

A guide for grandparents bringing up the children of prisoners



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This guide has been designed with an Islington focus. If you have found it useful the partnership encourages you to use those parts which are generic.

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This guide is endorsed under the older people quality of life strategy - 'Live long and Prosper'.
For further information on this guide and other work under the strategy please contact:
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The aim of this guide is to help you to find the right advice and support for you. The guide does not attempt to give you all the information, but to point you in the right direction.

This guide has been produced by professionals working with prisoners, families of prisoners, older people, and young people. But more importantly this guide has been designed by people like you who have brought up, or are bringing up children of people in prison.

In bringing together this guide we have listened to the views and opinions of both grandparents and young people, because we want the information to be relevant to you at this difficult time. The order of the guide has been specifically based on the priority areas identified by grandparents.

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What is the guide for?

The guide is to help you to find the right source of information for your needs...

...and...

to let you to know that you are not alone. Many grandparents told us they would have welcomed the opportunity to learn from others who had been through the same experience. If you would like to speak to others in the same position you will find the contact details on page 8

Why did we write the guide?

Often it is the parents of prisoners who bring up children. In talking to grandparents we found that they had made lots of assumptions about how things would work. They told us that the reality was very different from what they had expected. They did not want others to have to find out the hard way.

Many people expect a lot of help and attention from local services, but in reality the majority of the support is provided informally by the family.

Please note that whilst every effort has been made to check the quality and accuracy of the organisations mentioned in this guide, over time organisations lose funding and change direction. We cannot guarantee the quality of the service provided by organisations or that the details supplied will always be up to date.

You will find both phone numbers and web site addresses throughout this guide. Don't worry if you don't have a computer - take the guide to your local library or on-line centre and ask them to help you.

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Practical information

The decision to take on the care of a child or children is life changing.

Have you decided if you are able to look after the child in the long term?

Please see page 9 for more information.

Grandparents said this was the most important information straight away

“I have just begun caring for my grandchild - what do I need to know?”

Child benefit

This benefit follows the child. You need to make a claim as soon as you begin caring for your grandchild / grandchildren. You can do this by asking for a claim pack by contacting your Child Benefit Office on:
Phone **0845 302 1444**
Textphone **0845 302 1474**

Other benefits

Although there are no specific benefits for caring for your grandchildren, it is important that you have a financial benefit check. Your situation has changed and there may be other benefits you are entitled to.

Contacts

CAB - phone **0870 751 0925**
Islington People Rights - phone **020 7359 2010**
Age Concern Islington - phone **020 7281 6018**
Mary Ward Legal Centre - phone **020 7831 7079**

Housing

Overcrowding

You will not automatically qualify for rehousing. If you are a council tenant you can complete an 'Application for rehousing'. This is available from your local area housing office. Your application will be considered by a rehousing officer who will make a decision, you will not get a higher priority on the waiting list automatically.

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Non-Council tenants who need information about their rights should contact;

The Housing Aid Centre phone **020 7527 6321** or

Islington Law Centre phone **020 7607 2461**

Custody/guardianship for your grandchild

This is a complex area. It is not automatic and may not be necessary. For more information contact:

Mary Ward Centre legal adviser

Phone **020 7831 7079**

School

If your grandchild is moving to live with you, he/she may need to change school. If the period of caring is short term, but you may not know this, you may want to make this decision later. If you are in doubt speak to the head teacher to see if they still fall within the school catchment area.

GP (general practitioner)

Each GP has a catchment area. Again your grandchild will need to register with a new GP if they move.

Normally the GP you are registered with will take on new patients if they are family members living at the same address. If you have problems contact the Primary Care Trust (PCT) on 7853 5517/8.

Dentist

It is important that your grandchildren have regular check ups. You can visit any dentist, you do not have to live in the same area. Not all dentists take on NHS patients. To find one which does phone the Primary Care Trust (PCT) on **7853 5517/8**.

Do the children know?

"I just couldn't tell them...every time they asked me questions I just told them it was all ok...every day I felt so guilty and I wish now I had told them sooner...they understood so much better than I expected and everything was so much better when they knew and we could begin our temporary new life..."

How do you tell your grandchildren that their parent has been arrested or is in prison?

This is not easy...

There will be a range of emotions you are feeling which you may want to talk to someone about...and a range they will feel when they find out.

Young people are very good at digging for information, if you don't tell them they will try and make sense of the little information they have and may well come to the wrong conclusions.

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For help and advice

The Ormiston Children and Families Trust

Phone **01473 724517**

They have a range of child friendly leaflets which will help your grand-children come to terms with the situation.

Prisoners Families and Friends Service

Phone **0808 808 3444**

(Freephone Helpline) information and support for those with a family member or friend in prison.

National Prisoners' Families Helpline

Phone **0808 808 2003**

Information and advice on who may be available to help you.

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"It took a lot of courage, but I am glad I told them straightaway...even though it was so hard explaining it to them, it meant we could help each other and work through it together."

Maintaining family ties - preparing for release

Many people we have talked to said what a difficult time this was. They felt angry that their child had got themselves into trouble and that they now had to pick up the pieces. They still cared deeply for them and missed them. The following information aims to help you both emotionally and practically to maintain family relationships.

Practical information

Visiting

Each prison will have slightly different arrangements. There may be financial help available from the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme, phone **0845 300 1423**.

You will have to have ID with you when you visit a prison. As requirements vary from one prison to another, it is best to phone the prison to see what they require.

Good sources of information and advice are visitors centres.

Holloway - phone **020 7700 1567**

Pentonville - phone **020 7609 3860**

Phone calls

These can only be made from the person in prison to you. They will be able to buy prison phonecards (these are not phonecards you can buy in shops).

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Letters

Special rules apply to the number of letters which can be sent and received. These vary from when the person is on remand to when someone has been convicted. See below for more information.

For more information on these issues contact

National Prisoners' Families Helpline

Phone **0808 808 2003**

Chaplain

Prison Chaplains are a good source of support and help. You do not need to be religious to get their help, this is a non-denominational service in prisons.

Emotional support

It can be good to talk to someone about this. You may find the following organisations helpful.

Prison Advice and Care Trust

Freephone **0800 085 3021**

www.imprisonment.org.uk

Information and support for prisoner's families and for anyone else affected by imprisonment.

Prisoners' Family and Friends Service

Phone **0808 808 3444**

"When my daughter came out of prison, I missed my grandchildren so much. I knew they needed to be back with their mother, but I found it so difficult as we had grown so close and suddenly I wasn't needed anymore."

Parenting

"I only used to see my grandson every other weekend for an hour, he was so sweet. Having him full time is a different story!"

It may be some years since you bought up your children. Attitudes have changed! But the good news is that there is more out there to help you.

Local contacts

Children's Information Service

Phone **0207 527 5959**

to find out about the services available for you in your area.

Parentline Plus helpline

Freephone **0808 800 2222**

Website **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

Supporting anyone who is parenting a child.

Family Rights Group

Freephone **0800 731 1696**

Website **www.frg.org.uk**

Grandparents Association

Phone **01279 444964**

Website **www.grandparents-federation.org.uk**

Advice line on all grandparenting issues.

Prisoners Families and Friends Service

Freephone helpline **0808 808 3444**

Information and support for those with a family member or friend in prison.

Islington Carers Forum

Phone **020 7263 9080**

Website **www.carers.org/islington**

Support for all carers who live in Islington.