

Considerations for Schools

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



IDA, aged 11, Finland

Introduction

Schools are an institution that nearly all children attend. A parent's imprisonment - from their arrest onwards - can render children more vulnerable to social isolation, negative stereotyping, stigmatisation and shame, in addition to the psychological impact of separation from a primary caregiver. Individualised, child-rights based support can help mitigate these harms and should be available at school.

Most educational authorities recognise their duty of care to support children through adverse experiences. Yet very few schools are aware of how many children in their care are experiencing parental imprisonment, let alone how to provide adequate emotional support, create a non-discriminatory environment, and help maintain the child-parent bond. Having a compassionate and trusted adult with whom children can confide in and speak freely can help foster resilience in children, empower them and help them make sense of the experience. Creating a classroom environment where parental imprisonment can be discussed free of judgement can liberate children from secrecy surrounding their parent's imprisonment. Beyond teachers, support staff and administrative staff can play an important role too.

This document offers pragmatic ideas of how schools can systematise support to children coping with the imprisonment of a parent, relevant guidelines outlined in the Council of Europe's landmark Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5, and links to further tools and materials.



BOY, aged 3, Italy

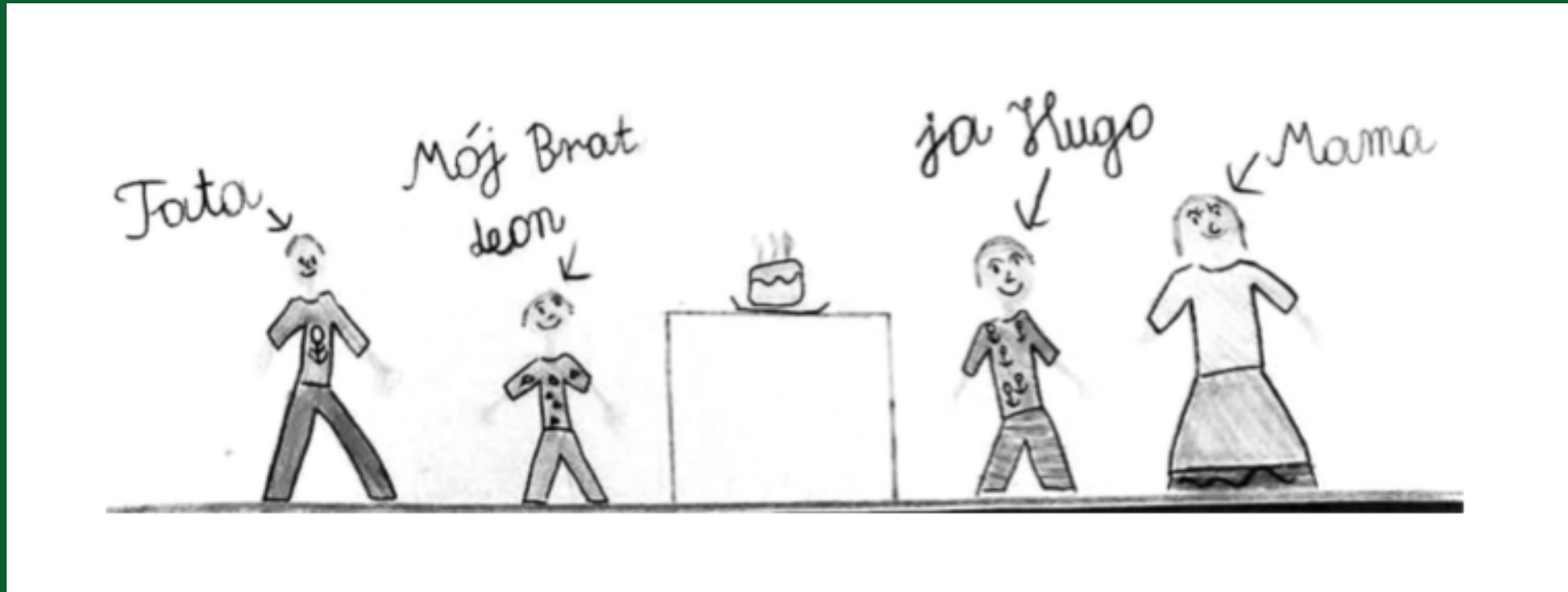
Key Considerations

- **Training** for school staff - teachers, administrative and support staff included - is essential for creating a supportive environment where children can freely express themselves and can seek guidance from caring and compassionate adults. Training teachers **in prison** can help remove any preconceived ideas teachers may have about prison and better equip them to provide individualised support.
- Schools should be provided with **resources** such as posters, leaflets, handbooks and guides to raising the wider awareness of parental imprisonment.
- **Engaging parents with their children's education** is key to maintaining the child-parent bond. Organising teacher-parent meetings in prison, with examples of children's work and information about their progress at school, demonstrates to children that their parent is still present. It also allows parents to better understand the stage of development of their children, ultimately strengthening the child-parent bond. Consider collaborating with prisons to encourage **homework clubs** and **sending report cards to prisons**.
- Including parental imprisonment in the **wider curriculum** and including the theme as a topic for routine assemblies might help to **mainstream the discussion** at school, especially if there is a high number of children impacted in one school.
- Create **peer-support groups** where children can discuss their experiences with others who also have a parent in prison.
- Just as health issues or other family circumstances are brought to the attention of schools during the **stage of enrolment**, asking families if children are impacted by the imprisonment of a family member should be a **standardised question**.



FIONA, aged 10, Norway

Key Links and Resources



HUGO, aged 7, Poland

- Toolkit: Reading Between the Lines: A toolkit to help schools support children with a parent in prison
- 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: First port of call: The role of schools in supporting children with imprisoned parents

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 that are geared towards education professionals.

27.

Arrangements should be made to facilitate an imprisoned parent, who wishes to do so, to participate effectively in the parenting of their children, including communicating with school, health and welfare services and taking decisions in this respect, except in cases where it is not in the child's best interests.

49.

The relevant national authorities should adopt a multi-agency and cross-sectoral approach in order to effectively promote, support and protect the rights of children with imprisoned parents, including their best interests. This involves co-operation with probation services, local communities, schools, health and child welfare services, the police, the children's ombudsperson or other officials with responsibility for protecting children's rights, as well as other relevant agencies, including civil society organisations offering support to children and their families.

Find the complete recommendation at

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

PILHA, aged 8, Finland





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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