help organise these events.
- During special events staff may dress up differently (a sweatshirt or no hat and tie or wearing civilian clothing), distribute presents, sing songs, etc., to create as normal an atmosphere as possible so that the child is reassured that the parent is treated well.
- Hold the events in a large open space conducive to play – or even outdoors.

### **Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- The 2014 Italian Memorandum of Understanding sets guidelines that 'allow the parent, during detention, to be present at important moments of their child's life, especially if they are underage, such as birthdays, first day of school, recitals, exhibitions, graduations, festivities.'<sup>41</sup>
- Member organisations of the Fédération Relais Enfants Parents (France, Belgium and Switzerland) offer special visits for children on Mother's Day, Father's Day and Christmas.

<sup>41</sup> Italian Memorandum of Understanding (2014), Article 3(2).

- Germany's Schleswig-Holstein prison holds special events for prisoners and their children such as Christmas baking in the prison bakery, puppet theatre, magic shows, etc.<sup>42</sup>



**Article 42:** *In order to enhance child-parent relationships, prison authorities shall utilise options such as home leave, open prisons, halfway houses, electronic monitoring and community-based programmes and services to the maximum possible extent, to ease transition from prison to liberty, to reduce stigma, to re-establish contact with families at the earliest possible stage and to minimise the impact of a parent's imprisonment on children.*

**Good practice:** Facilitate a smooth transition from prison life to family life, increasing leaves of absence and special family visits in the period leading up to release.

- Consider allocating parents to open prisons to facilitate communication and contact with children.
- Offer prisoners home leave for visits home and thus reduce the need for children to physically visit prisons.
- Bear in mind a prisoner's parental role when considering granting home leave.
- During the release and reintegration process, prioritise proximity to children when assigning a parent to a halfway home.

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- In Berlin, Germany, imprisoned mothers in open prisons can go home every day to take care of the children. The scheme allows mothers to spend sixteen hours a day at home taking care of family and household; she leaves prison in the early morning, goes home, wakes up the children, prepares breakfast and takes school-aged children to school, then returns home and takes care of the other children and household.<sup>43</sup>
- In Norway, prisoners have access to regular home leave once they have served one-third of their sentence.<sup>44</sup>



## IX. Providing information to children and families about visiting and prison conditions



**Article 29:** *Children shall be offered the opportunity, when feasible and in the child's best interests, and with the support of an appropriate adult, to visit or receive information (including images) about areas in which their imprisoned parent spends time, including the parent's prison cell.*

<sup>42</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 30.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 106.

**Good practice:** Provide information to children about a parent's life in prison, on the premise that accurate details about prison conditions will prevent children from imagining that their parents are being poorly treated.

- NGOs may be able to work in partnership with the prison services to publish information for children.
- Child-sensitive information can be in the form of story books, maps, videos, cartoons or animations
- Prison services can make their web platforms accessible to individuals with visual and auditory impairments by reaching out to specialised associations which work with the disabled.<sup>45</sup>

**Good practice from the COPE network and across Europe:**

- Denmark has a number of films that contain general information about imprisonment and custody. These films aim to give children of different ages insight into what to expect when visiting a parent or relative in prison, and to inform children about where to seek more information and support.<sup>46</sup>
- In Finland, there is an animated film about having a parent in prison. This film tells the story of a ten-year-old girl and her brother and their experience of their father being sent to prison.
- Sweden facilitates information for people with hearing impairments on the Prison Service homepage by pressing the 'lyssna' button.
- In Belgium, the website of the Federal Public Service of Justice is accessible to people with a disability. It obtained an Any Surfer Label, a quality label for accessible websites.<sup>47</sup>



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<sup>45</sup> EuroPris Family Relations Expert Group (2017), 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 20.

## LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: NEW LEARNING ON CHILD-PARENT CONNECTIONS

As COPE partners around Europe and the world responded to Covid-19 associated prison lockdowns, new revelations emerged for mitigating hardship and trauma for children with a parent in prison that will continue to be relevant once the current health crisis is under control. These findings were shared broadly amongst the COPE network, particularly during a May 2020 webinar entitled 'Keeping children connected to a parent in prison in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond' and COPE's annual Forum for Reflection and Exchange, which led to the formation of a thematic working group on prison visits, including partners from Belgium, Catalonia, Cyprus and Norway. These lessons were thus developed through knowledge sharing across numerous country contexts and can be thought of as broadly applicable during the current pandemic and into the future, so that instead of returning to 'normal' prison visits, a new normal is established – one that honours children's rights and fulfils children's needs.

- 1. Children and young people need to be told the truth.** COPE partners around Europe have observed a greater incidence of carers masking the truth of a parent's imprisonment from children during the Covid-19 pandemic. As discussed earlier in this toolkit, withholding the truth from children can have significant negative impacts on children's psychological well-being, including difficulty in working through emotions, demonisation of the absent parent, destructive behaviour, loss of faith in authority and a sense of ambiguous loss, which impedes children's grief surrounding a parent's absence. A good approach to telling children the truth about a parent's imprisonment is summed up by child psychologist and former COPE president, Alain Bouregba:

*Lying or partial omission might tempt some parents, but children are going to suffer regardless. Children perceive a whole lot more than what we think. They can understand absence, marginalisation, wrongdoing. That being said, it is not about overdoing it with the truth. What is key is to focus on how the child is perceiving things, and to take how they view the given situation as the starting point. If children are told too much, too fast without listening to what the child has to say, they will no longer be able to talk about it and will withdraw, which is very damaging.*

- 2. Children and young people need access.** The shift to videoconferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic laid bare critical inequalities of access to digital technologies for families with parents in prison. In some contexts, NGOs held collection drives to provide families with used computers, tablets and smartphones, and helped families to install necessary videoconferencing applications like Skype. The question of access goes further than having the right equipment, too: children and carers need to be supported financially when travelling long distances to visit in prison, and phone calls between parents in prison and families at home should not be expensive or should be subsidised completely. Lack of access, both to financial means and digital technologies, should not impede a child's relationship with their imprisoned parent.

- 3. Children and young people need options.** The experience of visiting prison in person can be complicated, stressful and tiring – all elements that take away from the goal of visiting: spending quality time with their parent. On the other hand, phone calls and video calls, while good ways of keeping connected, do not allow for bonding and extended visiting; physical contact is especially crucial for infants and toddlers to form healthy attachments. In order for children and young people to feel most comfortable and to best be able to connect with their parent, they should be able to choose the mode, conditions and frequency of prison visits to parents who are incarcerated.
- 4. Children and young people need to unpack their experiences.** Whether it be an in-person visit or a video call, visiting with an imprisoned parent is an emotional experience. Visits to prison in particular can be stressful and traumatic. No matter what, children should be given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences once the visit with an imprisoned parent is over, either with their caregiver or with a professional from an NGO or counselling service. The presence of a trusted and caring adult can greatly improve a child's resiliency and healthy development when a parent is in prison.

Several issues were raised during the Covid-19 pandemic that should remain on the table as critical questions to consider now and in the future:

- 1. Video calls needs to be codified as supplementary to in-person visits.** In-person visits should be the primary form of contact between children and their parents – but the Covid-19 pandemic has also shown that virtual visits can be a good option for maintaining contact between prison visits and if or when prisons experience precautionary lockdowns during similar health crises. Access to video calls – and the conditions of those calls – needs to be codified, but some questions remain as to how they should be codified: If there are multiple children participating, how can calls best be arranged to assure individual child-parent bonding? Does the children's carer have a role to play? Should there be a third party present? Do children have a choice in deciding how to visit with their parent?

This last question opens onto additional questions regarding children's voices and experiences with both in-person visits video calls:

- 2. How do we define a 'child-friendly' visit? Who defines it?** Children should have a role in defining the meaning of 'child-friendly' when it comes to in-person visits and video calls alike – but is the child always right? In other words, is the child's choice always in their best interest? What role should both carers in the home and parents in prison have in defining 'child-friendly'? Is this something that can be defined by social workers and child psychologists in partnership with prison administrations? It is important to consider that in some contexts, contact between a child and a parent in prison is not universally accepted as benefitting children. What can be done to shift the frame in this case to a definition of 'child-friendly' as increasing support for a healthy child-parent relationship, with support for both the parent in prison and the child at home?

## APPENDIX



*Tinja, age 7, Finland: 'I'm nervous to go to prison to visit if the guards are angry. Prison visits should be made more fun for kids.'*



With video visits being rolled out across prisons in the United Kingdom as an answer to the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people have been asked for feedback on their experiences of virtual and closed visits. Often the response is: 'It is nice, but all I want is a hug'. Where a hug isn't possible, the question to answer is, *How do we connect with children when there are physical barriers in place?*

As a Family Engagement Worker in a prison setting, I am tasked to support connection and relationships between prisoners and their children. I am an advocate, enabling the voice of the child to be heard. My role is to support communication between prisoners and their children, to ensure that it is child-focused and that the imprisoned parent is assisted and encouraged to be responsive to their child's needs.


This article offers some creative ideas to encourage connection through a digital or physical screen. Video visits will be discussed first, followed by ideas for facilitating non-contact in-person prison visits across a glass or perspex screen.


### Video calls

#### 1. Tips for supporting the child in the community



*Schedule video calls strategically.* Discuss with the child's family member in prison what time of day would be best for your child for a video call. Video chat means children have to sit quietly and focus on the screen. Try to avoid calls at times when your child may be hungry, tired or restless.

  
1. Eyes are watching

  
2. Ears are listening.

*Be aware of your child's sensorial experience.* When children interact face to face (like adults) they pick up on many different communication cues – sight, sound, smell, and touch. As video chat involves sight and sound only, help your child to concentrate on those senses. You may find it helpful during the call to repeat questions raised by their relative or point things out in the picture of things that your child can identify or see.



*Be creative.* Have items next to you before the video call starts to help engage your child – perhaps storybooks, musical instruments, your child's latest artwork or whatever you plan to show the other person, so your child doesn't lose interest as you scramble to find something.

## 2. Top tips for the imprisoned family member



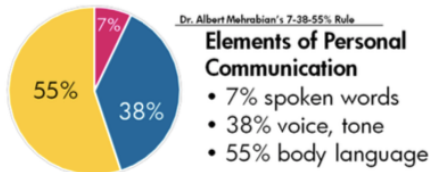
*Practice looking at the camera.* This is hard to do, as your eye will automatically wander during the call to either your own image or the image of your child, but to help the child process being looked at, try to look directly down the camera lens. This will help you really make eye contact and it is much better for interactive communication.



*Play games to hold interest.* Keep very young children engaged with you by playing 'peek-a-boo' – or hold your child's interest by showing them a book, a toy, or something else that you want to talk about.



*Make sure to use the same greeting each time and in the same tone of voice.* Infants and toddlers learn to recognise and feel comfortable with a real person on the screen when they hear that same sound each time they see the person. This is important because they often depend more on smell and touch when meeting a person – so they need more visual and sound cues to recognise you on video chat. And sign off in the same way – a kiss or hand to the screen.



*Use a lot of gestures and hand movements.* A talking head is not as attention grabbing as your hands and body movements – remember communication is 55 per cent body language.

Both adults taking part in the video call have a role to play to support the child. For the adult sat next to the child during the video call, it is important to consider a few other things:

- *You are the 'hands and heart' of the person on-screen.* So if the person on the screen (the imprisoned parent) 'tickles' your baby's tummy, you can give her tummy a tickle in real life. When the imprisoned relative leans toward the screen to 'kiss' your toddler, you can give him a kiss on the cheek. By taking this role, the adult in the room nurtures the relationship between the child and the parent on the screen.
- *Technical issues may occur.* Explain to the child why the video chat partner may appear to 'freeze' on the screen or why the call may be dropped. Explaining these experiences in child-friendly language helps children better understand the technology, and not feel that the connection has been broken by the imprisoned parent.
- *Make video chat a social, back-and-forth experience.* A successful video chat will feel like everyone is playing together, even when they're apart.
- *Take advantage of what video calls offer.* There are bonuses to video visits, as they bypass

the difficulty of visiting in prison. Video calls may be held in different rooms of their home or around the meal table. While physical visits are still very important, video calls can be meaningful and may be less disruptive to the child/young person than a trip to a prison.

We must press that video calls are to be a substitute whilst physical visits are not possible, but that they should not substitute actual physical visits in the long term.

### **Non-contact visits**

How can children be engaged across a barrier? The window can be seen as a restriction to their connection, but if it is used as an that encourages playfulness, the barrier can be a tool to help families connect.

To support children during non-contact visits, there is the option of a play box, to help them enjoy the session. This would include some colouring materials, perhaps a toy car and some books. However, there may be hygiene issues with these items and we would need to ensure that they are disinfected before another visitor used them. Also, these play boxes can be a distraction, keeping children occupied but allowing them to disengage from person on the other side of the screen.

NB: Some closed visits spaces will rely upon a microphone and therefore only one of the visitors may be able to use it at a time if the phone is a handset, so games that don't require the use of voice conversation can be useful when there are multiple visitors.

Marker pens are a good way to engage across a glass or perspex barrier, especially as they are impermanent and hygienic. Be creative about the way you use drawings to connect with children. Here are some ideas for games that can be played across a barrier:

- Drawing around each other's faces, which encourages eye contact.
- Playing Pictionary, which sidesteps literacy barriers
- Noughts and Crosses
- Charades
- Playing the game 'squares'
- Drawing a scene together
- A drawing conversation - You could take it in turns to draw a line/shape at a time and see what you create! Encourages turn taking, reciprocation needed to develop social skills or adult draws a line and child/young person turns it into a picture

Barnardo's hope that you have found these tips and ideas helpful and that it may encourage creativity when planning visits at your prisons.

