

Considerations for Prison Services

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents



LUCA, age 10, England

Introduction

Experiencing the imprisonment of a parent can have adverse consequences on children when they are not provided with adequate and individualised support. Children may be vulnerable to stigmatisation, shame and negative stereotyping in addition to coping with the separation from a primary caregiver. Measures can be taken to promote the resilience of children, strengthen the child-parent bond and mitigate the harmful impact of this experience, notably through positive and child-friendly visits in prison.

A single visit to a parent in prison can put at ease the exaggerated imagination and fears of children influenced by representations of prisons in films, on television and images online. Seeing that a parent is safe can reassure children and show them a reality more palatable than the one their imagination may have created. This is not to say that a visit to prison will always go smoothly. Imposing gates; the security search process; drug dogs; stern prison officers; the lack of play area or child-oriented decorations and pictures: all of this can heighten a child's fears. A child-friendly visit to prison can mitigate these fears, humanise the experience, reassure children that their parent is safe and ultimately promote the child-parent bond.

This document contains a brief summary of good practice that prison services should enact, salient guidelines outlined in the Council of Europe's landmark Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5, and links to further tools and materials to support prison services.



HUGO, aged 7, Poland

Examples of Good Practice

- Prisons should include **child-friendly visiting facilities** equipped with age-appropriate furniture, toys, books, games, etc. They should be welcoming, clean and accessible to all children, including those with disabilities. Visiting facilities should also include outdoor spaces, maximising opportunity for positive family engagement during visits.
- **Prison staff should be trained** on the impact that having a parent in prison may have on children and their role in mitigating this impact. This may involve how to communicate with children during key moments such as the security search.
- Prison administration services should be encouraged to communicate with other **agencies across the sector** to promote the child-parent bond. For example, prison services and schools can work together to ensure parental involvement in children's education.
- **Data collection:** on arrival in prison, it should routinely be asked if prisoners have any caregiving responsibilities.
- The **placement of prisoners** should take into consideration the **location of children**; the farther away the prison, the greater difficulty a family will have regularly visiting a parent.



ISAC, aged 7, Sweden

Key Links and Resources



FRIDA, aged 10, Norway

- [Giving Kids a Chance: A toolkit on children's right to direct contact with a parent in prison](#)
- [Child Talk: A Reflective toolkit for Prison Administrators and Staff on Supporting the Child-Parent Relationship](#)
- [Family Relations Good Practice Collection](#)
- [It's Time to Act: CoE Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)5](#)
- [Implementation Guidance Document: Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)5](#)
- [European Journal of Parental Imprisonment: Community sanctions and restorative justice](#)
- [European Journal of Parental Imprisonment: Bonding across barriers - Support for the infant-parent relationship within a carceral context](#)
- [European Journal of Parental Imprisonment: Perspectives on keeping connected during a pandemic - Challenges to child rights and well-being](#)

Relevant Articles from Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5



The Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents is a landmark instrument which both recognises parental imprisonment as having long-lasting effects on the well-being of millions of children, and addresses the needs of those children with a parent in prison through 56 guidelines for good practice.

Below you will find a selection of these guidelines geared to prison services.

03.

Whenever a parent is detained, particular consideration shall be given to allocating them to a facility close to their children.

05.

The prison administration shall endeavour to collect and collate relevant information at entry regarding the children of those detained.

Relevant Articles, cont.

11.

Significant events in a child's life – such as birthdays, first day of school or hospitalisation – should be considered when granting prison leave to imprisoned parents.

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."

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.

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.

Find the complete recommendation at

[HTTPS://CHILDRENOFPRISONERS.EU/COUNCIL-OF-EUROPE-RECOMMENDATION-CM-REC20185/](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/council-of-europe-recommendation-cm-rec20185/)



Relevant Articles, cont.

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.

32.

With a view to protecting children from the frequently harsh prison environment, preparing them for their parent's return, and having their parents present at significant events in their lives, home leave for prisoners should be granted and facilitated, where possible. This is especially important during the period before their release, providing more opportunities for them to prepare for resuming fully their parental role and its responsibilities on release.

52.

Statistical data from prison and child welfare sources should be systematically collected and published together with information on children with imprisoned parents and inventories of good practice.

Find the complete recommendation at

[HTTPS://CHILDRENOFPRISONERS.EU/COUNCIL-OF-EUROPE-RECOMMENDATION-CM-REC20185/](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/council-of-europe-recommendation-cm-rec20185/)



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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