



Children affected by imprisonment

Catholic Schools Toolkit - Early Years



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Pact is the national Catholic prisons charity. Founded in 1898 as the Catholic Prisoners' Aid Society, we now work in more than 60 prisons across England and Wales. The cornerstone of our work is supporting people in prison to build and maintain positive relationships with their children and family members. Evidence shows that prisoners who receive visits during their sentence are 39% less likely to reoffend.

Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, we believe in every person's innate worth and dignity, no matter what they – or someone close to them – may have done. We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters inside prison and their families, especially their children, who are serving a 'hidden sentence' on the outside.

The preferential option for the poor calls us to care for the poor in all senses of the word: the vulnerable, the forgotten, and the overlooked. Around 100,000 children and young people have a parent in prison on any given day in England and Wales. Currently, there is no statutory recording of children affected by imprisonment. Far too often, there is a lack of awareness of children with a loved one in prison or the effect this has on their lives.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "I was in prison, and you came to see me." (Matt. 25:36) In visiting their parent or sibling, some children are doing exactly this, but in silence and unnoticed. At Pact, we believe these children and young people deserve to be heard. This toolkit aims to support teachers in empowering children and young people to overcome the stigma, shame, and embarrassment surrounding familial imprisonment and support students in becoming ethically informed citizens. It is a vitally important resources for all schools.

The toolkit contains:

- A circle time lesson plan
- A book, 'While Daddy is Away' about a young girl whose Daddy has gone to prison. At this age children often feel the impact on their daily routine when a main caregiver is suddenly gone. In the story the little girl is thinking about all the things she usually does with her Daddy (teatime, bath time) and who else she has that loves her and can help with these things while he is away
- A school/setting policy framework
- A jigsaw to support a one-to-one conversation with a practitioner about the experience and impact of prison visits

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

We believe these resources will:

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

Safeguarding children and young people

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

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

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

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

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

Further resources for discussion and support

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

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

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Catholic Schools Toolkit

Missing someone you love

Early Years - discussing imprisonment



Links to personal, social, and emotional development goals

- Show an understanding of their feelings and those of others
- Show sensitivity and empathy to own and others' feelings
- Express their ideas and feelings

Teacher guidance

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

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

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

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



Resources

- Pact book: 'While Daddy is Away'
- Talking object

Reading

Read the story once through to the group or to the child.

Exploring

Ask the children to find pictures in the book that show the following emotions - happy, sad, laughing, upset.

Recap pages where the girl and her daddy are doing activities (bath time, cooking, reading, playing dinosaurs)

Using the talking object, ask, "What is the little girl in the story's favourite thing to do with her daddy?"

Put out a picture of a girl talking to her Mummy.

"The little girl's daddy has to live somewhere else for a while. How does the little girl feel about her daddy being away?"

"Who can she talk to when she's sad?"

Put out pictures of the girl playing with the other adults in her life

"Who else does she have to care for her while her daddy is away?"

Ask, "Who are the people that care for you?"

"When you miss someone, what can you do to feel better?"


Follow on activities

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

- **Outdoor play** - some children may benefit from unstructured outdoor play to reinforce their sense of freedom.
- **Small world play** - children may want to express their feelings through play, using toys that represent homes and families.
- **Sensory play** - encourage sensory activities to help children self-regulate after experiencing strong emotions.

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

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



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