

NICCO: Assisting early years professionals to support children of offenders



‘I haven’t told the nursery about her Dad being in prison’

2.5x
more children experience parental imprisonment than are in care.

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders' children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo's was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders' children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

* It is estimated that there are 200,000 children affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales (MoJ, 2012). In 2012 it was reported that there were 72,775 children in care in England and Wales (NSPCC, 2012).

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“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that.” Mother

It is estimated that there are **200,000 children a year** that experience the imprisonment of a parent. Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – **poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation, health and financial difficulties.**

Early years and parental offending

“[Son] didn’t know exactly where his Dad was straight away because then he was only three... He always went with me and saw his Dad, so he knew something was different.” Mother

Prisoners’ families are vulnerable to poverty, debt and housing instability,¹ and 25% of children of prisoners are at a higher risk of mental ill health.² The disadvantage and stigma that these families often experience can mean that children and parents do not seek help or let professionals know when a parent goes to prison. Given this, and that there is no systematic identification of which families are affected, these children and families can often be left feeling isolated and without support.

“I haven’t told the nursery about [daughter]’s Dad being in prison.” Parent

Under-fives are likely to be a high proportion of children of offenders due to the significant younger adult prison population (in June 2013, 40% of people in prison were aged between 19 and 29 years)³. The NSPCC estimates that that in 2009 11,800 0-2 year olds saw a parent go to prison in England and Wales.⁴ Given this and the vast evidence around the importance of children developing strong and secure parental relationships in their early years⁵, early years professionals and settings are well placed to offer valuable support to these families. Furthermore, research has shown that 65% of boys who had a father in prison before they were 10 went on to offend themselves.⁶ Therefore, early intervention can play a crucial role in improving these children’s outcomes.

“The health visitor knows that dad is in prison... She is supportive” Parent

It is essential that early years professionals both understand the needs associated with parental offending and are able to respond by providing



effective support. From talking to young children in an age appropriate way, to providing holistic family support, to promoting meaningful contact between parent and child within the prison environment, early years professionals can play an important role for these families. And given that many early years professionals work in roles and settings integral to families in the community (health visiting, midwifery, playwork, children’s centres, nurseries and so on), they are able to provide an accessible, non-judgmental and confidential place for families to disclose information.

How can NICCO support early years professionals?

“...there is a duty of care and a duty to provide these children with the same opportunities for success as everyone else.” Social Care Institute for Excellence

There is a growing national, strategic recognition of this group of children – Ofsted in April 2013 identified children of offenders as a potential target group for Children’s Centres with needs requiring additional support.⁷ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* suggests that the children in need assessment process should also be followed when a child has a parent in prison.⁸ The Department for Education have recognised that professionals should be able to respond to these specific and complex needs.

“I was pregnant when (partner) went away, but I would have liked to have had more help in people talking to me and telling me what to expect.” Mother

NICCO is a national one stop information and advice service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information that can support professionals in working with children affected by parental offending:

- resources for children and families and for professionals to use directly with children
- details of local and national services to signpost families to, that work specifically with children and families of offenders
- guidelines and toolkits to support early years professionals to work with these families, and to assist in developing setting-wide practice
- details of local training and workshops for professionals
- up to date, national and local policy frameworks, government guidance and recommendations about this group of families
- research into the impact of imprisonment on children and families

NICCO recognises that early years professionals work in a busy environment with demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when it's needed.

Note:

Children's and parents' quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in two Barnardo's reports:

Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo's, 2009

Owen Gill, *She just cries and cries: Case studies of Devon families with a father in prison*, Barnardo's, 2010

References:

1. Rowntree Smith R, Grimshaw R, Romeo R, Knapp M, *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoner's families*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007
2. Jones et al (2013) *COPING: Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, University of Huddersfield
3. Gavin Berman and Aliyah Dar, *Prison Population Statistics*, House of Commons Library, July 2013
4. Galloway, Haynes and Cuthburt (2014) *An unfair sentence, all babies count: spotlight on the Criminal Justice System*, NSPCC
5. See for example, Waldgrave and Woodall, *Exploring the impact of parental imprisonment on infant mental health*, *Community Practitioner*, 2015
Karin Grossman and Klaude E. Grossman, *The Impact of Attachment to Mother and Father and Sensitive Support of Exploration at an Early Age on Children's Psychosocial Development through Young Adulthood*, in *Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood*, Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development and Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development, 2009
6. Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, Ivana Sekol, Rikke F. Olsen, *Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:4, 2009
7. Ofsted, *Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013
8. Department for Education, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, March 2015

Examples of existing practice

Reading Midwives record in referral forms if new and expectant mothers' babies have a parent or close relative in prison. **Health Visitors** also have a vital role in information sharing in Reading in that they specifically refer families affected by parental imprisonment to their local Children's Centres who are well placed to deal with the families' needs.

All **Bristol Children's Centres** have a nominated 'champion' for children of offenders. The champion is knowledgeable about the impact of parental offending on children and families and how their children's centre can effectively respond. All of the city's champions attend a meeting each school term to share updates and practice and further develop their understanding through presentations and workshops from other agencies.

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