



# Families Handbook

# Acknowledgements

Welcome to the second edition of the Families Handbook. This Handbook was developed as a joint initiative between Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) and the Community Restorative Centre (CRC).

The Handbook is an important guide for families and friends of people who are incarcerated. It provides valuable information about the criminal justice system, keeping in contact with someone in custody and the type of support services that exist for inmates in custody and their families in the community.

One of the key features of the updated Handbook is that users will be able to download the whole document or individual chapters.

The Handbook is available for download at:  
[www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au)  
[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)

All feedback or ideas on ways to improve the Handbook should be directed to CRC at: [info@crcnsw.org.au](mailto:info@crcnsw.org.au).

The Handbook was reviewed by relevant government agencies and community organisations to ensure the content is up-to-date. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of the following:

SHINE For Kids;  
Legal Aid NSW;  
Justice & Forensic Mental Health Network; and  
Children and Families of Offenders Steering Committee.

**Disclaimer: the information in this Handbook was correct as of November 2018.**

*Families Handbook*

*Corrective Services NSW and Community Restorative Centre © 2018*

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# Families Handbook



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# 1. Understanding the NSW criminal justice system

Coming into contact with the criminal justice system can be traumatic, particularly if it involves the arrest of a family member, partner or friend. If you need support contact Lifeline on **13 11 14** or the Community Restorative Centre (CRC) on **9288 8700**.

## Arrest

If a person is arrested and the police refuse to grant the person bail, depending on the time of day, they can be held overnight before they must appear in court. To find out what is happening, call the police station where you think they were taken and ask to talk to the Custody Manager.

If the person is refused bail by the court, they may remain in the court cell for a longer period (sometimes several days) before being transferred to a remand centre. The court will have a welfare worker who may be able to offer some assistance to the person in prison.

You may be able to visit someone or receive a phone call from them when they are in the court cell. (**See p.16** on how to find out where your family member is being held.)

If you're concerned about how long it's taking for your family member, partner or friend to go before the court, ring LawAccess or a Community Legal Centre for information and advice.

LawAccess is contactable toll-free



on **1300 888 529**.

To find your nearest Community Legal Centre phone **9212 7333** or go to [www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)

Further details about legal assistance are at the end of this chapter.

## Bail

After the person has been arrested and charged, they may be released on bail. If granted bail:

- > they will be allowed to live in the community until they go back to court;
- > they may be required to report to a police station on a regular basis;

- > the person may have to sign a document saying that they will agree to forfeit some money if they do not attend court;
- > someone may have to deposit security (usually money), known as ‘bail money’, to assure the court the person will attend court when required. The person who deposits the money is called a ‘surety’;
- > this bail money is returned when the case finishes provided the person appears at court on the designated date and time;
- > if they don’t turn up at court the bail money is forfeited.

As a family member of the accused, you may feel under pressure to put up bail money. However, if you cannot afford to pay this money – and risk losing it – then you should think carefully before agreeing to pay bail money.

Bail may be refused if the court or police find there is an unacceptable risk that the person will:

- > fail to appear at court hearings for the charges;
- > commit a serious offence while on bail;
- > endanger the safety of victims, individuals or the community;
- > interfere with witnesses or evidence.

In cases where the person has been charged with certain serious offences, the person must be bail refused unless they show cause

as to why their detention is not justified.

## Remand

Remand inmates are held in prison before and during their trial because:

- > they did not apply for bail; or
- > they were refused bail; or
- > they could not meet the bail conditions, for example they did not have the money or other security needed for bail.



Time on remand varies widely and depends on circumstances such as which court the matter is to be heard in, whether the person pleads guilty, delays in the court system itself or other factors. For major trials it can be more than 12 months.

You may be able to assist your family member by getting references or support letters from people like their employer. Check with their lawyer to see if this would be helpful. It is worth preparing for the possibility of imprisonment, even if you believe this is an unlikely outcome.

During this time you should think about practical issues like financial commitments and accommodation plans, and ensure that relevant family members can be involved in important decisions.

For assistance with housing and financial matters (e.g. issues with Housing NSW, Centrelink and



debts), the person in prison can seek assistance from the Services and Programs Officer in their prison.

Being on remand may be also a good time to talk about what to tell others, especially children. Talking to children at this stage allows them to have more time to understand and accept that their parent is in prison (see **'What to tell children'** p.45).

## Trial

Courts can be intimidating places particularly for those attending for the first time. CRC (Community Restorative Centre) has trained volunteers at local courts throughout the Sydney area to provide support for people appearing at court and their families (opposite for list of courts). CRC can provide information and support. CRC does not provide legal advice. If required the person can self-refer to Legal Aid.

Some high profile trials will be covered by the media, especially if the charge is serious. If there is media coverage, this makes it more likely that other people will find out about the person's trial. Consider telling people yourself, rather than having them find out from a news report.



When going to court, be prepared for long waits as there may be a number of matters listed on the day. The solicitor may be able to indicate how long the hearing might take.

Families coming to court from country areas should bring an overnight bag in case the trial is carried over to the following day. Families may also have to make arrangements for accommodation.

## Sentencing

If the person is found guilty, sentencing may take place immediately, but this often happens at a later date to allow the person solicitor to prepare for it.

If the person is given a custodial sentence and are on bail, they will be taken directly into prison.

You will not able to say goodbye to them before they are taken away. Sentencing can be highly stressful. If there is someone in the family attending court who suffers from a medical or psychiatric condition, they should be accompanied by someone who knows about their condition and what to do in an emergency.

## Need help?

If you need help, contact one of the following as soon as possible.

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Visit your local library for free internet access.

### Courts with CRC support

The following courts have CRC volunteers who can offer you support:

- > Bankstown
- > Blacktown
- > Burwood
- > Downing Centre
- > Gosford
- > Hornsby
- > Manly
- > Mt Drutt
- > Newcastle
- > Newtown
- > Parramatta
- > Penrith
- > Sutherland
- > Waverley
- > Wollongong
- > Wyong



### Law Access

If you're not sure of the type of legal help you need or for information about the legal system contact LawAccess NSW.

**1300 888 529 (1300 888 LAW)**  
[www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au)

### Community Legal Centres NSW



There are around 40 Community Legal Centres throughout NSW. Some may provide legal advice and assistance with understanding the legal system, debt, tenancy, parole and family law. To locate a local CLC contact the State Office.

**9212 7333**  
[www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)

### Legal Aid NSW



Provides free legal advice, and in some cases, representation in court, to people in NSW. If a person is appearing in court for the first time they should get legal advice.

There are duty lawyers in most Local Courts. However in some courts they need to apply before the court date for a grant of legal aid for a lawyer to represent them. To do this, you should phone the Legal Aid office closest to the court they will be appearing in, and ask for an appointment to get legal advice.

The lawyer will tell them if Legal Aid NSW can represent them, if they

will need to arrange for a private lawyer to help them, or if they can represent themselves.

To find a Legal Aid NSW office call **1300 888 529** or look under 'Get legal help' at [www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

For the Legal Aid NSW Under 18s Hotline call **1800 10 18 10**

### **Prisoners Legal Service**

Prisoners Legal Service (PLS) is a specialist section of Legal Aid NSW for inmates.

Solicitors from the PLS visit prisons around NSW and see inmates by appointment.

PLS solicitors can help with criminal, civil and family law matters.

**9219 5888**

**1800 806 913**

[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

### **Warringa Baiya Aboriginal**



### **Women's Legal Centre**

Free legal advice for Aboriginal women for issues relating to domestic violence and victim's compensation, sexual assault and child sexual assault.

**9569 3847**

**1800 686 587 (outside Sydney)**

[www.wirringabaiya.org.au](http://www.wirringabaiya.org.au)

### **Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS)**



ALS is an Aboriginal community organisation giving information and referral, and legal advice and court representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women and children across NSW and ACT.

[www.alsnswact.org.au](http://www.alsnswact.org.au)

Head Office Parramatta . **8842 8000**

Armidale ..... **6772 5770**

Bathurst..... **6331 1255**

Bourke ..... **6872 2200**

Broken Hill ..... **8087 3233**

Canberra..... **6249 8488**

Dubbo..... **6882 6880**

Grafton ..... **6640 1400**

Griffith..... **6962 7675**

Kempsey ..... **6562 5990**

Lismore..... **6622 7088**

Moree ..... **6752 5700**

Moruya ..... **4474 2400**

Newcastle..... **4926 1571**

Nowra..... **4422 3255**

Parramatta..... **8842 8000**

Redfern..... **8303 6600**

Tamworth..... **6761 3766**

Taree ..... **6551 3928**

Wagga Wagga ..... **6921 9230**

Wollongong ..... **4225 7977**

## Law Society

If you need to help your family member find a lawyer, you can contact the referral service at the Law Society during business hours.

**9926 0300**

**1800 422 713**

When you find a solicitor, always ask about fees before you arrange a meeting with them. If someone is arrested outside business hours it can be hard to find a solicitor. If you have internet access, check the 'Find a Lawyer' section of the Law Society's website:

**[www.lawsociety.com.au](http://www.lawsociety.com.au)**



## Women's Legal Services NSW

WLSNSW provides free legal advice, information and referral on all matters of the law for women.

**8745 6988**

**1800 801 501 (outside Sydney)**

**[www.wlsnsw.org.au](http://www.wlsnsw.org.au)**

## Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line

**8745 6977**

**1800 639 784**



## 2. Going to prison

### How to locate your friend or family member in prison

To locate an inmate in prison, contact:

- > Sentence Administration on **(02) 8346 1000** between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekdays excluding public holidays, or
- > State-wide Sentence Administration on **(02) 9289 5258** between 4.30pm - 8.30pm, weekdays, or between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekends and public holidays.

You'll need their date of birth or their MIN, a six-digit identification number that's given to each person when they come into prison in NSW for the first time. It will be their identification number any time they're in prison. Get this number from your relative/friend in prison as soon as possible, and write it somewhere safe.

### How long will they be in prison?

When the court sentences an offender to be imprisoned for more than 36 months, there may be a minimum (non-parole) prison term set, followed by a period of time which may be spent in the community on parole.

### Reception at the prison

There are reception centres around the state, but most people will go to the MRRC (Metropolitan Remand & Reception Centre) at Silverwater for men or Silverwater Women's Prison (formerly known as Mulawa) for women.

All inmates go through a reception process. This includes:

- > handing in personal property to be stored while they're in prison;
- > a strip search;
- > a shower, and changing into prison clothing (greens), getting bedding and basic toiletries;
- > assessment of immediate risk of self-harm or suicide. If immediate concerns are identified, the inmate will be closely watched. (See **Chapter 16** on **p.118** for more information about specialist services for inmates who may have health issues or need additional assistance);
- > health assessment by a qualified Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network (JH&FMHN) nurse. They assist with detox if needed. Their services also cover physical and mental health issues, any current prescription medication, and history of drug and alcohol use.



If families have concerns relating to the inmate's health they can contact JH&FMHN on **9700 3000** and request to speak to the Client Liaison Officer or the prison's Nursing Unit Manager.

## Induction

While inmates are waiting during reception, they may see a video that explains the reception process and gives them information about prison life, programs and services. They'll find out about phone access and visiting, and be given information about looking after their health and safety. They may be introduced to an inmate delegate. They will be given a handbook that gives broad ranging information about living in prison.

## Delegates

Delegates are inmates who are familiar with being in prison and can help other inmates to adjust to prison life. They can refer inmates to services and/or programs, explain the correctional system, and provide support. There are Aboriginal delegates, and delegates from different cultural and religious groups. They also ask Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) for help on behalf of other inmates.

## Programs

An inmate's risk of reoffending is assessed and they may be signed up for programs that address their

risks. Programs include:

- > alcohol and other drugs programs;
- > violence prevention;
- > sex offenders; and
- > young offenders.

Participation in programs can help inmates when they apply for parole (**see p.105**). Programs may only be available at certain prisons and are in high demand. Inmates may need to wait until a spot becomes available and/or until they have been sentenced to be eligible.

## Employment

Remand inmates can ask to be employed.



Sentenced inmates are expected to work. They may be employed directly in providing prison services, e.g. as a cleaner or in grounds maintenance. Inmates may also work for Corrective Services Industries (CSI).

CSI businesses include:

- > Agriculture;
- > Engineering;
- > Food Services;
- > Buy-ups;
- > Construction;
- > Furniture & Upholstery;
- > Technology & Assembly;
- > Textiles & Laundry;
- > Facilities Maintenance;

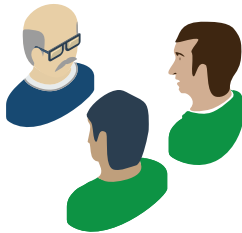
- > Print & Creative Services;
- > Logistics & Warehousing.

See [www.csi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.csi.nsw.gov.au) for more information.

Inmates are paid for their work, at a lower rate than in the community. Wages are paid into their inmate account. This helps them to purchase items through the 'buy-up' system (see below for information about buy-ups, and **page 48 'Money for inmates'**).

## Education

Inmates are required to participate in a core skills assessment and education planning so that they can enrol in suitable courses.



Inmates can participate in courses to improve reading and maths skills, learn trade skills and develop other valuable employability skills to help get a job when they are released.

Some of the available courses are:

- > Literacy and Numeracy;
- > Digital Literacy;
- > Aboriginal Cultural Programs;
- > Construction;
- > Engineering;
- > Hospitality;
- > Cleaning Operations;

- > Fork Lift;
- > Crane and dogging tickets.

Traineeships are also available. If your family member is serving a sentence of 12 months or more, encourage her or him to do a traineeship, where they will work in an industry and get a nationally accredited qualification when finished.



## Recreation

Inmates will spend quite a lot of time locked up in their cells. They may watch TV or read. Prisons have libraries, or inmates may have books in their unit. Newspapers may be available, or may be ordered through the buy-up system. You may be able to send in newspapers, magazines or books. For books, inmates must first get permission off the OIC inmate property store/reception room. Reading material must not be obscene or offensive, and should not contain any information that could be used in any way to aid in the commission of an offence.

Outside their cells, inmates may be able to play sports like football or basketball or use a gym.

## Religion





Inmates can practise the religion of their choice while in prison and most prisons have a full-time Chaplain. Chaplaincy services are provided by major Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish communities. Inmates from other religious groups may also be able to arrange a religious visit through the full-time Chaplain. If you wish to speak to a Chaplain, call the prison and ask for the full-time Chaplain and he/ she will put you in touch with the appropriate Chaplain of your faith.

## Food

Inmates are provided with three meals a day. The food is prepared by inmates under supervision.



Special diets can be provided for religious (e.g. Muslim or Jewish) or health reasons. Inmates will be required to pay the difference in cost of halal and kosher meals. Meals are usually eaten in the inmate's cell, but some units have dining tables for use if inmates aren't locked in.

Inmates may be able to purchase lollies, biscuits, food and other items through the buy-up system (also see p.48 '**Money for inmates**').

Inmates can get advice and information about nutrition and healthy eating from medical staff.

## Adjusting to life in prison

In prison, new inmates will need to adjust to:

- > loss of personal freedom;
- > separation from people they love;
- > fear and uncertainty about prison life.

The early days and weeks can be difficult. Some inmates feel very anxious and fearful during this time. Prisons can be tough places, and while the levels of violence have decreased in recent years, bullying still does occur. Many inmates feel that showing sadness, fear or distress may make them appear 'weak'. Some inmates try to act 'tough' so they won't be seen as vulnerable. Others open up to family during visits and phone calls, then don't tell the nurses at the health centre about the feelings they are having.

Inmates with strong family ties generally do better when they're released. If you're finding that your family member seems emotionally withdrawn, or is not making contact as often as you'd like, it might help to understand why this may be happening. Don't assume that this behaviour means that your family member doesn't love you or care about you anymore. They might just be having a hard time adjusting to prison life.

If you're concerned about the emotional wellbeing of your family

member, please contact their prison directly and ask to talk to the Welfare, Services & Program Officer (SAPO), or the Governor, so that support can be provided to your family member.

## **Custodial Case Management and Classification**

Corrective Services' custodial case management model motivates inmates to get involved in programs that will help reduce reoffending.

Every inmate serving more than 3 months will have an individual case plan developed through assessment and in collaboration with the inmate.

Case management staff will ensure that each inmate receives services, programs, employment opportunities and education to reduce their likelihood of reoffending.

Classification is the process of determining each inmate's level of security – high, medium or low.

They'll be placed in a prison which accommodates inmates with the same classification. Decisions about classification are based on the offence, sentence length and prior convictions. Inmates can ask for the location of their family to be taken into account when they are being placed, but this doesn't guarantee a certain prison.

For most inmates, classification and placement recommendations

are made by the Case Management Team (CMT) that meets with the inmate after they're sentenced and then at least every 12 months. The final decision is made by the CSNSW Case Management Committee.

For serious offenders (who have a life sentence, or 12 years or more), decisions about classification and placement are monitored by the Serious Offenders Review Council (SORC) and the CSNSW Commissioner has the final say.

### **Male inmates' classo levels**

- > A1 and A2 – maximum security: should at all times be confined by a secure physical barrier including towers, electronic surveillance;
- > B – medium security: should at all times be confined by a secure physical barrier. The type of barrier varies between centres;
- > C – minimum security:
  - C1 – inmates confined unless with an officer;
  - C2 – can do community projects under supervision;
  - C3 – can go into the community without supervision on day or weekend leave, education leave or work release.

Inmates who have escaped from prison or police custody will be given an Escapee (E1) classification in maximum or an E2 in medium

security prisons. They can apply to the Escape Review Committee to have this changed to a B or C classification. Serious offenders will probably start off with an A1 or A2 classification and it will take a long time for them to come down to a B. Inmates with short sentences are not eligible for work release or day release.

If you have questions about classification, talk to the Manager Offender Services and Programs (MOSP) at your family member's prison. You could also contact the Inmate Classification and Case Management Branch at Corrective Services NSW on **(02) 9289 5035**.

### Women inmates' classo levels

- > Category 5 - maximum security: should at all times be confined by a secure physical barrier including towers, electronic surveillance;
- > Category 4 – continuous supervision within walls;
- > Category 3 – behind a physical barrier;
- > Category 2 – may not be behind a barrier but will be supervised. Can do community projects under supervision;
- > Category 1 – can go into the community without supervision on day or weekend leave, education leave or work release.

Inmates who have escaped from prison will be given an E classification.

They can apply to the Escape Review Committee to have this changed. Serious offenders will probably start at Category 4, while others will enter as a Category 3 or 2.

## Transfer of inmates

Inmates can be transferred between prisons at any time. They may not get much notice when this happens.



Inmates are responsible for telling family members that they've been transferred – you won't hear from the prison.

Always check with the prison before visiting so you can be sure your family member is still there.

You can expect that inmates may be transferred after they've been sentenced, or when their classification changes. They may also be transferred to access services such as health or specialist programs, or court appearances. Sometimes you may not know why someone has been transferred. Call **(02) 9289 5258** to check your family member's location if they've been transferred.

## Protection

If there are concerns that an inmate is at risk of harm from other inmates, they can be placed on protection (also called 'protection limited association' (PRLA), protection non-association (PRNA),

or Special Management Area Placement (SMAP)). Protection means being placed in a special section of the prison, or being sent to a prison where everyone is on protection. Protection orders are reviewed after 14 days, then after three months and six months. Inmates can ask to be placed on protection, or the Governor may place them on protection because of information received from inside or outside the prison.

Although protection may offer inmates a safer environment, the decision to go on protection should not be taken lightly. Issues with protection may include:

- > many prisons providing protection are in country areas, which may mean your family member is more likely to be away from family;
- > going on protection may make it harder to access education or other programs;
- > other inmates can have negative attitudes to inmates who have been on protection. This can make it very difficult to go back into the mainstream population after being on protection.

## Segregation (segro)

Segregation is isolation for inmates who have broken the rules and/or pose an extreme risk to other inmates or staff of the prison.

The decision about segregation is made by prison staff, and inmates don't have a choice.

## Sexual and physical assault and bullying

Although violence and sexual assault do occur in prisons from time to time, this happens much less often than people think. Inmates who keep a low profile and don't get involved in 'prison politics' can usually avoid trouble.

If you have reason to believe that your family member is getting bullied ('stood over') in prison, you should tell a prison staff member immediately. Prison staff will need some information before they can take action. Useful information can range from being told about an incident to simply noticing a change in your family member's behaviour that has made you feel worried. Your family member may have told you not to tell prison staff about their situation because they fear that talking to authorities about another inmate will make their situation worse. In such situations you need to think very carefully before you do anything.

You could consider informing the prison anonymously by phone call, email or letter. If you aren't sure what to do, contact CRC (Community Restorative Centre) on **(02) 9288 8700**. For some more information about CRC, **see p.12**.

## Self-harm

Sometimes people intentionally hurt themselves, e.g. by cutting themselves. This is a sign of distress, and they need support and understanding. People who self-harm may not be suicidal. They may be using self-harm as a way of expressing feelings that they can't deal with in other ways.

### What are the signs that someone might be at risk?

Your family member might seem unusually quiet and withdrawn, or just not interested in things. They may look like they've stopped taking care of themselves. They may express a loss of hope for the future or a loss of meaning in their life. They may have told you that they're scared for their personal safety, or that they're feeling intense despair and that things are out of their control. In some cases, a suicidal person may drop 'hints' about their intentions, for example saying something like 'You won't have to worry about me much longer anyway'.

### Who may be particularly vulnerable?

Several risk factors for suicide and self-harm have been identified. Inmates at higher risk include those:

- > who are 'first timers' or on remand;
- > who have suffered a recent death of a friend or family member;

- > who have recently had a broken relationship;
- > without family or friends to visit and care about them;
- > with a history of depression or other psychological issues;
- > with a history of mental illness;
- > with a history of self-harm or past suicide attempts;
- > with a history of substance use.

### Responses that are helpful

- > Ask your family member directly whether they want to self-harm or commit suicide. Contrary to popular belief, this question won't 'put the idea in their head'. It often allows people to express something that they've not told you before for fear of worrying you.
- > Let them know you're there for them to talk to if they need to.
- > Accept and acknowledge that your family member is in pain, without judging them.
- > Support and encourage them to get help from prison staff.
- > Be available to them, but also set reasonable limits about how often you can visit them in prison, send letters or speak on the phone.
- > Make it clear from your behaviour that they don't need to self-harm in order to receive love and caring from you. Be consistent with caring gestures,

even if they're not always returned. Don't withdraw your love or contact from your family member.

### Responses that are not helpful

- > Shouting at your family member.
- > Calling their behaviour 'attention seeking'.
- > Blaming them or someone they care about.
- > Pleading with them to try and stop it, or using emotional blackmail such as 'If you loved me you wouldn't do this'.
- > Telling them to 'pull yourself together', 'toughen up' or 'get over it'.

### Look after yourself

Look for information to help you understand issues about self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

If you have internet access try [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) or [www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au](http://www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au).

Be honest with yourself about how self-harm makes you feel. Don't pretend to yourself that it's okay if it's not. Many people find self-harm frightening.

If you need help dealing with your feelings, talk to a counsellor, social worker or psychologist (**see p.30** for contact details of services).

### What should I do?

If you have concerns about your family member in prison:

- > report your concerns to staff in

the visitors centre before you leave the prison;

- > ring the prison and speak to the Welfare, Services and Programs Officer or other staff member (see inside back cover for prison phone numbers);
- > ring the JH&FMHN 24 hour Mental Health Helpline on **1800 222 472**. This service is for inmates, their relatives and friends, as well as CSNSW staff who may be concerned about the welfare of a person in prison.

These calls are answered by mental health clinicians who will address your concerns and can refer inmates to health services in prison. Referrals to community mental health services should be made through the Mental Health Line on **1800 011 511**.

### I'm concerned my family member may need psychiatric help

All inmates are assessed on reception. Mental health screening units operate for men and women at both MRRC and Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre so that inmates with mental health issues can be identified, assessed and stabilised. Inpatient mental health services are provided for male and female inmates with acute psychiatric problems at Long Bay Hospital. JH&FMHN employs psychiatrists and mental health nurses. Some psychiatric services

for regional areas are provided through video link (also called telehealth).

Psychologists employed by CSNSW may provide treatment services in conjunction with health staff. Many inmates have mental health issues, and services prioritise those inmates with the most urgent needs. If you're concerned that your family member has an untreated mental illness, talk to staff at the prison or phone the JH&FMHN Mental Health Helpline on **1800 222 472**.

## My family member has a disability

Inmates with disabilities will generally be identified during the reception process. Many inmates with disabilities are able to be accommodated in mainstream prisons, and there are three units for male inmates with intellectual disabilities, at the Long Bay Complex, MSPC 2 & 3 (Additional Support Units).

CSNSW has a Statewide Disability Services (SDS) unit.

**9289 2136, 9289 2091**

**[SDS@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SDS@justice.nsw.gov.au)**

Staff from SDS are involved in case management and pre-release planning for inmates with disabilities where needed. Some people won't need additional support because they're already linked with services. If you are concerned about a family member

with a disability, the best starting point is to talk with a Welfare Officer, Service & Program Officer (SAPO) or other Programs staff at their prison. However, if you remain concerned, contact SDS and discuss your family member's needs with staff there. If you have copies of reports about your family member's disability, these can be very helpful in assessment and planning, and you can forward them to SDS via fax: **(02) 9289 2134**) or email:

**[SDS@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SDS@justice.nsw.gov.au)**

SDS can be involved with inmates with a wide range of disabilities, including people with borderline intellectual disability, people with acquired brain injury, and people with functional difficulties who may not have a clear diagnosis. Where inmates have mental health issues, these are managed by staff from JH&FMHN. If an inmate has a dual diagnosis that includes a physical or intellectual disability, SDS will address the disability issues.

Families of inmates with disabilities may already have experienced many challenges, including isolation and lack of support.

Coping with your family member's imprisonment may feel like the last straw. It may be helpful to know that people with a wide range of disabilities are in prison, including people with Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Fragile X and Cerebral Palsy.

Being questioned by police



or appearing in court can be very difficult for people with an intellectual disability. The Intellectual Disability Rights Service provides legal casework and advice for people with intellectual disabilities. They have access to inmates in prison and can give advice about guardianship, wills and care, and protection matters where a parent has an intellectual disability. They have a volunteer network, the Criminal Justice Support Network, through which trained volunteers assist people with intellectual disabilities who are being interviewed by police.

## My family member is transgender/intersex

CSNSW has a policy that guides the location of inmates who are transgender or intersex. They have the right to dress in clothing and buy personal care items of their gender of identification. An inmate can make application to be identified as transgender at any time in their sentence. JH&FMHN is able to assist with medication that may be needed. Transgender support groups and specialist legal services can also be accessed.

## My family member is a forensic patient

A forensic patient (sometimes called a forensic inmate) has been charged with a crime but is dealt with differently because they have

been found not guilty by the reason of mental illness. Some forensic patients are detained in prisons and some in psychiatric hospitals. The Mental Health Review Tribunal reviews all forensic patients at least every six months and makes decisions regarding detention, treatment, transfer and release, under conditions if necessary.

There are three kinds of forensic patients.

### > **Unfit to be tried**

If a court finds a person unfit to be tried, the Mental Health Review Tribunal decides if they'll be fit in the next 12 months. If they can't be tried in that time, they may appear before a special hearing in a Court, which can return a qualified finding of guilt and decide how long the person will be detained.

### > **Not guilty by reason of mental illness**

At a trial or special hearing, the court may find a person not guilty by reason of mental illness and refer the matter to the Mental Health Review Tribunal. The person may then be detained in a hospital or prison until released in accordance with an order by the Tribunal.

### > **Limiting term**

Where a person is found unfit to be tried and subsequently found to be guilty on the limited evidence available at a special hearing, the Court can order the

person to be detained in prison for a 'Limiting Term, which is the best estimate of the sentence of imprisonment the Court would have given if the person had gone through a normal trial.

Forensic patients are not eligible for parole or home detention. They may be transferred to a secure hospital ward, or placed on community treatment orders. Having a family member who is a forensic patient brings extra stresses. Some people may believe that the forensic patient has avoided punishment if they haven't been tried in the usual way.

A Forensic Patient Victims Register is kept by the Mental Health Review Tribunal. Victims can be notified of forthcoming Tribunal hearings and their outcomes, and can make submissions to those hearings. Families may find it unsettling that their family member's circumstances are being reviewed regularly, as the possibility of the forensic patient returning to a mainstream prison or being released is always on the agenda. **See p.30** for agencies that can offer support to families facing such issues.

Forensic patients are entitled to representation from a solicitor when appearing before the Mental Health Review Tribunal.

### **Transferees and detained persons on remand**

An inmate serving a sentence,

or a person on remand, may be transferred to a hospital if involuntary treatment for a mental illness becomes necessary. Such a person is called a 'correctional patient.'

## **What health care is available in prisons?**

Health services are provided in prisons by NSW Health through JH&FMHN.



JH&FMHN nurses are in health centres at all prisons in NSW. Inmates who are ill or injured receive treatment at the prison health centre.

Inmates who need surgery or complex treatment may be transferred to a prison with the necessary facilities. This will usually be Long Bay Hospital at Malabar. Sometimes services will be accessed through local public hospitals. Doctors and dentists visit health centres to provide medical and dental services. After screening at reception, inmates receive a detailed medical check-up. Health plans can be developed and reviewed each year for inmates with longer sentences. Before discharge, inmates can receive assistance from JH&FMHN to ensure they can continue to access medical treatment and medication in the community. Optometrists (for eyesight checks and glasses) also visit most prison health centres. At some prisons, Aboriginal inmates

may also be able to access medical services provided by Aboriginal medical organisations.

Your family member may not be able to get non-urgent health care straight away. There may be delays because of staffing or other issues.

**See p.30** for ways to advocate for your family member if you're concerned that they're not getting the health care that they need.

If you have an urgent concern about the mental health of your family member, call the JH&FMHN 24 Hour Mental Health Helpline on **1800 222 472**.

## Can mothers have children living with them in prison?

Depending on their classification, women may be able to have children living with them through

the Mothers and Children's Program if they meet the program requirements.

In the program, children can live with their mothers full time until they start school. If a woman gives birth in prison while serving a sentence, she may be able to keep her baby in her care while participating in the Mothers and Children's Program. Children may stay with their mothers as part of the Occasional Care Program up to the end of primary school. To be accepted into the program, applications are assessed and recommended by a committee, then approved by the Commissioner. This can take up to eight weeks.

The Mothers and Children's



*Jacaranda Cottages, Emu Plains Correctional Centre*

Program is based at Emu Plains and the Parramatta Transitional Centre. Generally, women and children join the program at Emu Plains and may move to Parramatta to prepare for release. Women can apply to be accepted into the Mothers and Children's Program while on remand. If a woman gives birth while on remand, she won't be able to care for her baby in prison unless she is accepted into the Mothers and Children's Program. Children of women on remand are generally cared for by family. Where this is not possible, they're placed in foster care through Family and Community Services (FACS).

Once a woman on remand gives birth, decisions will need to be made quickly about who will care for her child. It's best for everyone if the mother can plan ahead to make arrangements about who will care for the baby.

All pregnant women are transferred to a Sydney metropolitan prison to give birth in a public hospital.

## **Can inmates be transferred interstate or overseas to be closer to family?**

Under some circumstances, inmates can be transferred from NSW to other states of Australia, or from those states to NSW. Inmates can apply in writing for a transfer to be considered.

Decisions about transfers are made by State Ministers and/or the Commonwealth Attorney-General, depending on whether the inmate was convicted under State or Federal law.

Decisions about transfers can take some months to process and may be refused. Inmates can't appeal the refusal of transfer applications, and applications can only be made once within every 12-months. Inmates can discuss transfer applications with the Welfare SAPO at their prison. The inmate must make the application for a transfer – it's not possible for family to apply on their behalf.

Inmates may be able to apply for a transfer to or from Australia in certain circumstances. Transfers must be agreed to by both countries, and the processing of applications is likely to take a long time. The countries involved must reach agreement about the length of sentence the inmate will serve once they're transferred. Generally, only Australian citizens can be transferred from overseas countries to Australia. Similarly, overseas countries will generally only accept transfers of their own citizens. Australia has extradition arrangements with some countries. This means that people can be apprehended in one country and sent to another country to face court charges.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney.

Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

### Criminal Justice Support Network



After hours service for people with intellectual disabilities who are at a Police Station (24-hour Helpline)

**1300 665 908**

### Family & Carer Consultant

PO Box 150  
Matraville NSW 2035  
**9700 3000**

### Family Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS)

**9391 9000**

### Forensic Patient Victims Register

Information about the Forensic Patient Victims Register.

Call MHRT on **1800 815 511**

### Intellectual Disability Rights Service

A Community Legal Centre working with people with intellectual disabilities.

**02 9318 0144**

[www.idrs.org.au](http://www.idrs.org.au)

### Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (JH&FMHN)

Client Liaison Officers

**02 9700 3000**

24 Hour Mental Health Helpline. Staffed by mental health clinicians for inmates, their families and prison staff.

**1800 222 472**

### Lifeline



Free and confidential counselling, 24 hours.

**13 11 14**

### Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS)



Advice about legal representation for forensic patients at Mental Health Review Tribunal hearings and about issues of mental health law.

**02 9745 4277**

### Mental Health Line

(available 24 hours a day)

**1800 011 511**



### Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT)

Reviews circumstances of forensic patients.

**1800 815 511**

[www.mhrt.nsw.gov.au](http://www.mhrt.nsw.gov.au)



## Mothers and Children's Program (CSNSW)



The Mothers and Children's Program Co-ordinator can talk to families about options for children to be cared for by their mother within the Mothers and Children's Program, and can visit women who may be eligible for the program to discuss their plans for their children.

Mothers and Children's Program Co-ordinator:

**4735 0230**

## Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association



Provides advice, information and referrals for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with a disability and for their families and carers.

**02 9891 6400, 1800 629 072**

[www.mdaa.org.au](http://www.mdaa.org.au)

## NSW Council for Intellectual Disability



Provides information and referral on a range of issues, including where people with intellectual disability are involved in the criminal justice system.

**02 9211 1611**

**1800 424 065**

[www.nswcid.org.au](http://www.nswcid.org.au)

## NSW Law Society Pro Bono Scheme



THE LAW SOCIETY  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Provision of free legal representation where Legal Aid has been refused.

**02 9926 0364**

**02 9926 0355**

[www.lawsociety.com.au](http://www.lawsociety.com.au)

## Statewide Disability Services (CSNSW)

Case management and pre-release planning for inmates with disabilities; contact SDS if you have spoken to a Services and Programs Officer (SAPO) at your family member's prison but still have concerns about them.

**02 9289 2136**

## The Gender Centre



Information and outreach support for people with gender issues.

**02 9569 2366**

**1800 069 115** (outside Sydney)

[www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)

## WayAhead Mental Health Information Service



Details of mental health services in NSW, information about mental health, and details of support groups.

**1300 794 991**

[www.wayahead.org.au](http://www.wayahead.org.au)

# 3. Drug and alcohol programs

Up to 80% of people in NSW prisons are incarcerated because of drug use or related crimes. Prisons have strict security measures to limit access to drugs. Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) offer programs to help people reduce or stop drug taking, so that being incarcerated can offer new opportunities for inmates to address drug and alcohol use.

## Drug testing in prisons

Drug detector (sniffer) dogs are used to detect drugs in searches of prisons, including cells, inmates and their property. They may also be used in visiting areas. Urine testing is also used to detect drug use among inmates. If an inmate is found to be trafficking drugs, or has traces of drugs in their urine, they may be moved to a more secure prison, may lose privileges, and may face disciplinary action or new charges.

This could increase their time in prison and make it harder to get parole.

## Can inmates get help for drug problems while they're in prison?

The prison reception process includes screening for alcohol and drug use. Any one identified as being at risk of being intoxicated or in withdrawal from drugs and/or alcohol are commenced on routine monitoring by the health staff and their symptoms are medically managed, regardless of

the location they are in. All prisons have options for drug and alcohol treatment. Options include:

- > group programs;
- > residential programs, which are specialised treatment programs for three to five months at several prisons – the Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Programs, Compulsory Drug Treatment Centre (CDTC) program;
- > self-help programs such as NA (Narcotics Anonymous) or AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) in some centres;
- > pharmacotherapy (e.g. methadone, suboxone/ buprenorphine) for heroin and other opioid dependence. Anyone on these medications whilst in prison will have a post release care plan arranged by the health team to ensure that they can continue treatment on release.

Some interventions may only be available at certain centres. Where inmates have come into prison because of alcohol or drug use, they'll be encouraged to make use of treatment programs. Progress to



a lower classification, or success in applying for parole, may depend on people participating in drug or alcohol intervention programs.

## What if I'm asked to bring in drugs?

No matter how much an inmate begs or threatens you to bring them drugs, **DON'T DO IT.**

Prisons have highly sophisticated mechanisms for detecting drugs on visitors, including children. See **p.46** for more information on prison security.

**If you're found with drugs, you'll be arrested and charged by the police.**

You can also be prohibited from visiting a prison for 12 months or more.

## What is the Compulsory Drug Treatment Centre (CDTC)?

Male inmates who have repeated drug-related convictions may be referred to the Drug Court for consideration of a Compulsory Drug Treatment Order. (See next page for information about the Drug Court).

Some people will be excluded from this option because they've committed violent offences or sexual assault, or because of the risks they may pose in the program or in the community. They may be accepted into the Compulsory Drug Treatment Centre. This is located at Parklea and provides group programs and support for inmates in residence and those living in the community under intensive supervision. Only the Drug Court can make referrals to the CDTC.



Alcohol and Other Drugs program, Dillwynia Correctional Centre

## What is the Intensive Drug & Alcohol Treatment Program (IDATP)?

The Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (IDATP) is a residential (live in) program for male and female inmates who have a drug and/or alcohol problem linked to their offending behaviour. It is a group program which can take up to 12 months to complete. IDATP aims to:

- > help inmates gain an understanding of their substance dependence and offending behaviour;
- > reduce the likelihood of reoffending;
- > give inmates the skills, resources and support needed to return to the community, alcohol and/or drug-free and crime-free.

The program incorporates a range of therapeutic, health, education, vocation and pre-release interventions aimed at addressing substance dependence, offending behaviour and reintegration. It is offered to inmates at the Outer Metropolitan Multi-Purpose Correctional Centre and Dillwynia.

## Drug Court

### What is the Drug Court?

The Drug Court addresses the cycle of drug use and crime. The individual must reside in the catchment area for one of the Drug Courts (Parramatta, Downing

Centre, Newcastle), and must plead guilty to their charges to be eligible. If found eligible, the individual enters prison into a Drug Court unit in order to be assessed and have a highly suitable treatment plan developed.

The Drug Court focuses both on the offender's offending behaviour and on their drug use. Offenders agree to an individual plan that's monitored through regular appearances at the Drug Court.

Offenders must attend counselling to address their drug use and their offending behaviour; counselling is provided by staff from the Local Health District where the participant resides or within the residential program the participant is involved with, and Corrective Services NSW. Offenders need to agree not to use prohibited drugs, and to limit use of alcohol and legal drugs so they don't interfere with participation in the program. In some cases, participants will also need to agree not to use alcohol.

If participants fail to keep conditions of the Drug Court program they are given sanctions which equal days in prison. When they accumulate 14 days, they return to prison for that period of time. The Drug Court may also send the individual back to prison to serve sanctions before they accumulate 14 days. Decisions about drug use while on the program are made on an individual basis and don't automatically mean

exclusion from the Drug Court program.

Benefits of the Drug Court include reduced time in prison, accessing specialised treatment programs, development of plans that meet individual needs, and the affirmation received from the Drug Court as progress is acknowledged at court.

### **Eligibility for Drug Court**

Participants need to be referred by a magistrate or judge sitting in a court in the Drug Court catchment area. They need to be highly likely to be sentenced to full-time incarceration if convicted. They must be willing to participate, and to plead guilty. They won't be eligible if they've been charged with an offence involving violence, a sexual offence, or some more serious drug offences. They also need to undergo a mental health assessment to ensure they'll be able to participate in the program. Priority will be given to people who haven't previously had the opportunity to access the Drug Court.

### **What does Drug Court participation mean for families?**

Individuals involved in the Drug Court and their families can really benefit from the relationships with staff, who have an expert knowledge of drug treatment and an ability to make referrals to a wide range of agencies. Families

may see family members benefiting from treatment programs and addressing personal issues. The recognition of progress by the Drug Court can also be encouraging for families, who may feel that no one else appreciates how hard it is to change drug use or offending behaviour.

They may also feel anxious about their family member's capacity to maintain changes, especially as they move back into the community and have greater access to drugs, and the influence of drug-using friends or family. This can place strain on relationships. It can be hard for families to accept that they can't protect their family member if they're not able to take responsibility for the decision to remain drug-free.

If offenders are living at home, their residence needs to be checked by CSNSW staff. Members of the household need to be aware of the offender's participation in the Drug Court, and must be willing to cooperate with relevant staff.

Participation in the Drug Court is restricted to certain areas, so this may affect the household if others in the family wish to move. If a participant fails to keep conditions of the Drug Court program and goes into prison no visits are allowed.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

### Family Drug Support Australia



Family Drug Support offers information and referral, family support groups and courses for families affected by a family member's drug use. **1300 368 186 (24/7)**

[www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)



Information about drugs and alcohol, and referrals for detox and rehab programs, drug and alcohol counselling and related services. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**1800 250 015**

### Al-Anon



Al-Anon Family Groups

Self-help

support groups for families and friends of alcoholics. Based on the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Step approach.

**1300 252 666**

[www.al-anon.org.au](http://www.al-anon.org.au)

### Nar-Anon

Self-help support groups for families and friends of compulsive drug users.

**8004 1214**

[www.naran.com.au](http://www.naran.com.au)



## 4. Alternatives to detention

If your family member is awaiting sentencing, the court may consider alternatives to detention as a sentencing option. Sentencing options will depend on the charges your family member is facing, their history and other individual factors. Sometimes alternatives to detention are also available for people during the remand period who don't have adequate accommodation in the community.

You may be able to help your family member access alternatives to detention by encouraging them to talk to their solicitor or staff from Community Corrections (if a Sentencing Assessment Report has been requested by the court) and also by offering support such as accommodation. Think carefully about the kind of support you can offer, recognising the demands this may put on you and your family. Be aware also that there will be many circumstances in which there's nothing you can do to prevent your family member from receiving a sentence of detention.

If you're concerned that your family member won't be able to find out about alternatives to detention on their own, ask if you can be with your family member while they're interviewed or get their permission to make enquiries on their behalf.

### Drug Court

The Drug Court (**see p.34**) offers people with serious drug problems an opportunity to break the drug-crime cycle by involving them in

programs that address their drug issues. In some circumstances people can live in the community while they participate in the Drug Court program instead of serving their sentence in prison, while other Drug Court participants (male) will be in prison in the Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre at Parklea (**see p.33**).

Participants who live in the community work with staff from CSNSW and NSW Health and must undertake tasks like attending counselling, education programs and participating in urine screening. Regular progress reports are provided to the court, and the court is advised of any breaches. Drug Court programs generally involve participants for 12 months or more. At the end of the program, participants receive a final sentence from the Drug Court that takes into account their original sentence and their progress in the Drug Court program.

For more information about the Drug Court, go to:

[www.drugcourt.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.drugcourt.justice.nsw.gov.au)

# MERIT

## What is MERIT?

MERIT is the Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program. It offers people an opportunity to volunteer to address drug problems as a condition of their bail. Progress in treatment is taken into consideration when the person receives their final sentence. Treatment may include detox, methadone or other medication, referral to residential rehab, counselling and support services.

## Who is eligible for MERIT?

MERIT is for people who use illegal drugs and are facing charges at a Local Court, and whose charges don't involve significant violence or sexual assault. Participants need to be willing to participate in drug treatment.

## What does MERIT mean for families?

MERIT assists drug users to get treatment. Facing court is sometimes the trigger for people to accept help for drug use when they haven't been willing before. This can be a big relief for families. Participants won't be punished for not completing their MERIT program, but the magistrate may take success into account when sentencing. You may find it stressful if you're aware that your family member is not following through on their program requirements.

Remember that you can support and encourage your family member, but you can't take responsibility for making them succeed.

To find out more about MERIT ask at the Local Court or talk to your family member's solicitor.

## Court orders and conditions that don't involve detention

### Fines

For minor traffic offences and less serious criminal offences, the Magistrate can impose fines. Usually the law states the maximum fine that can apply to an offence. Fines need to be paid within 28 days; it's possible for an extension or payment by instalments to be arranged.

Unpaid fines will be referred to State Debt Recovery (SDR). If fines remain unpaid, arrest warrants can be issued. If you want to talk to SDR about your family member's outstanding fines, you'll need them to phone SDR to give permission, or send a letter.

### Conditional Release Orders (CRO)

A CRO may be imposed with or without conviction for up to 2 years. It may or may not be supervised by a Community Corrections Officer and includes conditions not to commit any offences and to appear before the court if requested.



## Community Correction Orders (CCO)

CCOs come with a criminal conviction and can last up to three years.

CCOs may or may not be supervised by a Community Corrections Officer and includes conditions not to commit any offences and to appear before the court if required.

## Intensive Correction Orders (ICO)

ICOs are an alternative to a sentence of imprisonment. An ICO may be made when a court is satisfied that no sentence other than full time imprisonment is appropriate and that the sentence is likely to be for a period of two years or less. ICOs are designed to reduce an offender's risk of reoffending through the provision of tailored interventions and monitoring in the community. Some conditions that may be imposed on an ICO include home detention, community service work and programs.

### What is home detention?

Home detention is a condition of an ICO where an offender can serve their sentence at home under intensive supervision. Offenders with a home detention condition are monitored through electronic bracelets, visits from supervising officers, and drug and alcohol testing.



### Who is eligible for home detention?

Offenders need to be sentenced to a term of 18 months or less. Offenders can't get home detention if they're on remand (**see p.11**).

### What does home detention mean for families?

Home detention has many benefits for families. It ensures that families can stay together and parents can continue to care for their children. It's also possible for an offender to attend pre-approved study (e.g. TAFE) or work while on home detention. It means families are spared the pressure of worrying about what's happening to an incarcerated family member. It also relieves them of the pressure of visiting a family member who may be in a prison a long way from home.

Home detention can have downsides for families as well. They may feel obliged to have the offender at home to keep them out of prison, even if they would

otherwise want them to leave the home. Relationships can be stressed if families feel they have to put pressure on the offender to keep to the conditions of their order. And everyone may be affected by visits and telephone calls from Community Corrections staff which can come at any time to check that the offender is at home.

### **Community Service work conditions**

As a condition of an ICO or CCO, the Magistrate or Judge can sentence people to do community service work. This means that the person will be required to complete a number of community work hours specified by the court.

### **Need help?**

Encourage your family member to discuss alternatives with their legal representative.

### **Drug Court**

The Drug Court of NSW is a specialist court that sits in Parramatta, Toronto and Sydney.

The Drug Court accepts referrals from the Local and District Courts for offenders who are dependent on drugs, and who are eligible for a Drug Court Program.

For more information go to:

[www.drugcourt.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.drugcourt.justice.nsw.gov.au)



## 5. Keeping in contact

Families benefit from maintaining ties with a family member in prison, even if its hard to find time for visiting or staying in contact. Fares, petrol and other costs can make visiting expensive, and dealing with prison security can be frustrating. However, inmates who stay in close contact with their families are less likely to reoffend when they're released. They do better on parole, have better mental health and have better relationships with their families when they return home, so its worth the effort to stay in touch.

It's easy for inmates to become institutionalised, meaning that they can't cope without the structure of a prison. Keeping in contact with families helps maintain an identity as a partner, friend, brother, sister, sibling or parent. Family ties remind the inmate that they're more than just an 'inmate' and help them stay focused on the roles they can play beyond the prison. Away from home and loved ones, it's easy for inmates to believe that people

will stop caring about them. This can produce feelings of isolation, hopelessness and despair.

Regular visits and letters from family are important reminders to inmates that there are people on the outside who love and care for them. Keeping in contact also means family can assist inmates in planning for the future, and supporting them after release. **See p.107** for more information about planning for release.



Visits area at Dillwynia

## Should you visit?

If a family member has been violent or threatening towards you or someone else, you may be feeling greatly relieved that they're in prison. Families of inmates with violent or abusive behaviour often feel pressured to support their family member while they're in prison, and feel guilty if they don't. Think about your safety and that of your children in deciding whether you or your children should visit them.

As well as physical violence, think about other ways in which you may be at risk of abuse or controlling tactics. Imprisoned partners can feel jealous about your real or imagined relationships with other people and react with threats, coercion, manipulation, emotional blackmail, intimidation or angry outbursts. They may also attempt to control your activities and movements, for example by asking friends or family to monitor what you do. Now that your family member is away from home, you may have the time and space to think about whether to stay with them. You may find yourself paying more attention to people in your life who have questioned whether your relationship is safe and healthy. You may find it helpful to talk about this with a counsellor or support worker. **See p.30** for contact details about services.

You may not want to take children to visit their parent in prison if

you're questioning whether you want to continue a relationship with that person. You may be able to ask a trusted relation or friend to take the child when they visit the prison. If you don't know someone who can do this, you may be able to arrange for a worker from SHINE for Kids to take the child on visits (**see p.75** for SHINE details and contact numbers).

## Visiting and AVOs (apprehended violence orders)

If you have a current apprehended domestic violence order (ADVO) or apprehended personal violence order (APVO), you can't visit a prison if this will contravene the conditions of the order. For example, if the order says that the inmate can't come within a certain distance, you won't be able to visit them. Prison staff are able to check whether there's a relevant AVO. If there's an order, but you believe that you can still visit, you should take a copy of the order with you to the prison. For example, the inmate may be able to have contact with you, but only if they stick to conditions about their behaviour.

## Visiting a prison

### Who can visit?

Family and friends are encouraged to visit. Up to four adults can visit an inmate at any one time. Check with the prison if you want to bring

more than four children.

Inmates can decide they don't want to attend a visit. If an inmate has many people who are likely to visit, they should check with each other beforehand to avoid too many people attending at the same time. If you let the inmate know in advance that you're visiting, this will help them be prepared for the visit. You can do this by writing to them, or by telling them when they phone you.

But remember that once you've told them you're visiting, they'll be counting on you coming. If you have to change your plans on the day, you won't be able to contact the inmate to let them know.

### **Booking visits**

Most prisons require you to book visits in advance.

Contact the prison by phone and ask to book a visit. You'll need the person's birth date and/or their MIN. If you don't know which prison your family member is in, contact:



### **Sentence Administration**

**(02) 8346 1000**

between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekdays excluding public holidays, or

### **State-wide Sentence**

**Administration (02) 9289 5258**

between 4.30pm - 8.30pm, weekdays, or between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekends and public holidays.

Booking a visit doesn't guarantee that it will take place. Inmates may be moved at short notice, and they (not the staff) are responsible for telling you their new location. Ring the day before you leave to check that your family member is still in the same prison. If you have to travel a long distance to get to the prison, ring and check along the way.

Arrive before your visit is due to start. In some centres you'll need to queue in order of arrival, while other centres will give you a specific time to arrive. You may have to wait if your family member is working or needs to be located to come to the visit.

### **How often can I visit?**

Visiting arrangements vary between prisons, so contact the centre to check visiting times and how often you can visit. See the inside back cover for a list of NSW prisons and their phone numbers.

MRRCC (Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre) at Silverwater and Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre have visiting six days a week, but many centres will only be open for visits on weekends and public holidays. Remand centres may have different times, and different procedures to other centres, which may make visiting more difficult and

time-consuming. They also have limits on the number of visitors an inmate may see. Visitors to remand centres may need to have an eye scan (see below) or be fingerprinted upon entry.

### **VIN (Visitor's Identification Number) and ID for visits**

The first time you visit a prison you'll be given a VIN (Visitor's Identification Number).

This will be your VIN each time you visit the prison. Allow extra time for the issue of a VIN on your first visit. You'll also need to fill out a visitor's form. This form will be different at different centres. Some centres conduct eye scans (biometric scans). To have a biometric scan you're asked to stand still while a light shines in your face.

The record of your eye scan will be used to check your identity at your next visit. Remember that you must provide identification each time you visit. You'll need one form of ID from List 1 or three forms of ID from List 2. One of these must show the address where you currently live.

#### **List 1**

- > Current Driver's Licence with photo.
- > Photo card from issued by the Roads and Maritime Services or similar from interstate.
- > Current passport or one that has expired within the last two years.
- > Any current photo ID issued by an Australian Government department agency or authority.

#### **List 2**

- > Birth Certificate.
- > Confirmation of enrolment letter from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC).
- > Water, power or phone accounts issued less than six months before the visit date.
- > Current car or boat registration papers.
- > Marriage Certificate.
- > Australian citizenship card issued by a government department agency or authority (e.g. a pension card, Medicare card).
- > Department of Home Affairs papers.
- > Credit or debit card with your signature.

### **Visitor Information Volunteer Scheme (VIVS)**

The Visitor Information Volunteer Scheme (VIVS) is operating at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (MRRC) and the Bathurst Correctional Centre. Volunteers provide information, guidance and support to families and friends visiting inmates. The volunteers are easy to spot as they wear badges which identify them.

## **Visiting for children**

### **Arrangements for children**

Children under 18 years must be with an adult. Take the children's ID (e.g. birth certificate or passport) if

you have it. Visiting with children can be challenging, particularly if they're young. They'll be expected to stay seated near you and not to disturb other people. There will be no toys for them to play with, and they can't bring toys or playthings from home. If you have sensitive issues to discuss with your family member in prison, it's often better to leave the children at home that day. SHINE for Kids provides childcare during visits at prisons in Silverwater, Parklea, Windsor, Goulburn, Bathurst, Cessnock, Wellington, Junee, Nowra and Kempsey. This MUST be booked in advance. Contact SHINE for Kids on **9714 3000**.

### **What to tell children**

Depending on their age, children may have different expectations and reactions to visiting a prison. Younger children may not realise that they're visiting a prison. Older children may be fearful or uncertain, and may need reassurance about what will happen when they visit.

Some families try to avoid telling children that they're visiting a prison. They may say that the visit is taking place at the family member's work or some other setting. While it's up to individual parents and carers to decide what to tell children when visiting a prison, many people find that children cope best when told the truth. **See p.45** for more

information about what to tell children.

### **Child protection**

Be aware that parents are expected to keep their children safe during visits. If parents are observed physically abusing children (e.g. smacking) or harming them in other ways, the visit may be terminated. Also CSNSW staff are required to report child abuse to FACS. Physical abuse includes hitting children around the head, or hitting them hard enough to mark them or hurt more than a few moments.

If you want to take a child to visit an inmate who has been charged or convicted of an offence with a child victim, the inmate will need to make a special application for the visit and will have to be assessed regarding the safety of the visit for the child. This process will also apply to Family Video Contact (**see p. 50**). To find out more, call CSNSW's Child Protection Coordination and Support Unit on **8346 1008**.

### **Help for children to visit parents in prison**

SHINE for Kids has centres at different locations across the state. SHINE may be able to assist with transporting children to other centres if they're unable to attend visits otherwise. To find out how they can help you, contact them on **9714 3000** or **see p.75** for locations and more phone numbers.

## Security

Officers may ask you to turn out your pockets, or your child's pockets, and open bags or other belongings (where these are allowed into visiting areas). They may scan you with a hand-held scanning device, or ask you to walk through a metal detector.

Sniffer dogs, trained to detect drugs, may walk around visitors and their children. Sniffer dogs can detect drugs from a week ago. Visitors need to make sure there are no traces of drugs on their possessions or in any car in which they travelled to the prison.

Visitors may be required to remove face coverings (e.g. an item of clothing, helmet, mask) to verify the identity of the person entering or exiting a prison.

Requests for visitors to remove face coverings worn for religious reasons will be carried out in a sensitive manner.

Visitors will not be strip searched by CSNSW officers, but police can strip search if called. Muslim women wearing a veil or hijab may be asked to remove it so it can be searched. This will be conducted by a female CSNSW officer. You won't be allowed to remove any clothing during the visit.

Inmates in higher security centres will be wearing one-piece white or orange jumpsuits during visits, as a security measure.

## Visiting arrangements

Each prison has individual visiting arrangements. The security classification (maximum, medium, minimum) will make a difference to the arrangements during visits.

Generally the following will apply in the visits area:

- > no smoking;
- > you will not be admitted if under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and can't behave in a disruptive way;
- > you must stay seated, and can't sit on laps or tables;
- > you can only make contact with the inmate you've been authorised to visit;
- > you can't join other visitors at other tables;
- > you won't be able to bring a camera, mobile phone, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, syringes or weapons;
- > maximum security prisons are generally very restrictive about bringing in items.

## You should check with the centre about the following:

### Location of an inmate

Check that the inmate is still at the prison you plan to visit. They could be moved at the last minute and be unable to let you know. Phone as close as possible to the visit.



## **A list of prisons and their phone numbers is on page 124 of this book.**

The Corrective Services website has the most up-to-date contact information:

[www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au)

### **Access to lockers**

Some centres will have lockers where you can leave valuables. Check what change is needed for lockers.

### **Baby care**

You may be able to bring baby food in a sealed jar or a baby bottle. You may be able to bring nappies or nappies and wipes may be provided. Strollers will often not be permitted inside prisons. Check whether any other food will be permitted for toddlers and older children.

In maximum security centres, no food may be permitted beyond that needed for infants.

### **Medication**

If you need to have medication accessible to you at all times, you'll need to hand it to the Visits Processing Officer during your visit. It should be in its original container. Prescribed medication should be in its original package with your name on it. It would be wise to bring the prescription or doctor's certificate. Before the visit, complete an Application for Special Medical Consideration form with a copy of a medical certificate.

### **Toilets**

Some centres will only have toilets at the gate, so you won't be able to use toilets after you enter the visitors waiting area. At some centres, visits will have to end once you leave the room to use the toilet. This may also happen if children need to use the toilet. If you're allowed to return to the visit, you'll need to be rescreened before the visit resumes.

If you have a medical condition that means you'll need access to toilets, apply to the Governor or Manager of Security in writing by completing an Application for Special Medical Consideration form with a copy of a medical certificate before the visit.

### **Vending machines**

Some prisons have vending machines where you can buy junk food for yourself or your family member during visits.

Only you can use the machine – your family member won't be allowed to handle the money. Check how much change you can bring in, and what kinds of coins are needed. There are no change machines at prisons so make sure you have change with you.



## What to wear

Remember you may be scanned by a metal detector. If the metal detector goes off you'll delay other visitors, so it's best to avoid metal – e.g. in shoes, buttons, bra under-wires, jewellery except for wedding rings, or jewellery – that you are unable to remove. CNSNSW requires visitors to wear clothing that 'conforms to family standards'; This means avoiding see through or revealing clothing. Staff may be very strict about what's appropriate clothing. You may not be able to wear sunglasses or sunhats.

## Transport

You can ask the prison about transport options and directions. These are also given on the CNSNSW website, [www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au) – look for 'correctional centres'. You can ring the Transport

Infoline on **131 500** or go to [www.transportsw.info](http://www.transportsw.info) for information about public transport.

Junee Correctional Centre provides a free weekly return train ticket to Junee from Central Station / Campbelltown Station, and a free taxi service to and from Junee station to the centre. Bookings can be made by contacting Junee Correctional Centre on **02 6924 3222** Monday – Wednesday between 12.30pm – 4pm. Visitors must book and pay their own accommodation.

## Money for inmates

You won't be able to directly give any items to your family member during visits.

CNSNSW is no longer able to accept cash deposits at prisons or money sent in by post. You will be able to deposit money in their trust account by using BPAY (internet and phone banking) or at an Australia Post outlet (cash and debit card). You'll need a VIN (Visitor's Identification Number) before you can deposit money. Once you have a VIN then you can be issued with a form that will allow you to use BPAY and Australia Post services. This form will either be emailed or posted to you by prison administration staff. You can deposit \$100 only at a time. There is also a monthly limit of \$600, if an inmate receives more than \$600 in one month the amount over the limit will be put in a separate account that can't be accessed until the inmate's release. Inmates can use money to order items ('buy-up') such as toiletries, additional food, clothing, tobacco, papers and personal items. Inmates are not permitted to have money or other items, such as stamps, that could be used as currency.

## Mail for inmates

Prisons encourage the sending of letters between inmates and their families. Inmates really value





letters, and often keep and reread all that they receive. Be aware that inmates may find it hard to find much to write about, and so may not respond to every letter they receive. Even if they don't write back regularly, they usually love to receive letters and like hearing about what's going on beyond the prison.

Mail is usually opened by prison staff, but may not be read in detail. Inmates' letters will be screened for any illegal activity. If you have legal or other official papers that you urgently need to pass on to an inmate, check with the prison about the fastest way to do this. You may be able to leave them to be passed on after your visit.

Each centre has individual rules about sending clothing or reading material to inmates. Check with the centre about whether you can send in clothing, books or magazines.

## Phone calls

You won't be able to phone your family member in prison. Each inmate receives a phone card with six phone numbers that can be programmed for family or friends. They can also allocate three numbers for services they may wish to phone. They must have money in their account to make phone calls. Phone calls generally last six minutes.



To use their phone card, inmates enter their MIN then a PIN for the card. They can then make the call. You'll be advised that the call is from a prison. It can be a good idea to plan ahead, organising times for the inmate to call so that you're not waiting around the call. Partners and family may feel anxious if an inmate doesn't call when they said they would. Inmates may have to queue to use one of a limited number of phones, so they may not be able to contact you exactly when you are expecting a call. Professional visits, medical appointments and inmate lock downs may also prevent them from calling.

Avoid spending hours sitting and waiting for calls. If they haven't called within an hour of when they said they would, it's best to get on with other things. Don't jump to awful conclusions about why the inmate has not called. Keep in mind all the everyday reasons that could have prevented them from calling you.

## In an emergency ...

In a genuine emergency – i.e. a serious situation such as death, major injury or illness in the family – contact the prison (see inside back cover for numbers) and say that you need to pass on an urgent message to your family member.

## Family Video Contact

### What is a video visit?

A Family Video Contact links an inmate in a prison using video conferencing equipment with family who go to a venue where video conferencing is also available. Some prisons have video conferencing so that inmates don't have to be transported for brief court appearances, and to assist in provision of professional services such as access to solicitors. Family Video Contact uses this technology for family and friend's visits.

### Why have a Family Video Contact?

A Family Video Contact can mean that an inmate can have contact with family members and friends who have difficulty visiting the prison. Difficulties may arise due to distance, costs or because family members are elderly or have disabilities.

### How is a Family Video Contact organised?

Inmates can apply for a Family Video Contact by filling out a **Family Video Contact form**.

This form can be obtained from the officer in charge of the video conferencing area or from the Manager Offender Services and Programs (MOSP). The SAPO or Welfare Officer can also help find and complete this form. If a support agency like SHINE for Kids or Community Restorative Centre (CRC) has been supporting the family, they may be able to provide a supporting letter or, if they're visiting the inmate, add their support for the visit on the application form.

It's best for inmates to discuss the option of the contact with their family before putting in the application, so the family knows what to expect. It takes about two weeks for applications to be reviewed and approved. If the Family Video Contact session is

approved, the family will receive a phone call either from a support organisation. A time will be set for the contact to take place, and the prison will be advised. The family will be asked to go to a venue where video conferencing is available. This will usually be a government or council



*Video conferencing suite*

building, such as a TAFE, school or library.

Families may have to travel to a neighbouring suburb or town if video facilities aren't available locally. Family Video Contact sessions are generally about an hour long.

Because video conferencing facilities at the prison must also be used for court hearings and professional visits, there may be a delay in the start of a visit, and sometimes visits will be a little shorter than an hour. Sometimes families find that they don't want to use the whole hour, especially if they're just starting to re-establish a relationship with someone in prison.

The inmate can nominate up to four adults and four children for their Family Video contact. There are no difficulties if some of the people nominated can't attend the visit. However, only the people nominated on the form can attend

the visit. You can't bring along other people to take the places of people who were nominated but can't attend on the day.

### **Hints for getting the most out of video visits**

It really helps if family can bring items to the visit. For example, family could show photos or children could bring a toy or something they've done at childcare or school. The inmate won't usually be able to bring anything to show.

Children will often find it hard to stay engaged with the video, especially at first. It can help to bring toys so they can be occupied during the contact session. It may be helpful to reassure the inmate that if children don't seem interested, it doesn't mean the inmate is not important to them - it's just that they have a short attention span, especially when they have to watch and listen.

### **Need help?**

Note that **1800** numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

For advice about AVOs contact:

### **Domestic Violence Advocacy Centre**

A Community Legal Centre specialising in free advice on domestic violence.

**8745 6999**  
**1800 810 784**

### **FACS Domestic Violence Line**

24-hour advice about safety, AVOs and child protection.

**1800 656 463**

## 6. Coping with a family member in prison

### Guilt by association

Families of inmates have been called the 'invisible' victims of crime. Many families of inmates experience discrimination, often fuelled by widespread fear of crime, and negative beliefs about inmates.

Family members may find even relatives and friends are judgemental and fearful.

Media attention and community reaction can put great pressure on family, who may feel that they, as well as their family member, are on trial. People may give you a hard time about keeping in contact with someone in prison. You may find relationships with family and friends are strained, just when you most need support. This can be especially hard for children who may lose contact with extended family through no choice of their own. Sometimes families feel so ashamed of their family member that they assume others will judge them.

Fear of rejection can lead people to isolate themselves from others. It is important to give trusted friends and family a chance to support you, although some may find it hard to do.

Sometimes families may feel relief that their family member is in

prison. They may feel their family member will be safer in prison or have a better chance of getting the help they need. Having a family member in prison may also mean life at home is calmer, more predictable and perhaps safer. It may be hard to share this with others, and families may feel guilty that they feel this way. Contact with a counsellor, social worker or support group such as Kairos Prison Ministry Australia can be very helpful at this time. See their website for locations, [www.kairos.org.au](http://www.kairos.org.au) or call **9987 2016** for assistance.

### Grief and loss

Many families of inmates have said that the grief they felt when their family member went inside was as if someone had died. Even though they can still see their family member, or speak on the phone, the loss for the family is very real.

In some ways the grief can be harder to deal with than a death. Unlike a death, the experience of imprisonment seems to drag on indefinitely. When someone dies, friends, neighbours and relatives will usually be very supportive and understanding. Families of inmates often find people don't know what to say, or leave them feeling that

they too are 'in disgrace'. While bereaved families have the funeral and other rituals to help them, there are no rituals to help the families of prisoners cope with their loss. This lack of social support can make it difficult for families to express their sadness openly. As a result, they often hide their feelings from others and try to 'soldier on'.

Although this may seem to work in the short term, most people do better if they can talk through how they feel. Sometimes it's easier to talk with a counsellor or support group than with friends or family. See p.30 for information about services that may be able to assist.

## Looking after yourself

It may be hard to focus on your own needs when you're so worried about your family member's situation. However, you need to look after your health and wellbeing as well. It's easy to overlook signs of stress. Check the following list to identify ways that stress may be affecting you.

Everyone feels stress differently, so you will need to develop your own approach to managing it. The self-care suggestions that follow are a guide.

If you can't find strategies that work for you, or you find you're relying on alcohol or other drugs or other unhealthy behaviours to cope, you may find it helpful to talk with your doctor, or look for assistance from a psychologist, social worker or counsellor.

### Signs of stress are:

- > difficulty sleeping;
- > undereating or overeating;
- > difficulty communicating thoughts;
- > easily irritated;
- > muscle tension, headaches, stomach problems;
- > disorientation, confusion
- > difficulty concentrating;
- > reluctance to leave home;
- > feeling depressed, sad or hopeless;



- > mood swings and crying easily;
- > feelings of guilt and self-doubt;
- > increased use of alcohol and other drugs or gambling to escape or ease the pressure.

### Ways to ease stress

- > Talk with someone about your feelings – anger, sorrow and other emotions – even though it may be difficult. Don't let shame stop you from seeking support from family and friends, or getting outside help.
- > Eat healthy food and eat three meals a day.
- > Try to do some regular exercise.
- > Take time out to relax.
- > Get enough sleep.
- > Try to keep your worries in perspective and not make passing concerns into catastrophes.
- > Be gentle and patient with yourself; accept that it's impossible to do everything at once.
- > Take time for yourself; don't put off doing things that you enjoy and that bring meaning to your life.
- > Do something nice for your body, e.g. take a bubble bath, ask someone for a hug, or just stand up and stretch.
- > Write down your thoughts.
- > Try an app that helps deal with stress.

- > Do things that give your mind a rest, such as reading a book, taking a walk somewhere pleasant, watching a movie, or doing some gardening, cooking or something creative.
- > Try to remain hopeful even if there's no easy solution to the current situation.

### Living as the partner of an inmate

Partners of inmates have many adjustments to make. Having a partner in prison can impact on your financial situation (see p.90), your housing (p.85) and your social networks. If you have children, you'll have to adjust to being a sole parent (p.76). You'll also have to adjust to a relationship with your partner through visits, phone calls and letters, instead of being with them day to day.

### Intimacy

Intimacy is an important part of relationships and can be a difficult issue for inmates and their partners. Sexual expression is limited by the restrictions of prison visits. However, you can still share intimacy through hugging, kissing, handholding and talking during contact visits. You won't be permitted to do more than this, because you'll be expected to respect other people who are also having visits at the same time. Many factors can affect the closeness between you and your partner at visits.



You may feel anxious about visiting, or just tired from travelling. Your partner may feel guilty, or be worried about what's happening to them. Part of the frustration of being an inmate's partner is that visits won't always live up to your expectations.

### **Pressure from your partner in prison**

Inmates are cut off from the outside world. They have a lot of time to imagine things, and may become suspicious and fearful about losing their relationship with you. You can reassure them that you love them and value the relationship. Ultimately it's up to them to come to terms with the fact that they're in prison and can't control what happens on the outside. Partners often experience pressure to visit the inmate frequently. Comments such as 'you're the only one who visits me' or 'you're the only one I've got' can place considerable pressure on partners.

Although you may want to visit your partner every weekend, it may not be possible because of the cost, travelling time and the stress it places on you. Your partner may not be aware of what it's like for you on the outside. Try to talk with them about the pressures on you and arrange a realistic visiting plan together.

Partners often have to work out how much financial support they can give an inmate. However much you want to support your partner,

you also need to take care of your own and your children's needs.

Inmates receive three meals a day, have shelter and have some options for filling in time. Their basic needs are met. Relationships can become strained when an inmate remains dependent on their partner throughout their sentence and expects their partner to focus considerable attention on them.

The inmate's situation may not change much during that time. You may have to take on new roles and responsibilities as you cope in the community on your own. You may meet new people, take on new work responsibilities or move to a new area. You may develop new skills and confidence and you may have to become more independent because your partner isn't there. You'll have to adjust to changes in relationships with friends and family as children grow older and parents age. It can be hard for inmates to appreciate these changes, and this can put strain on the relationship, both while inmates are in prison and after release.

### **Communication between partners**

Communication is the most important ingredient for maintaining a close relationship with your partner. It's important to share what's going on with your partner, including both the positive and the negative events.

Partners say they feel guilty about

enjoying activities while their partner is in prison. However, you still have your own life and have every right to take part in enjoyable activities. It's okay to be positive and tell your partner about things that are enjoyable, even though they can't be a part of it.

You may fear that you'll make your partner's life even harder by telling them about the difficulties in your life. Ultimately, honest communication is the best way to help you and your partner feel closer. It will help your partner feel involved and needed. It will also stop them from feeling angry if they find out that something happened and they were not told about it.

It may help to make a list before a phone call or a visit so that you don't forget important things to discuss.

Good communication involves recognising what your partner may be experiencing and how this may impact on their communication with you. The ways that inmates cope with living with other inmates (emotional withdrawal, being guarded about personal issues, and not getting involved) are exactly the sort of reactions that can damage relationships with people on the outside.

Inmates may be silent or uncomfortable during visits with you and the children. They may feel that talking about life in prison is boring or frightening and therefore feel they have nothing to say. These

may be important factors to keep in mind when you communicate with your partner.

Inmates have a lot of time to think between visits and restricted opportunities to resolve issues. As a result, they can sometimes blow minor disagreements out of proportion.

Sometimes a small argument on a visit can spiral out of control afterwards, leading them to become suspicious, angry and defensive. Try to resolve minor disputes during visits when possible rather than leaving issues unresolved.

## Dealing with relationship breakdown

Many couples will find ways of coping with the pressure of a partner in prison, but some relationships break down. Often the beginning and the end of a sentence are the times when there's the most stress on relationships. Sometimes having a partner in prison gives you time to think about whether you really want the relationship to continue. You may become more aware of aspects of the relationship that haven't been working for you, such as violence in the home, or controlling tactics by your partner. You may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor to assist you at this time. **See p.30** for services that may help.

If you're not getting along with



your partner and don't want to have contact, don't use children to relay messages to your partner. Doing this can lead to children feeling torn between their parents. It's important that children can still have the opportunity to talk with parents on the phone. Relationships between parents may be strained but where it is safe, children should still have the chance to sustain relationships with both parents.

## Parents of inmates

Parents of inmates frequently experience strong and conflicting emotions about their child's situation. Common reactions include:

### Denial/disbelief

Parents often struggle to come to terms with the idea that their child is being accused of criminal behaviour. They may feel that this doesn't fit with the person they know and raised, or that their family doesn't have the characteristics usually associated with criminality. They may assure their child that they believe in their innocence, and refuse to accept any indications of possible guilt.

### Anger

Parents can be outraged that their child has committed a crime. They may feel resentful and angry, with questions such as: Why did they do it? How could they cause us so much pain?

Parents sometimes feel anger towards the police and the justice system. This may be particularly so if they believe their child to be innocent. Parents may feel their child was set up or 'framed', that they are not being given a fair trial or adequate representation in court, or that they are somehow different from other people in the prison system.

### Worry

No matter how old the inmate is or how serious the offence, they're still a parent's child. Parents often feel deeply concerned about their child's health and safety in prison.

### Guilt

They may feel guilty about negative feelings towards their child. It can be helpful to separate what your child did (their behaviour) from how you feel about them (the person). You can disapprove of someone's behaviour but still love the person.

Parents of inmates may feel guilty if they don't want to support their child by putting up bail, paying out their debts (see **Chapter 11 'Money issues' on p.90**) or taking them back home when they're released. Many parents report finding it hard to say no to demands from their child in prison, and feeling guilty if they do.

### Shame

Parents often worry about telling others that their child is in prison. They may be embarrassed.

Parents may decide not to tell their friends in case they're judged as bad parents or rejected by their association with a criminal. Secrecy can increase a parent's sense of shame and humiliation.

### **Isolation and alienation**

Friends or extended family may reject the inmate and condemn the parent's continuing feelings of loyalty or concern for them. Parents may feel that no one could possibly understand what they're going through, and this can give them a sense of being different from other parents and isolated from their social networks.

### **Relief**

Parents may experience a great sense of relief when their child is in prison. Their child might have been abusing alcohol and other drugs, or might have been endangering themselves or others. It's comforting to know that they're now being closely monitored and are off the streets. For some inmates, prison might be the first time that they will access treatment for mental health issues, among other things, and this can be a big relief to parents.

### **Self-blame**

Parents may feel that they're in some way responsible for their child's actions. They may compare themselves to other families who don't have children in prison. People commit crimes for all sorts

of reasons, such as to support a drug habit, to get out of debt or because of mental health or personality problems.

### **Uncertainty**

Parents may feel overwhelmed with conflicting feelings and may become very confused about what to do, about what their own needs are, and how and whether they'll continue to support their child.

## **How much support should parents give?**

There are some questions parents might have to ask themselves.

- > Should I put up the money for bail?
- > Should I put money into their inmate account?
- > How much should I put in?
- > Should I visit them every weekend?
- > Should I let them live with me when they get released?

There are really no 'shoulds' or 'musts'. Many parents set limits to the support they're able to give. For example, they may decide that it's too hard having their son or daughter living at home with them anymore. It's important to think about your own needs and limitations, and those of others in the family. If there is a history of violence, it is more important to put the safety of yourself and others first.

It may also be worth considering whether you should allow your

child to avoid responsibility for their own actions by paying any of their debts. There may be differing views in the family regarding the level of support to be provided to the inmate. Where there's ongoing

conflict in the family, it may be helpful to talk through the issues together with a counsellor or support worker. Contact CRC on **9288 8700** or see **p.30** for services that may be able to help.

## Need help?

Note that charges may apply for calls from mobile phones, so check before calling. Check with your local library for free Internet access.

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

Information, advice and support for prisoners, former prisoners and their families.

**9288 8700**

[www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au)



### Community Health Centres

Provide counselling and a range of other health-related services. To find your nearest service phone:

**9391 9000**

[www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

### Family Drug Support

Information, referral and support groups for families and friends affected by the drug use of someone close to them.

**1300 368 186**

[www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)



### Fams

Fams aims to support the delivery of quality services by non-government, not-for-profit organisations working with vulnerable children, young people, families and communities. For assistance call:

**8354 3799**

[www.fams.asn.au](http://www.fams.asn.au)



### Kairos

A community-based Christian ministry that provides services and programs for offenders and their families.

**02 9987 2016**

[kairos.org.au](http://kairos.org.au)

### Relationships Australia



Provides relationship counselling to couples, individuals and families.

**1300 364 277**

[www.relationshipsnsw.org.au](http://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au)

## SHINE for Kids

Services include support, advocacy and referral for children of inmates, inmates and carers. See **p.75** for more details.



Silverwater.....	<b>9714 3000</b>
Parklea.....	<b>9933 7900</b>
Windsor .....	<b>4573 3900</b>
Kariong .....	<b>4340 3836</b>
Bathurst.....	<b>6328 9900</b>
Cessnock.....	<b>4993 6800</b>
Wellington.....	<b>6845 5000</b>
Junee.....	<b>6934 6000</b>
Kempsey .....	<b>6561 3800</b>

Call **9714 3000** for details about Nowra and Goulburn services.

[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)

## Telephone counselling:

### Lifeline

Free and confidential telephone counselling open 24 hours. Crisis support and suicide prevention



**13 11 14**

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### Lifeline – Domestic violence / Family violence / Sexual violence

**1800 RESPECT** is a national phone assistance and referral for people affected by sexual assault, family violence and domestic violence.

**1800 737 732**

[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

## ParentLine NSW



Parent Line is a telephone counselling, information and referral service for parents of children ages 0 to 18 who live in New South Wales. Mon - Fri 9am to 9pm / Sat - Sun 4pm to 9pm

**1300 1300 52**

[www.parentline.org.au](http://www.parentline.org.au)

## Mensline Australia



Family counselling, information and referral for men.

**1300 789 978**

[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

## Domestic violence services:

### Domestic Violence Legal Contact Line

A Community Legal Centre specialising in free advice on domestic violence.

**8745 6999 or 1800 810 784**

Mon & Thurs 1.30pm – 4.30pm

Tue & Fri 9.30am -12.30pm

### Domestic Violence Line

This is a NSW statewide telephone crisis counselling and referral service for women and persons who identify as female. The service provides advice about safety, AVOs and child protection 24/7. This service is run by Family & Community Services.

**1800 656 463**

[www.facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/helpline](http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/helpline)

# 7. Communicating with Corrective Services NSW

Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has extensive information available on its website for the benefit of family and friends of inmates: [www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au). At the time of writing, most of that information is found under the heading 'Visiting or contacting an inmate' (found under 'Popular content').

If you cannot find the information you seek there or wish to provide feedback, you can contact CSNSW at prisons and community corrections offices. Additionally, you can contact head office through writing to the Commissioner using the general enquiries email, the complaints web form, or using the 'Your Feedback' facility available on CSNSW's internet site.

Like all government agencies, CSNSW has policies and procedures that staff and members of the community are required to follow. It also has standards of service that it expects staff to provide.

## How to raise an issue

Raising an issue can involve making a request or enquiry, providing feedback or making a complaint.

Here are some tips for effective communication with staff at a prison:

- > contact the prison and find out

who you should approach. Don't waste time and energy talking to people who have no power to do anything about your situation. Often the Governor will be the best person to talk to if you haven't been able to sort out an issue with a staff member directly;

- > rehearse how you're going to express your concern or request. Show your letter or discussion points to a neutral person who can give you feedback;
- > wait until you're calm and not upset or angry. It's no use trying to communicate when you're stressed, tired or upset.

Be assertive, not aggressive. Stick to the facts and avoid abusive language, finger pointing, sarcasm, swearing or threats. It's more likely that you'll get a sympathetic hearing if you're polite.

- > Don't make demands. State your request and the reasons why it's justified.
- > Keep a record of the people you've spoken to and the actions you've taken.

- > Don't expect an immediate response.
- > If your request is turned down or your concern is dismissed, accept that you can't always be told why if this information will breach privacy laws or compromise security or good order in the prison. For example, don't get angry that your partner has been transferred to another prison, your partner may not have told you that they were involved in a disciplinary breach and that's why they were transferred. Prison staff won't be able to tell you the reason for the move if they won't have the inmate's consent.
- > Listen to the response. Don't react before you've had time to consider what the person has said.
- > Be prepared to compromise.

If you have a problem with a staff member while visiting a prison, you can ask to speak with the most senior staff member on duty, and discuss your concerns with them. You can also call the centre's Governor on the next working day.

## Making a formal complaint

If you're not satisfied with the response from the prison, you may want to write to the Commissioner of CSNSW (see opposite for details).

If you feel that your problem has not been addressed, you may write a letter to or contact the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman receives complaints when people believe they've been treated unfairly by government organisations, including CSNSW. The Ombudsman has the power to investigate conduct that is:

- > illegal;
- > unreasonable;
- > unjust or oppressive;
- > discriminatory;
- > based on improper or irrelevant grounds;
- > based on a mistake of law or fact;
- > otherwise wrong.

If you're writing to the Ombudsman (see details opposite) include information about the steps you've already taken to resolve the situation. Make sure that you have detailed and accurate information about the situation that concerns you. It can be helpful to find out about prison policies and procedures that relate to your complaint.

## Options for inmates

As well as raising issues with prison staff, most inmates have the option of raising complaints with official visitors.

Official visitors are community members who regularly visit

prisons to check on inmates' circumstances. Aboriginal official visitors play a particular role in checking out the wellbeing of Aboriginal inmates.

Official visitors only speak to inmates and staff. They're not available to family members outside the prison. Inmates can also ask to see a solicitor from visiting legal services such as Legal Aid. They can ask their Wing Officer for an appointment the next time the legal services visit.

The Corrective Services Support Line (CSSL) is a free telephone service for inmates and is available in all prisons and transitional centres. The CSSL receives records and speedily resolves enquiries and complaints about the services and programs provided by CSNSW.

## Does it help to make a complaint on behalf of your family member?

Your family member may complain about unfair treatment over the phone, or when you visit. Be cautious about taking up their complaint unless you have concerns about their safety. Often things blow over, and a few days later your family member may no longer feel the same. If you intervene, especially without their permission, you may risk making the situation worse.

Some inmates become very

dependent on family, and expect them to take responsibility for situations that they could look after themselves; sometimes much more easily than a family member can from outside the prison.

Enquiries, feedback and complaints can be lodged on the CSNSW website:

[www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au)

**The Commissioner  
Corrective Services NSW  
GPO Box 31  
Sydney NSW 2001**

## Need help?

If you're not sure if you need to complain, talk to CRC on **9288 8700**.

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline, but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney.

Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

**NSW Ombudsman  
9286 1000  
1800 451 524  
[www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)**

# 8. Children with a parent in prison

## What to tell the children

People sometimes find it hard to tell children that their parent is in prison. Sometimes people pretend a parent has gone overseas, or that they've gone away for work.

It's understandable to want to protect children from being teased by others, or from feeling ashamed of a parent. However, not telling the truth can cause serious problems later.

If children don't know what's happened to their parent, they may feel worried and confused. They may pick up more than people realise, and be aware that something is wrong. Not being able to talk about how they feel, and about what's happening, can leave them isolated and ashamed.

If children find out the truth later on, they may lose trust in people who withheld information from them. This can be especially hard if children are told by someone outside the family, like someone at school, or from TV or newspaper reports. Children often have no idea about life in prison and may find it easier to adapt to the situation than the adults in their life. Every family's situation is different, and there may be circumstances in which it's better not to tell children about their parent's imprisonment.

If you're unsure about whether

or how to talk to your children, it may be helpful to talk to staff from SHINE for Kids on **(02) 9714 3000** or to another family service with workers who understand children's needs.

There is no 'right time' to talk to your child. Usually the sooner you talk to them, the better. Putting it off may just make it harder to tell the truth in the end. Children will want to know where their parent is and why. They need to be reassured that their parent is safe and that they'll be able to see them or talk to them. Children have vivid imaginations, and what they imagine can be far more frightening than reality. Seeing their parent on a visit can help dispel fears, and help them have a realistic picture of what's happening to their parent.

You can help children by talking about their feelings. They may feel anger towards their parent for going away, or towards police or other authority figures for taking their parent from them. They may feel grief and sadness, guilt and shame or be frightened and scared. If they can talk about these feelings, they're less likely to feel overwhelmed by their emotions. Children often blame themselves for their parent being sent to prison, and need to hear that this is not their fault.

Young children need simple



explanations of why their parent is in prison, such as 'Dad hurt someone' or 'Mum stole something'.

Most children can accept the idea that people are punished for bad behaviour. They need to understand that their parent did the wrong thing but it's still all right for them to love their parent and see them positively. Older children will probably have more questions and need more detail. The questions that children ask often tell you how much they want to know.

Children will usually want to know when their parent is coming home. It may be tempting to comfort children by telling them that their parent will come home 'very soon'.

However, if this is not the case, children can become extremely worried when their parent doesn't come home. They might also feel betrayed when they discover they were lied to. Be honest with children. If their mum will be in prison for four years, tell them that their mum will not be able to come



home for a very long time (or in four birthdays/ four summer holidays).

It's best not to tell children to keep their parent's imprisonment a secret. Secrecy can increase children's feelings of shame and guilt. It also prevents the child from receiving support from friends. Children can feel very lonely if they can't share important parts of their life with anyone. On the other hand, some young children may not be able to anticipate the possible consequences of telling other people that they have a parent in

prison. In this case, you may like to encourage your child to tell just specific people who you think they can trust.

## Talking to children about feelings: bad, sad, mad or glad

A good way to talk about emotions with children is in terms of four basic emotions: bad, sad, mad and glad.

In explaining these feelings, it can be helpful to let children know that all of these emotions are okay. Everybody has these feelings and it's okay to talk about them.

**Bad:** includes feeling frightened, anxious, uncomfortable, guilty, ashamed.

**Sad:** includes feeling unhappy, depressed, miserable, gloomy, low.

**Mad:** includes feeling angry, irritable, furious, enraged, spiteful.

**Glad:** includes feeling happy, relieved, cheerful, excited, content.

You can explain that it's possible to experience a mixture of these feelings at the same time. For example, when seeing their mum or dad in prison, the child might feel sad to see them there, but happy (glad) to be with them. Or a child might feel angry (mad) with their parent for having gone to prison, and at the same time guilty (bad) for having this feeling.

This basic four-word emotional vocabulary and the message

that all feelings, including mixed feelings, are okay can be very helpful for children.

## Bringing children to a prison for visits

Families and carers may be unsure about taking children to visit their parent in prison. Visiting can be hard for children. They may have to travel long distances and cope with queues and rigid security procedures. Often they'll be expected to sit in one place and keep quiet. Where there isn't play equipment, they won't be able to run around or make a noise. Some people think children should not visit because 'it's no place for a child' or 'they'll think prison is okay and won't be afraid to break the law'. Some people worry that seeing parents in prison is too upsetting and could be unsafe. Families and carers need to weigh up the negatives involved in visiting against the benefits for children. The focus should be on the best interest of the child.

Children's visits often help both parents and children to deal with the pain of separation. Visits allow children to replace their fears and fantasies with a more realistic understanding of their parent's circumstances. Seeing their parent reassures children that they're safe. Visits allow parents and children to maintain their relationship. Regular visits allow imprisoned parents to maintain a parenting

role and a sense of being needed and valued outside the prison. This can increase their motivation to get out and stay out of prison. Regular contact gives children some sense of routine in their communications. It builds a sense of security and predictability, both of which can reduce the negative effects of parental separation. Visiting a prison and seeing other families and children of inmates helps children know that they're not alone. Keeping in contact can make it easier for the family to get back together when the inmate is eventually released.

In a small number of situations, visiting will clearly not be in the child's best interests – for example, where the inmate has harmed the child previously. The type of offence committed by the inmate can also influence children's visits. Further information about these offences and restrictions can be found on the CSNSW internet site under Offender Management -Child Protection- Child Contact Assessment Policy or by phoning **8346 1008 or 8346 1009**.

## Helping the imprisoned parent get ready for visits

Carers can help parents get ready for visits by telling them about the child's current interests and activities, so they have something to discuss. Sometimes parents are used to being the focus of visits themselves, and may need some

encouragement to adapt to the focus being on the children.

Imprisoned parents can also help to prepare children for coming to the prison by writing them a letter explaining what the visit will be like and telling them that they're looking forward to seeing them. It may be helpful if the parent can send a letter immediately after the visit telling the child how much they enjoyed seeing them.

## Preparing children for visits

Children will cope better if they know what to expect during visits. It's a good idea for the caregiver or relative to visit the parent on their own first so they know what prison visits are like. Tell children about:

- > how long it takes to get to the prison;
- > what the officers will be wearing, what their parent will be wearing, and whether they'll look the same as they did the last time the child saw them;



- > security and search procedures;
- > what the visiting centre looks like;
- > how long the visit will last.

## Hints for positive visits for children

- > Give children something to eat and drink as close to the visit as possible. Vending machines may be out of order, and children can become distressed when hungry.
- > Take children to the toilet as close as possible to the visit. They will usually be able to access a toilet from the visiting centre, but using this can take up valuable time and may lead to the visit having to end early.
- > Cooperate with prison officers and procedures. Children will have a better experience if they feel safe.
- > Tell the child's parent about the child's interests and activities.
- > Plan ahead so you and the child's parent know what to do if the child needs direction or guidance during the visit e.g. if they're running around and need to sit quietly.
- > Try to think of creative ways to keep children engaged while waiting for a visit and while visiting e.g. telling stories or singing songs with younger children, playing 'I spy' or other games with older children. It can be helpful to bring

someone else along so that they can take the children outside if they become restless.

## Talking to children immediately after visits

Leaving their mother or father behind in prison can be very upsetting for children. It's important to reassure children about future contact with parents. Even if they have to wait before they see their parent again, they can write to them and may be able to expect a phone call. Ask children what they liked about the visit and also anything they didn't like. Reassure them that they can talk about their parent openly. Encourage them to ask questions, and be honest in your answers.

Children will cope with visits in different ways, and some children won't want to talk. Don't pressure them. They may talk to you when they feel ready, or they may prefer to talk with someone else.

## Communicating with their parent by phone or letter

### Telephone calls

Parents in prison will usually only be able to make short calls (e.g. six minutes), and the cost of calls and access to phones may prevent them phoning as often as they would like. However, regular short conversations may be more satisfying with young children than longer ones. Inmates may be

able to call children for a couple of minutes just to say hello, find out what the child did that day, or tell the child that they're thinking about them. If the conversation feels strained, you can suggest that the parent play games and tell jokes and riddles with children over the phone to make the conversation flow more naturally. Phone calls can be stressful. The parent often feels pressure to make the conversation enjoyable, but sometimes children might not say very much. The parent shouldn't feel rejected however, as this is normal for children, and doesn't mean that the phone call is a waste of time or meaningless. It's helpful for children to hear their parent's voice, even for a short time.

Teenage children may be unresponsive during a phone call, but don't assume this means that they don't want regular contact.

Children may feel guilty about telling their parent about the enjoyable things they did, because their parent could not participate. However, the more regular the telephone contact, the more both parent and child are likely to relax and connect with one another.

## Letters

Letters are a great way to maintain communication. Letters can be read many times, and give children the sense of ongoing contact with parents between visits and phone calls. It's often easier to express

certain feelings and thoughts in letters and drawings than it is on the phone or in person. Posting children's drawings, copies of school assignments, or photographs can help provide topics for conversation during visits, and can help parents and children to feel more connected.

Inmates may also find it easier to express their love for children in a letter than in a visiting centre where the presence of others may make them feel self-conscious.

## Tips for helping children write to their parent in prison

- > Keep some stamped envelopes addressed to the parent to make it easier to write and send a letter spontaneously.
- > Ask children what they wish they could tell their mum or dad. On the fridge, keep a running list of things to write, and then help the child write a letter.
- > For children who can't write, write down the child's exact words and then let them draw a picture.
- > Letters don't have to be long. It's often better to send regular short letters than occasional long letters.
- > Letters can be creative and fun.
- > For example, caregivers can help children start a picture or story and send it to their parent. The parent can then add to the story or picture and send it back, and this cycle can go on and on.

- > Children can play games with their parent or arrange to have footy tipping or other competitions through the mail.
- > Keep the parent informed about birthdays, school events and achievements and other events in the child's life. This can help them communicate in a way that's relevant and meaningful to the child.
- > Older children often appreciate letters from their parent that describe their thoughts, feelings and daily life in prison. These letters reassure children that they're in the parent's thoughts and that the parent is okay.

## Effects of parental separation and incarceration on children

The imprisonment of a parent can be a devastating experience for children. Every child is different, and it can be hard to know for sure what behaviour is due to the parent's incarceration and what may be due to other reasons such as developmental changes. Knowing some of the typical reactions of children in this situation may help you to understand and support your child better.

The following are some common feelings that children may experience following the imprisonment of their parent.

### Grief

Grief is a common reaction after a child's parent has been incarcerated. Children may be quiet and withdrawn and lose interest in their normal activities.

### Confusion/helplessness

Children may not understand what happened and may feel helpless to bring their parent back and make things better.

### Worry

Children who were present when their parent was arrested often feel worried about what's happening to their parent. This fear may extend to all strangers. Children may worry that their parent will never come home, and may fear that their remaining parent or caregiver will also be taken away. Most children worry about the health and safety of their imprisoned parent. Children may worry that their living and school arrangements will change and that they'll be taken away from what has come to be familiar. Older children may worry that they're a burden for their caregiver if their imprisoned parent was the primary caregiver.

### Anger

Children may experience a great deal of anger at their parent for abandoning them, at the police or court that locked their parent up, or at their remaining parent or carer. This anger can develop



into rebellion against all authority figures as children grow older.

### **Shame or embarrassment**

Children may feel ashamed of their parent and fearful that friends and neighbours will label them, pick on them or reject them because they're associated with an inmate. Children may feel very embarrassed if people at school tease them or otherwise speak badly of them.

### **Isolation and loneliness**

Children may withdraw from their peers because of the shame they feel about their parent. They may begin to feel different from peers and start to believe that no one really knows or understands them

and that they'll be rejected in other relationships.

### **Guilt**

Children feel guilt for different reasons. Young children may believe that they did something wrong that made their parent go away. Sometimes children feel guilty about having angry feelings towards their parent. Children may also feel guilty for having fun while their parent is in prison or for not wanting to visit.

### **Changes in behaviour**

Often children will express their reaction to a parent being imprisoned through changes in their behaviour. Some examples are:





- > withdrawal from friends and family;
- > sleeping problems or nightmares;
- > crying a lot, and being difficult to console;
- > school issues, including difficulty concentrating, lower marks, being disruptive in classes, getting into fights, or attendance issues;
- > developmental issues (e.g. delayed language development);
- > temper tantrums (although these are a normal part of young children's development);
- > bedwetting;
- > being clingy.

Older children may respond with acting-out behaviours such as antisocial behaviour or drug use.

If you find it hard to deal with children's reactions or if these behaviours persist, seek help from services such as those listed on **p.116-117**.

Workers at these services can help children talk about their feelings, and can help you find strategies for responding to challenging behaviours. Getting help early can make a big difference.

## School issues

Children of prisoners may experience a decline in school performance and a decreased motivation to achieve at school.

Children and adolescents can become disruptive in class or engage in attention-seeking behaviour because they're finding it hard to concentrate on schoolwork.

Some children may refuse to go to school. Sometimes other children may be picking on them, especially if their family member's court case attracted media attention. Try to find out what's going on at school, while remaining firm about the importance of school attendance. The longer children stay out of school the harder it is for them to go back.

Children generally do better if they attend schools that have attentive and caring teachers. If a child feels especially comfortable with a particular teacher, you may want to let the teacher know what the child is experiencing. This information can help the teacher understand changes in the child's attitude, and alert them to the child's need for attention. Don't assume that the school will pass on information about the child's parent in prison to all staff.

In high schools you may find you need to work through the year coordinator rather than accessing teachers directly. You may also find it helpful to talk to the school counsellor, or ask if the school counsellor can provide support to the child.

## Teenagers

During the teenage years, children are developing their own sense of identity (separate from their parents/caregivers) and becoming more independent. It's normal for teenagers to withdraw from their parents to some extent, but this can be especially hard for an imprisoned parent to understand. They may take the child's changed behaviour as a personal rejection, rather than seeing it as a predictable stage in their development.

Especially where contact is irregular, parents may have an outdated image of their child, and will find it hard to adjust their expectations.

This can exacerbate issues in the relationship, and may further discourage children from wanting to have contact. Caregivers may be able to help by gently reminding incarcerated parents that their child is growing up, and by keeping the inmate up to date with what their child is doing.

## What can you do to help?

Nothing can totally remove the distress that children feel when their parent goes to prison. However, the stress can be reduced if children have experiences of stability, care and open communication.

## Stability

Children need predictability and routine in their lives. Like anyone else, they like to know what to expect each day. Of course, the imprisonment of a parent may bring changes, such as a change of living arrangements. Try to keep routines stable, or create predictable routines such as bedtime, homework time and mealtime if children haven't had these before. Having clear 'house rules' is one positive strategy for encouraging stability even where children sometimes challenge these rules. It's also good for children to maintain their hobbies, sports and other activities, when possible.

## Care

Children need to feel loved, cared for and supported. Tell children regularly that they're loved and worthwhile, and reassure them that they're not to blame for their parent's imprisonment. Give children lots of positive feedback and encouragement. Extended family, friends and teachers can also provide emotional support.

Sometimes children may not feel that they can talk to their carer about what they're feeling. It can be helpful for children to know that there's someone else they can talk to, such as an auntie or teacher.

Difficult behaviour may be a sign of distress or need for attention. It's not always easy to respond with

understanding when children are being a ‘nuisance’ or ‘acting up’. However, getting angry can lead to a vicious circle which only ends up making the behaviours worse. Of course, it’s still appropriate and important to set boundaries on children and have reasonable consequences for unacceptable behaviour.

### **Open communication**

Talking openly and honestly to your children about their parent, and talking to them about how they’re feeling, helps children to cope better with the situation. Let children know that there’s nothing so bad that they can’t talk about it with someone. Allow time to ask questions, and answer them as honestly as you can, given their age and level of understanding. You don’t need to feel that you have to make everything better; listening is more important than giving advice.

Encourage children to feel they can talk, but remember that some children will talk more than others, and that as children adjust to having a parent in prison they’ll also want to talk about other things, like their friends and their

day’s activities. While children need to feel they can talk, they may not benefit from other adults’ free expression of feelings and opinions about their parent in prison. Their carers, or other relatives, may need to express their anger or frustration about their imprisoned family member, but they should avoid involving children, who may not have the maturity to cope with the feelings of others.

### **Parents’ involvement in discipline**

Although incarcerated parents can participate in the disciplining of their children, it’s important that this doesn’t dominate their contact with children. Children may lose interest in talking to their parent in prison if they just expect to be told off for something.

If discipline is a concern, contact SHINE for Kids, or one of the family services listed below, and discuss your concerns with them. If you’re concerned about how the child’s parent is coping, it may be helpful to talk to the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer at the prison.

## Need help?

### Community Health Centres

Community Health Centres provide a range of services, including child and family counselling. To find your nearest centre, phone NSW Health.

**9391 9000**

### Child Protection Helpline

For reporting suspected child abuse or neglect.

**132 111**

### Kids Help Line

Kids Help Line is a free and confidential telephone counselling service for 5 to 25 year olds in Australia.

**1800 55 1800**



### SHINE for Kids

SHINE for Kids is a non-government organisation that supports children with a parent in prison. SHINE for Kids services include:

- > Individual children & family support
- > Activity and drop-in centres for children and young people
- > Groups for children and young people
- > Preparation for visiting a prison
- > Mentoring
- > Day trips
- > Pre-release preparation and post-release support



- > Child and parent activity days within prisons
- > Community education and advocacy
- > Volunteers program

SHINE for Kids have locations at:

Silverwater.....	<b>9714 3000</b>
Parklea.....	<b>9933 7900</b>
Windsor.....	<b>4573 3900</b>
Kariong.....	<b>4340 3836</b>
Bathurst.....	<b>6328 9900</b>
Cessnock.....	<b>4993 6800</b>
Wellington.....	<b>6845 5000</b>
Junee.....	<b>6934 6000</b>
Kempsey.....	<b>6561 3800</b>

Call **9714 3000** for details about Nowra and Goulburn services.

[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)

### Parentline



Advice, counselling and referrals for parents and carers of children under 18 years. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm Saturday-Sunday 4.00pm.-9pm

**1300 1300 52**

### Fams



Fams is a peak body whose aim is to support the delivery of quality services by non-government, not-for-profit organisations working with vulnerable children, young people, families and communities. For assistance call:

**8354 3799**

[www.fams.asn.au](http://www.fams.asn.au)

# 9. Caring for children

## Caring for children with a parent in prison

When a child's mother or father is in prison, relatives often become the primary carer. This is a big responsibility. In the early days of becoming a carer, you may experience a range of emotional, physical and financial difficulties. These can include:

- > having to cope with children's distress and confusion;
- > struggling to answer children's questions;
- > feeling tired by the demands of parenting;
- > financial pressure;
- > uncertainty about your role and legal position;
- > difficulties getting a break;
- > feeling frustrated and angry because you haven't had a choice about being a carer;
- > resentment from other family, especially if you're no longer so available to them or to their children;
- > isolation from friends who may not understand why you've taken on parenting responsibilities.

If, as often happens, you're the child's grandparent, you may experience loss of freedom and financial security, inability to follow

through on retirement plans, and difficulty keeping in touch with your adult friends, who may have little understanding of the pressure you face.

## Support for carers

If you haven't recently been caring for children, you may feel overwhelmed by the demands of parenting. You may feel out of touch about parenting practices and expectations of schools and others. If the children in your care have experienced disruption, abuse or neglect, they may have additional needs, and you may feel unprepared for these. If you're a grandparent, you may also feel your confidence in parenting has been harmed by having a child in prison.

Family services often have experience supporting kinship carers, and may also run parenting courses especially for grandparents. Family workers can also help families with practical issues such as finding childcare and budgeting.

You can find your nearest family service by contacting Fams on **8354 3799**.

SHINE for Kids provides a range of services for children with parents in prison and their parents or carers or CRC can provide casework and



support services for those who have a family member incarcerated. For contact details **see p.116-117**. Grandparent carers may find it helpful to make contact with other grandparents who are also caring for grandchildren. Most often grandparent carers are involved because of their child's drug use or mental illness.

While not all grandparent carers will have children in prison, generally they'll understand the challenges you're facing.

To find a grandparent support group check [www.cotansw.com.au](http://www.cotansw.com.au) for a grandparent support group near you. There's also information on their website:

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

The Mirabel Foundation has published a helpful book called

*When the Children Arrive...* for carers of children whose parents are affected by drug and alcohol use. [www.mirabelfoundation.org.au](http://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au)

### Self-care tips for carers

- > Routines can help children settle, although you may need to keep some flexibility to deal with unplanned changes e.g. to visiting arrangements.
- > Keep contact with friends, even if they don't really understand what it's like.
- > Try to get some time for yourself regularly.
- > Don't try to do too much at once.
- > Plan outings or treats where you can all have some fun.

Tell people what you need if they offer to help. In the beginning the

best help may be practical (e.g. ironing, cooking, shopping) so you can spend time with the children or get some rest. **See p.83** for services who may be able to help.

## Managing visits

Sometimes there will be tension between children's carers and their parent in prison. This can make shared decision-making about children difficult and visits very uncomfortable. You may feel that you don't want to take children to see their parent because of this. This can end up having negative effects for children and parents, and may backfire on carers. When it's safe, it's important to make arrangements for children to see parents in prison.

If you aren't getting along with the parent, you may be able to ask another family member or trusted family friend who knows the children well to take them to visit their parent. SHINE for Kids may be able to arrange visits for children if no one else can take them. Video visits can also be an option where distance or other issues make face-to-face visiting difficult. **See p.50** for more information. CRC provides support for families including some travel and accommodation assistance, family casework and telephone information and referral. Call CRC on **9288 8700** between 9am and 5pm Monday - Friday.

## Travel and Accommodation Assistance

Travel and Accommodation Assistance is available to help people with:

- > reimbursement of travel costs within NSW;
- > accommodation (when visiting at a long distance).

You need to pay the fares, accommodation or petrol costs, so keep the receipts and apply for reimbursement. Check with CRC first to make sure you're eligible.

Generally, you can apply if:

- > you are a member of the inmate's immediate family, support network, a friend or have a kinship relationship;
- > you are in receipt of a Centrelink benefit or in similar financial hardship;
- > you live more than 100km from the prison you are to visit (except in exceptional circumstances);
- > you have not received travel/accommodation assistance in the last 12 weeks.

Reimbursement of costs is as follows:

- > train/bus tickets at economy/concession rate;
- > accommodation - maximum \$110/night;
- > fuel costs based on \$10 per



100km of direct travel between home address (on application form) and prison;

- > taxi fares directly to and from train/bus station closest to prison you are visiting where public transport isn't available and there is no suitable alternative;
- > one night's accommodation (up to a cap of \$110) where the trip cannot reasonably be made in one day.

Food and beverage expenses are not reimbursed.

## Video visits

See **p.50** for information about **Family Video Contacts**.

## Legal issues when caring for a child with a parent in prison

### Kinship care

In NSW a parent can arrange for immediate family to care for their child without having to involve FACS or a court order. If there's no court order, the parent keeps their legal rights and can take back the child's care as soon as they're released. It's a good idea to get the parent to sign a statement saying they've placed the child in the family's care, and to get the child's Medicare number. This will help when dealing with schools and doctors. If a child needs surgery or applies for a passport, you'll usually still need the parent's consent.

### Caring for an unrelated child

If you provide care for a child who isn't related to you, you may not have any legal authority to arrange medical care or decide whether it's best for the child to go back to their parents after a lengthy separation. You can't assume you'll get any fostering payments for the child. Be especially cautious if you're asked to care for a child when you don't know and trust the child's parent. Check with a Community Legal Centre NSW on **9212 7333** or the FACS Helpline on **132 111** for advice.

### Children's Court

FACS may get involved if concerns are raised about possible harm to a child. This can include concerns about children being moved around a lot or not having a stable parent figure, especially when they're very young. FACS is also called when police arrest a parent and there's no one to look after the children. Most of the time FACS staff prefer children to remain with immediate family. Sometimes this can be arranged informally, without needing to go to court. But if there are big concerns about the children, or issues about the children going back home after the parent is released, the matter may go before the Children's Court. Sometimes children will be placed in the care of family, but the Court may allocate parental (i.e. legal) responsibility to the Minister for Community Services,

or may order that this be shared between FACS and a relative. This means FACS may be involved in decisions like where the child lives, visiting arrangements to see parents, and decisions about their education or medical care. If the Court is involved and you want to be considered as a carer for the children, contact FACS as soon as possible. If you are considered, FACS will need to visit your home and prepare a report. You may also be able to be a party to the court case. If you want to do this, you'll need a solicitor.

Depending on your income, you may be able to get Legal Aid for this. Check with Legal Aid on **9219 5000**. If you're concerned that children will be at risk of harm if they return to a parent on their release from prison, phone FACS helpline on **132 111**.

### Family Court

If you're caring for your grandchildren and you believe that it's in their best interests for them to have legal security in your care, you may be able to get a residence order from the Family Court. This can be an option where FACS isn't involved. Family Court action can be quite expensive, as you may not be able to get Legal Aid. Check with Legal Aid on **9219 5000**.



### Care of Aboriginal children

The law says that if an Aboriginal

child can't live with parents, steps should be taken to keep them with extended family or within the Aboriginal community, as long as they'll be safe. Placement with an unrelated non-Aboriginal foster family should be a last resort. This is called the Aboriginal Placement Principle.

Link-Up NSW 'Family-Link' program may be able to help families to get care of the children while a parent is in prison. The Family-Link service aims at finding possible kinship (relative) carers for Aboriginal children and young person's entering or within the Out of Home Care system. This service is provided to children and young persons of Aboriginal descent aged 17 years or under. Priority is given to children and young persons at risk of self-harming, depression, placement or family breakdown and those who are in non-Aboriginal placements. See the contact number below.

### Financial support caring for a child with a parent in prison

Getting financial support will depend on your circumstances and the child's situation. Caring for a child can place financial pressure on extended family, especially where grandparents or other carers are themselves relying on pension payments or retirement income. Some kinship carers feel



uncomfortable about claiming benefits to care for grandchildren or other related children, but these payments are the community's recognition that you're doing an important job.

Sometimes before a parent goes into prison, grandparents or other family may have already been providing most of a child's care, especially where parents have drug or alcohol issues. They may not previously have claimed benefits because that would put pressure on their relationship with the child's parents and might unsettle care arrangements for the children. If a parent is sentenced to prison, it's an opportunity for carers to review this.

## Centrelink

Depending on your income, you may be able to get a Parenting Payment and Family Tax Benefit from Centrelink. Check with the Centrelink Families and Parents Line on **13 61 50** or the Grandparent Advisor Line on Freecall™ **1800 245 965**. Depending on your age, and the children's age, you may be expected to look for work or do training for work once the youngest child is at school. If you're concerned about your ability to care for the child and meet work or training requirements, make sure Centrelink is aware of your circumstances as a carer. If the child in your care has one parent in

prison with a sentence of ten years or more, and the other parent is dead or you don't know where they are, you may also be able to claim a Double Orphan Pension.

If you're caring for a child with significant health or special needs, you may be able to get a Carer Allowance or a Health Care Card from Centrelink. (There's no means test for a Carer Allowance).

## Child Care Benefit

Grandparent carers with full-time responsibility for grandchildren may be eligible for Grandparent Child Care Benefit giving up to 50 hours of child care in a registered child care service per week without having to meet work or study requirements.

If grandparent carers receive Centrelink payments (e.g. an age pension) they may be covered for the full cost of childcare. Other carers may be eligible for short term assistance with childcare fees if they're experiencing short-term financial hardship. Contact the Centrelink Families and Parents Line on **13 61 50**, or the Grandparent Advisor Line on Freecall™ **1800 245 965** for information about Child Care Benefit.

## Allowances

If FACS asks you to look after your grandchildren, you may receive a Carer Allowance. This is a fortnightly payment for the care of the children and is tax free. FACS may also pay for some other expenses, such as travel to see parents, if they're written into the child's plan. FACS may pay a Statutory Care Allowance where the court has granted parental responsibility for the child to the Minister, the Secretary or a non-relative. A Supported Care Allowance may be paid where a relative has parental responsibility, either through a court order or where there's no court order. Both kinds of allowances provide the same level of financial support.

When approached by FACS to consider caring for children, many relatives are so anxious to ensure the child stays with the family that they don't feel comfortable talking about money. Allowances are not paid automatically, even where there's a court order. FACS would prefer children to stay with family if possible. If you're concerned about your financial capacity to meet the needs of children FACS wants to place with you, start asking about possible financial support sooner rather than later. Once the placement is established it can be much more difficult to access an allowance.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

### Centrelink

To apply for a payment..... **132 717**  
Employment Services..... **132 850**  
Disability, Sickness & Carers **132 717**  
Families and Parents ..... **136 150**  
Youth & Student Services. **132 490**  
Multilingual Call ..... **131 202**  
TTY: **1800 810 586**

Grandparent Advisor **1800 245 965**  
[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

### Centrelink Grandparent Advisors

Information about payments and services available to grandparents and non-parent carers of children.

**Freecall™ 1800 245 965**

### Child Protection (FACS) Helpline

Contact FACS if you're concerned a child is at risk of harm or to request assistance.

**132 111**

**TTY: 1800 212 936**

[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)

### Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres offer free legal advice. To find a centre near you:

**9212 7333**

[www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

CRC provides Contact Coordination & Support Service (CC&SS) providing support for visits, family case work and a telephone information and referral service. They also provide Travel and Accommodation Assistance.

**9288 8700**

### COTA NSW (Council on the Aging NSW)



COTA NSW is the peak organisation for people over 50 in NSW. They work to advance the rights interests and futures of Australians as they age.

**9286 3860** (Sydney metro)

**1800 449 102** (regional NSW)

### Family Court of Australia

The Family Court can make legal orders about children where there are no child protection concerns.

**1300 352 000**

[www.familycourt.gov.au](http://www.familycourt.gov.au)

### Fams



Fams is a peak body whose aim is to support the delivery of quality services by non-government, not-for-profit organisations working with vulnerable children, young people, families and communities. For assistance call:

**8354 3799**

[www.fams.asn.au](http://www.fams.asn.au)

## Legal Aid Commission of NSW



Legal Aid provides free legal representation to disadvantaged people. See them when they visit your prison or call the NSW LawAccess line:

**1300 888 529**

**9219 5000**

[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

## Link-Up NSW

The Family-Link Worker provides support for parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

**9421 4700**

**1800 624 332**

[linkup@nsw.link-up.org.au](mailto:linkup@nsw.link-up.org.au)

[www.linkupnsw.org.au](http://www.linkupnsw.org.au)

## Mirabel Foundation



Addresses the needs of children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental drug use, supporting them with programs and assistance.

**03 9527 9422**

[www.mirabelfoundation.org.au](http://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au)

## Parentline NSW



Advice, counselling and referrals for parents and carers of children under 18 years. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm Saturday- Sunday 4.00pm-9pm.

**1300 1300 52**

## Raising Children Network



The Raising Children Network website provides up-to-date information about raising children and caring for yourself as a parent or carer.

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

## Raising Grandchildren NSW (Council on the Ageing NSW)

Information for grandparents and other kinship carers.

**9286 3860**

**1800 449 102**

## SHINE for Kids



Services include support, advocacy and referral for children of inmates, inmates and carers. See p.75 for more details.

Silverwater..... **9714 3000**

Parklea..... **9933 7900**

Windsor ..... **4573 3900**

Kariong ..... **4340 3836**

Bathurst..... **6328 9900**

Cessnock..... **4993 6800**

Wellington..... **6845 5000**

Junee..... **6934 6000**

Kempsey ..... **6561 3800**

Call **9714 3000** for details about Nowra and Goulburn services.

[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)

## Welfare Rights Centre

If you have problems dealing with Centrelink, they can help you.

**9211 5300, 1800 226 028**

[www.welfarerights.org.au](http://www.welfarerights.org.au)



# 10. Housing issues for families of inmates

If your housing situation has changed because your family member has gone into prison and you need help with accommodation you can apply for social housing (public housing and community housing) or housing support.

FACS Housing NSW and community housing provide social housing for people who have low incomes and additional needs, such as health issues or disability, which make it hard to get private rentals. You can apply for social housing on one application form. You can also use this form to apply for a transfer if you are already a tenant in social housing.

Putting in your application for housing as soon as possible is helpful as you may have a long wait. Some community housing providers have transitional housing and partnerships with support organisations. Contact FACS Housing NSW on **1300 468 746**. Applications for After Hours Temporary Accommodation and Rentstart can be lodged in person or by mail or over the phone.

Link2home provides information, conducts assessments and makes referrals to homelessness services across NSW. It brings together several homelessness telephone services including Homeless Persons Information Centre, Y Connect and the After



Hours Temporary Accommodation line and is being delivered by the Housing Contact Centre. The service is for people who are homeless or who are worried they will become homeless, as well as for advocates acting on a person's behalf.

Link2home is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year on **1800 152 152**.

## What if the lease is in the name of my family member in prison?

If a lease is in the name of your family member now in prison, contact FACS Housing NSW or the relevant community housing provider to explain that the tenant is in prison. FACS Housing NSW may let people keep their tenancy



for up to six months if they stay in prison for a short time, and pay a nominal rent, usually \$5 per week. Community housing may also be flexible. FACS may allow friends or family of the inmate to stay in the property to safeguard the inmate's belongings and to maintain the property. They'll need to pay rent as if they were a FACS Housing NSW tenant during that time. If the tenant is incarcerated for a longer period, they'll need to give up their tenancy and reapply for FACS Housing NSW accommodation before they're released.

Being rehoused depends on availability of a suitable property. Major rental arrears or histories of tenancy issues such as damaging property can make it difficult to get rehoused. This means it's important to tell FACS Housing NSW or the relevant community housing provider what's happening when someone is incarcerated so they don't get into debt. Past tenants who give up their properties do not automatically get rehoused post release. Family members can often negotiate with a housing provider to clean out and store the inmate's belongings and return keys. However, there are time limits on how long these belongings can be stored.

If the tenant's partner and/or children remain in the house after the tenant has gone into prison contact FACS Housing NSW for a review of the situation. In some

cases it may be possible for the tenancy to be transferred. You will need to fill in the *Application for Housing Assistance and Recognition as a Tenant Supplement* form and send or take it to a local housing office with the required supporting documents. See [www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au) for fact sheets and forms.

If you are already a tenant and need help with tenancy issues contact Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service NSW. See [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au) to find a local service near you.

## Private rental

If you need to move into private rental accommodation, you may be eligible for help through FACS Housing NSW Private Rental Assistance scheme. This provides a range of financial assistance for eligible clients to help them set up or maintain a tenancy in the private rental market. The types and level of assistance provided are based on individual circumstances and needs, and are intended to:

- > assist clients to establish or keep a sustainable tenancy in the private sector;
- > provide quick financial help with housing-related costs to clients in need, particularly those facing homelessness;
- > assist tenants whom Housing NSW has assessed as ineligible for a public housing lease

extension due to their income and assets, to make the move to private rental accommodation.

There are five types of Private Rental Assistance or Rentstart assistance:

- > Rentstart Bond Loan;
- > Advance Rent;
- > Rentstart Move;
- > Tenancy Assistance;
- > Temporary Accommodation.

Rentstart is available over the phone from FACS Housing NSW Contact Centre (**1300 HOUSING**) and in some FACS Housing NSW offices during normal office hours. Under Housing Pathways, community housing providers can give access to Rentstart help too.

FACS Housing NSW will assess applications for Rentstart Bond Loan, Advance Rent, Tenancy Assistance and Temporary Accommodation within one working day of receiving the application and all necessary supporting information from the client.

The following clients may also apply for Rentstart:

- > clients currently receiving a Private Rental Subsidy;
- > former unsatisfactory social housing tenants who owe money to the social housing provider or who have been evicted;
- > clients exiting social housing at the end of a fixed-term

provisional lease (3 or 6 months) who are not eligible for Recognition as a Tenant (RaaT).

## Difficulties meeting mortgage payments

If you have a mortgage and your partner is imprisoned, you may have a reduced income, and difficulty meeting mortgage payments. Talk to your mortgage provider about your circumstances to see if you can negotiate your payment arrangements. Do this as soon as you have difficulty meeting payments – it will be harder to do once you have significant arrears.

## Housing options for Aboriginal people

If you are Aboriginal you can apply for Aboriginal housing as well as applying for social housing through FACS Housing NSW.



## Moving to be close to your family member's prison

Some families move closer to a prison so they can visit their family member more often. Bear in mind that if your family member has a lengthy sentence they can expect to be transferred to various prisons. It can be expensive to try to follow

them around to different prisons across the state. It can also be very disruptive, especially for children. Also think about what it will mean to leave your support networks behind, and where you will want to live once your family member leaves the prison. Where possible, CSNSW will try to locate inmates

as close to family as possible. Classifications accommodated in centres and availability of beds are two of the factors that have to be considered. You can ask for your family member to be located close to you by writing to the CSNSW.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

## Housing

### **FACS Housing NSW (Department of Family & Community Services)**

Contact for information about social housing, Rentstart Bond Loans and other help.

**1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)**

(8.30am–4.30pm weekdays)

[www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)

### **Rentstart and other financial assistance**

For details of types of support and eligibility see the website or call:

**1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)**

[www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au)

### **Women's Information and Referral Service (WIRS)**

Information about organisations and services for women in NSW, including housing and other support services.

**1800 817 227**

## Crisis accommodation

### **Link2Home Homelessness Line**

Link2Home provides 24/7 information for people who are homeless

or at risk of homelessness about local services, assess what kind of help people need, and refer people to appropriate specialist homelessness services, support services, temporary accommodation and other services.

**1800 152 152**



## Tenancy advice

### Tenants NSW

Find your local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service by using the website. Type in your postcode to find services near you that give advice and information about renting, tenants' rights, etc.

[www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au)

See also:

[www.tenanthelp.com.au/nsw](http://www.tenanthelp.com.au/nsw)

### Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services

[www.nswats.com.au](http://www.nswats.com.au)



Assists with public and private tenancies, including bond, temporary accommodation and tenants' rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Greater Sydney..... **9698 0873**

Northern NSW ..... **1800 248 913**  
or **6643 4426**

Western NSW ..... **6884 0969**

Southern NSW..... **1800 672 185**  
or **4472 9363**



# 11. Money issues

## Centrelink

Even if your family member was receiving Centrelink payments (e.g. Newstart or Disability Support Pension), prior to prison, they won't be eligible for payments while they're in the prison.

If your partner has been incarcerated and you were both getting Centrelink payments, you need to advise Centrelink so your payments can be adjusted. You may be eligible for a higher payment. Centrelink obtains the dates people enter prison directly from Corrective Services NSW, so payments cease when your family member goes into prison.

If your partner supported you financially, you may need to apply for Centrelink payments for the first time, or you may need to ask Centrelink to reassess your eligibility for payments. Centrelink has a special rate of parenting payment where couples are unable to live together. If you advise Centrelink that your partner has entered prison but you're still a couple, you'll be paid at this special partnered rate.

If you've decided to separate from your partner, your separation would need to be verified before the Parenting Payment is paid at the single rate. Your ex-partner may then have obligations for child support that may continue at a minimal rate while they're in prison.

You may be asked to attend a Job Capacity assessment that will help identify your skills and support needs to help you get a job. If you have dependent children you may be required to work part time.

You may feel uncomfortable if you have to tell Centrelink that a close family member is in prison. It may help to remember that Centrelink and Job Search staff hear many different people's stories, and they're expected to treat all customers in a respectful way.

Generally, staff in these agencies will be better able to assist you if they know about the pressures you may be under because your family member has been incarcerated.

Centrelink employs social workers who can provide counselling and referral for families under pressure. If you're finding it difficult to deal with Centrelink issues, the social worker can be a good person to talk to. If you have problems dealing with Centrelink, the Welfare Rights Centre may be able to help you with appeals or checking your eligibility.

**Welfare Rights Centre 9211 5300**

## Child Support

If you're no longer in a relationship with your imprisoned ex-partner but you have children together, you may be eligible to receive payments through the Child Support Scheme. The rate of payment expected of prisoners is low, reflecting their limited earning ability.

If a prisoner has outstanding debts to the Child Support Agency before they went into prison, it's important to advise the Agency about their imprisonment. The Child Support Agency will take the prisoner's reduced earning capacity into account, and will waive penalty payments on outstanding debts if the agency has been advised that the parent has been imprisoned.



**NATIONAL  
DEBT  
HELPLINE**  
**ndh.org.au**  
**1800 007 007**

## Debts

Many prisoners have debts when they go into prison. These may include unpaid fines, bills for electricity or phone services, child support payments, credit cards or loans. If your partner has been imprisoned, you may have difficulty meeting payments for joint debts as well. Money worries can really add to the stress you're experiencing. This can be even worse if you have pressure from debt collectors or court notices. You may also have to cope with repossession of the family car or household appliances if repayments fall behind.

If you're concerned about outstanding debts once your family member is in prison, there are some things you can do.

> You may want to check out if

you're personally responsible for a debt. Sometimes people feel pressure, or may even be hassled by debt collectors, over debts that don't belong to them. Check with the **National Debt Helpline 1800 007 007** if you're not sure if a debt is your responsibility.

- > You can also check your credit file with Equifax (formerly Veda). You need to enquire and register online at [equifax.com.au](http://equifax.com.au). Local libraries have free internet access.
- > If you want to assist a family member to sort out their debts, you'll usually need their written authority to negotiate with organisations like electricity or phone companies. They may need to post this authority to you, see the SAPO or Welfare Officer, who may be able to assist them to get the authority to you or to the relevant organisation.
- > Many organisations will negotiate about repayment of debts. They may feel they'll be better off to allow you to make smaller repayments so they'll still get their money back eventually. Check with the **National Debt Helpline 1800 007 007** for advice about how to approach this.
- > You may be able to apply for a hardship variation from the Consumer, Trader & Tenancy



Tribunal. Contact your local Community Legal Centre for advice.

- > If your financial situation is complicated, talk to a financial counsellor. To locate a financial counsellor phone **1800 808 488**.
- > You may be able to consolidate your debts into one combined debt, with one repayment. Beware of private debt consolidation schemes which may charge you high fees for something that you could do through a financial counsellor or bank without additional charges.
- > If you have children and are struggling with financial issues, you may be able to get help with budgeting from a Family Support Service. Contact Fams on **8354 3799** to find out where your nearest Family Support Service is located.
- > Sometimes family members in prisons will owe money to drug suppliers, or for other illegal reasons. Often families will feel pressure to repay these debts because of concerns about retaliation if the debts aren't paid. If you need to talk to someone about a situation like this, contact CRC on **9288 8700** for confidential support.

## Paying bills

If you're having trouble managing financially, you may be able to get help with food vouchers or

power bills from non-government agencies. Some of the large ones are listed below. Centrelink, local community centres or family agencies can usually refer you to local services.

## Travel assistance for visiting the prison

If the cost of visiting your family member in prison is taking a financial toll, you might be eligible for some reimbursement of the cost of fuel, fares and/ or accommodation. Contact the Community Restorative Centre (CRC) on **9288 8700**.

You can apply for reimbursement of visiting expenses once every 12 weeks. To apply for this assistance, the recipients must be:

- > a member of the inmate's immediate family, support network, a friend or have a kinship relationship;
- > in receipt of a Centrelink benefit or in similar financial hardship;
- > living more than 100km from the prison;
- > at least 18 years of age.

## Work and Development Orders (WDOs)

Inmates as well as people in the community who have a mental illness, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment, are homeless, have a serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile



substances and are experiencing financial hardship can reduce their fines through unpaid work with an approved organisation or through

certain courses or treatment. Call the Work and Development Order Hotline **1300 478 879**.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

### Anglicare



Check if they have a service near you.

**1300 111 278**

[www.anglicare.org.au](http://www.anglicare.org.au)

### Centrelink

To apply for a payment:

Parenting Payment ..... **136 150**

Age and Wife Pension ..... **132 300**

Newstart Allowance..... **132 850**

Disability & Sickness ..... **13 2717**

Family Assistance Office .. **136 150**

Indigenous Call Centre **1800 057 111**

Youth & Student Services. **132 490**

Multilingual Call ..... **131 202**

TTY ..... **1300 555 727**

[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

### Child Support Enquiry Line

Information about payments and services.

**131 272**

[www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au)

### Community Legal Centres

For free legal advice.

**9212 7333**

[www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)

### National Debt Helpline



(formerly Credit and Debt Hotline)

When you're in financial trouble, call for **free** advice and assessment of your situation. They can refer you to financial counselling, legal advice, crisis food, accommodation and health services.

**1800 007 007**

[www.ndh.org.au](http://www.ndh.org.au)

### Energy and Water Ombudsman (EWON)



Assistance with problems with gas, electricity and water providers including billing.

**1800 246 545**

[www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au)

**Equifax  
(formerly Veda)**

Get a copy of your credit file and check any outstanding debts.

[www.equifax.com.au](http://www.equifax.com.au)



**Salvation Army**

Check if they have a service near you.

**13 72 58**

[www.salvos.org.au](http://www.salvos.org.au)



**St Vincent de Paul  
(Vinnies)**

Check if they have a service near you.

**9560 8666**

[www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au)



**Revenue NSW  
(State Debt Recovery)**

Information about parking fines, etc. Will renegotiate debts where people are in prison.

**1300 138 118**

[www.revenue.nsw.gov.au/fines](http://www.revenue.nsw.gov.au/fines)

**Telecommunications  
Industry Ombudsman**

Assistance with problems with telephone services.

**1800 062 058**

[www.tio.com.au](http://www.tio.com.au)



**Welfare Rights Centre**

Can help with information about entitlements and appeals.

**9211 5300**

Advice times Monday, Thursday and Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm; Thursday 1.00pm to 4.30pm

[www.welfarerights.org.au](http://www.welfarerights.org.au)



**Work and Development Orders  
Hotline**

**1300 478 879**

## 12. Aboriginal Families



Aboriginal people continue to be in prison at a higher rate than non-Aboriginal people. It is important to keep in touch with your family member when they go into prison so that when they are released, coming home to their family and community will be easier.

### Identifying as Aboriginal

When your family member arrives at the prison they need to tell the person who will interview them that they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This will help them to access to services that are aimed at Aboriginal inmates.

When your family member is interviewed at the prison, they can tell the interviewer where their mob is from so, if possible, they can be moved to a prison close to their home and family.

### Programs for Aboriginal people in prison

There are many programs on offer to Aboriginal inmates to help them. The programs are about offending behaviour, connection to community and culture, skills and education for employment. Following is a list of programs targeted at Aboriginal inmates.

#### Balund-a Program

**Tabulam** *Bundjalung country*

This is a 'second chance' residential diversionary program for male offenders between 18-

40 years of age on a section 11 bond. The program aims to address drug and alcohol issues, anger management, education and employment, domestic violence, parenting skills and living skills. Cultural activities include excursions to sacred sites, music, dance and art. Elders employed by the program provide support and assist residents to recognise, restore and value cultural links with their land and history.

#### Yetta Dhinnakkal

**Brewarrina** *Wailwan country*

This program is available to C1, C2, C3 minimum security male inmates between the age of 18 - 30 with a fixed term of 12 months or less. Targeting first time young offenders, this program offers vocational training courses in information technology, horticulture, construction, visual arts and contemporary craft. Other practical skills, including small motor maintenance, welding, road sealing, building skills, literacy and numeracy and first aid are also provided.

## **Girrawaa Program**

### **Bathurst** *Wiradjuri country*

The Girrawaa program provides cultural, educational, vocational, workplace and business management skills for up to 14 Aboriginal male inmates, through the production of Aboriginal art and craft items for commercial sale. For C3 minimum security inmates.

## **Winhangadilinya Program**

### **Bathurst** *Wiradjuri country*

This program targets medium security Aboriginal male inmates who would not normally participate in therapeutic programs. The program includes EQUIPS, an Aboriginal specific domestic violence program, Aboriginal Culture delivered by Aboriginal teachers, a TAFE nutrition course, Aboriginal Art delivered by an Aboriginal Correctional Officer and classes on positive lifestyles, resume writing, interviewing skills, first aid and WH&S.

## **Nura Warra Umer Program**

### **Goulburn** *Gundungurra country*

The Nura Warra Umer Program has been developed to address the limited work, education and cultural knowledge available to maximum/medium security male inmates. This program offers a chance to create cultural art including hand painting, picture framing and engraving.

## **Gundi Program**

### **St Heliers** *Wonnarua country*

Gundi supports minimum security Aboriginal inmates towards a career in the Building and Construction Industry. The program comprises pre and post release training plus a wide range of support and personal development services. It is based on commercial construction work at St Heliers Prison building affordable homes for the Aboriginal Housing Office and Community Housing organisations.

## **Babiin Miyagang**

### **At most male prisons**

Provides an opportunity for Aboriginal fathers/carers who are separated from their children to gain greater understanding of their role and develop an enriched relationship with their kids. It is a strength based program giving insight and support.

## **Mothering at a Distance**

### **At all female prisons**

Helps Aboriginal mothers in prison who have children to develop better relationships with their kids. It also aims to reduce the trauma of separation.

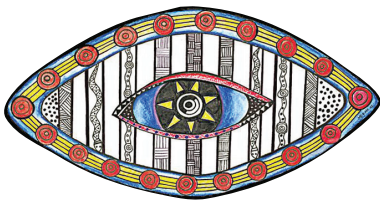
## **Bolwara Transitional House**

### **Emu Plains** *Dharug country*

Bolwara Transitional House is a residential pre-release program for Aboriginal female inmates with alcohol and other drug related problems. It is located at the

entrance of Emu Plains Prison. Minimum security women with 3-12 months left to serve can apply to Bolwara.

The residents attend AOD programs like AA, NA and other programs to help with life management and life skills. Staff at Bolwara can provide counselling and assist with housing and employment matters.



## **Bundian Way Camps**

**Eden** *Yuin/Monaro country*

This program is a cultural work camp offered to eligible Aboriginal inmates. It offers a link to culture and the local Aboriginal community by providing an opportunity to contribute to the efforts of the local Aboriginal custodians of the Bundian Way. Participants assist to preserve a culturally significant and historically important community project and can provide transitional pathways.

## **Dubay Gunyah**

This program helps Aboriginal women released from prison who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness to gain medium term accommodation with culturally appropriate wrap around services.

## **Aboriginal staff working in Corrective Services NSW**

There are over 215 Aboriginal staff working within CSNSW in custodial, support staff and education roles. If your family member is on parole in the community, contact the ACSO (Aboriginal Client Services Officer) in your area to assist with any enquiries regarding parole and Community Corrections matters. For matters relating to prisons contact the Services and Programs Officers (SAPOs) and Regional Aboriginal Project Officer (RAPOs).

## **Cultural activities for Aboriginal inmates**

Aboriginal inmates have the chance to celebrate significant cultural events whilst in prison such as NAIDOC. Some prisons invite local Aboriginal Elders and community guests to participate in the event. This enables the inmate to keep in touch with their culture and meet other Aboriginal people from the local community.

CSNSW also encourages Aboriginal Elders to provide support and guidance to inmates on a regular basis. They become the inmates' contact with the Aboriginal community. The Pinta Kulpi Elders program runs at specific prisons. Elders provide spiritual, emotional and social support and assistance to inmates

which may help them when they get out of prison.

## Attending funerals (Sorry Business)

CSNSW recognises the importance of Aboriginal families and kinship. In the event of a death in the family (Sorry Business), please contact the prison where your family member is located and speak with the SAPO.

There is a process for approval to attend a funeral of a family member. Pass on information about the funeral arrangements to the SAPO as soon as possible so the process can begin.

Sometimes due to the inmate's offence, community consideration or the distance to travel to the funeral, your family member may not be approved to attend.

## Keeping in touch with mob

It is important to keep in touch with your mob when they are in prison. They may have feelings of shame and regret, so it helps to have someone stay in touch. There are many different ways to keep in touch. You both can write letters, they can call you from the inmate phone (at certain times of the day) or you can visit them on visits day or through video link (see p.50). CSNSW can also give some financial help if you are

travelling from far away and you are on a Centrelink benefit. **See p.78** for information about Travel and Accommodation Assistance.

## Keeping yourself strong after family is released

It is a big responsibility for anyone to take care of someone once they are released from prison. We all have our own lives and cannot be there with your family all the time to give them all of the support they may need. It is a good idea to offer your support, but also accept assistance from professionals who are skilled in this field. Aboriginal Men's and Aboriginal Women's groups or support services offer cultural support and it is usually amongst other people who have been through the same situation like being in prison. The inmate can ask their SAPO or Community Corrections Officer for more information on this.

If your family member has alcohol or other drug problems, they would be best to stay on track in a rehab if required. Sometimes when they return home things can go back to the bad ways before they were inside. This places a lot of pressure on the family and the local community. It is not your responsibility to stop someone from taking drugs and/or drinking, AOD counsellors are trained to do that job. You need to stay strong yourself and keep your life on track.

## Need help with Aboriginal services?

### Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd



ALS is an Aboriginal community organisation giving information and referral, legal advice and court representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women and children across NSW and ACT. Head Office Parramatta **8842 8000**  
[www.alsnswact.org.au](http://www.alsnswact.org.au)

Armidale .....	<b>6772 5770</b>
Bathurst .....	<b>6331 1255</b>
Bourke .....	<b>6872 2200</b>
Broken Hill .....	<b>8087 3233</b>
Canberra.....	<b>6249 8488</b>
Dubbo.....	<b>6882 6880</b>
Grafton .....	<b>6640 1400</b>
Griffith.....	<b>6962 7675</b>
Kempsey .....	<b>6562 5990</b>
Lismore.....	<b>6622 7088</b>
Moree .....	<b>6752 5700</b>
Moruya .....	<b>4474 2400</b>
Newcastle.....	<b>4926 1571</b>
Nowra .....	<b>4422 3255</b>
Parramatta.....	<b>8842 8000</b>
Redfern.....	<b>8303 6600</b>
Tamworth.....	<b>6761 3766</b>
Taree .....	<b>6551 3928</b>
Wagga Wagga .....	<b>6921 9230</b>
Wollongong .....	<b>4225 7977</b>

### Aboriginal Strategy and Policy Unit (ASPU)

The Aboriginal Strategy and Policy Unit (ASPU) is located in the Corrective Services NSW Head Office in Sydney. They provide advice to CSNSW management regarding Aboriginal offenders in prison and in the community.

**8346 1911**

[www.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au)

### Wurringa Baiya



### Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre

Free legal advice for Aboriginal women for issues relating to domestic violence and victim's compensation, sexual assault and child sexual assault.

**9569 3847**

**1800 686 587** (from outside Sydney)

[www.wurringabaiya.org.au](http://www.wurringabaiya.org.au)

### Women's Legal Resources Centre



Provides free legal advice, information and referral on all aspects of the law and its affects on women.

**9749 5333**

**1800 801 501** (outside Sydney)

**1800 639 784** (Aboriginal women)

[www.wlsnsw.org.au](http://www.wlsnsw.org.au)



## Aboriginal specific rehab, medical and healing centres

There are many Aboriginal specific medical centres and healing services throughout NSW. Some are listed here. For more listings go to the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council website or call them for help.

9212 4777

[www.ahmrc.org.au/members.html](http://www.ahmrc.org.au/members.html)

### The Glen Centre



Chittaway Point near Wyong

4388 6360

[www.theglencentre.org.au](http://www.theglencentre.org.au)

### Orana Haven

Brewarrina

6874 4983

[www.](http://www.oranahaven.com.au)

[oranahaven.com.au](http://www.oranahaven.com.au)



### Benelong's Haven

Kinchela Creek near Kempsey

6567 4880

[www.benelongshaven.com.au](http://www.benelongshaven.com.au)

### Weigelli Centre

Cowra

6345 1803

[www.weigellcentre.com.au](http://www.weigellcentre.com.au)



### Wiimpatja Healing Centre

Mallee District, near Wentworth

03 5018 4100

[www.mdas.org.au](http://www.mdas.org.au)

### Jarrah House



**Jarrah House**

Residential treatment facility for women

Little Bay

near La

Perouse, Sydney

9661 6555

[www.jarrahouse.com.au](http://www.jarrahouse.com.au)

### Yula-Punaal Education & Healing Aboriginal Corporation

Mandalong

4977 2863

### Namatjira Haven

Alstonville near

Lismore

6628 1098



### Oolong House

Nowra

4422 0644

[www.oolong@shoalhaven.net.au](mailto:www.oolong@shoalhaven.net.au)



# 13. Families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds



Families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face additional pressures to other families when dealing with the criminal justice system.

For instance, language barrier contributes to lack of understanding of the court and correctional systems. Families may also find the Australian correctional system somewhat different from what they have experienced in the past. Corrective Services (CSNSW) provides a range of services to support families from CALD backgrounds.

## Access to language services

CSNSW provides inmates and their families and friends who have limited or no

English access to telephone and face-to-face and Auslan interpreter services free of charge.

CSNSW also employs staff who are fluent in more than one language and available to provide on-the-spot simple interpreter services to CALD people. This service is available in most locations in CSNSW.



CSNSW offers a range of information in languages other than English. This information is available to the public in community languages at: [www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au)

## Deportation from Australia for committing a crime

Permanent residents who are not Australian citizens may be deported (ordered to return to their country of citizenship) if, within 10 years of entry into Australia they have been convicted of a crime for which they have been sentenced to imprisonment for one year or longer. In some circumstances, the Department of Home Affairs may cancel the residence visa of a permanent resident who has been convicted of serious offences and has served a custodial sentence, even if they have lived in Australia for much longer than 10 years.

Inmates are not usually informed

of the Department's plans for deportation until shortly before their release from prison.

Generally, only those who have been convicted of serious offences are deported. Serious crimes include crime of violence, offences involving injury or corruption of young people, sex offences, and trafficking or distribution of drugs.

If a permanent resident in Australia is deported because of committing a crime, they will probably be permanently banned from returning to Australia.

## The Department of Home Affairs

The Department considers the following matters before making the decision to deport someone:

- > details of the offence(s);
- > extent of rehabilitation of the offender;
- > prospect of repeated criminal offences (recidivism);
- > risk to the community if the person reoffends in Australia;
- > families ties, and/or
- > obligations of the Australian Government under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

When an inmate has been given a deportation order, they can appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). The Tribunal can, if it believes that a wrong decision has been made, reverse the deportation order.

Once advised by the Department of Home Affairs of their intention to deport them, inmates can contact Prisoners Legal Services (PLS) as a matter of urgency to ascertain whether there are grounds to appeal such a decision.

PLS solicitors visit most prisons in NSW and are available via audio video link (AVL).

Inmates can contact Legal Aid directly by dialing **11#** on the prison CADL (phone system-free of charge) and ask for PLS solicitor.

Inmates can also ask the prison's Services and Programs Officer (SAPO) or the wing officer to record their name in the Legal Aid book for appointment with the PLS solicitor.

## Revoking citizenship

A citizen by application can have their citizenship taken away if they are found to have committed a serious criminal offence prior to gaining citizenship. Australian citizenship can be revoked if:

- > they have been convicted of making a false statement or representation in relation to their application to become an Australian citizen;
- > they have been convicted of a serious criminal offence at any time prior to becoming a citizen involving a sentence of 12 months or more;
- > their approval to become an Australian citizen was gained as a result of migration-related fraud;

- > their approval to become an Australian citizen was gained as a result of third-party fraud, for example, fraudulent conduct by a migration agent in the citizenship application;
- > it would be contrary to the public interest for the citizen to remain an Australian citizen. An Australian citizen by birth cannot have their Australian citizenship revoked. Similarly, a person conferred citizenship, after fully disclosing all relevant factors,

cannot have their Australian citizenship revoked.

People who have their citizenship revoked can be removed from Australia.

## Children

Children under the age of 18 may also have their citizenship revoked unless the other responsible parent is an Australian citizen or the child would become stateless.

## Need help with an immigration matter?

### The Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC)



IARC provides free information and advice to help vulnerable people navigate Australian migration law. Information in community languages can be downloaded at [www.iarc.asn.au](http://www.iarc.asn.au) or by contacting the IARC (Tuesdays and Thursdays) on **(02) 823 0799**.

### Legal Aid NSW

Legal Aid provides a specialist immigration service. The service includes; free legal advice, assistance and representation about refugee law and other immigration matters.



For assistance, contact Legal Aid to book an appointment on **(02) 9212 57 90**.

Appointments to see a Legal Aid lawyer for immigration advice can be made at:

- > Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (Monday mornings) **9601 3788**
- > Sydney West Multicultural Services, Blacktown (Friday mornings) **9621 6633**
- > Fairfield Legal Aid office (Tuesday mornings) **9727 3777**
- > Auburn Diversity Services (Wednesday mornings) **9649 6955**
- > Bankstown Legal Aid office (Thursday afternoons) **9707 4555**

## Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

Feeling isolated and in need of support, families can access CRC services by contacting **9288 8700**.



Families that require and interpreter service can contact **131 450** to communicate with CRC, government agencies and not-for-profit organisation. This service is free of charge.



# 14. Getting Out

## What is Parole?

Custodial sentences can have two components (minimum period and balance period). The minimum period is also known as the non-parole period, which is served in prison. About six out of every ten inmates will get to serve the balance of their sentence in the community on parole. Sometimes they may serve part of the balance in the community if they are not granted parole at the earliest possible time.

For sentences under three years, parole is usually granted automatically. Otherwise decisions about granting parole for longer sentences are made by the State Parole Authority. The Authority is made up of public servants and representatives of the community, including an Aboriginal representative.

If people have a good record in the prison, and have done programs to address their offending behaviour, there's a good chance they'll get parole when they apply. If parole is not granted, the inmate can appeal for a hearing by the Authority. This may be in person or by video link. Their family can come and support their appeal, especially if they're offering accommodation and support. To get parole, inmates need to have a stable place to live.

A Community Corrections Officer will need to visit and check this before the person's parole is approved. If the inmate plans to live with family, the Community Corrections Officer will make sure that members of the household support this plan.

People on parole have to keep to set conditions. This includes contact with a Community Corrections Officer.

Community Corrections Officers work from a Community Corrections office. They can help with referrals to community agencies, help finding study or employment, and help with programs designed to keep former inmates from going back to prison. Community Corrections Officers generally have a good understanding of the pressures newly released inmates face, and can provide both practical and emotional support. Community Corrections Officers will visit the home from time to time and talk to the family. Although their main focus is on the person on parole, their knowledge and support can be helpful for the rest of the family too. Community Corrections Officers may report breaches of parole conditions to the State Parole Authority. Not all breaches result in a return to prison. Decisions are made on a case-

by-case basis, depending on the severity of the breach.

The more your family member on parole puts into the relationship with the Community Corrections Officer, the more they're likely to benefit from it. However, while you can encourage your family member to make the most of contact with their Community Corrections Officer, you can't do the work for them.

## Will inmates get day leave or weekend leave before release?

Inmates can apply for day or weekend leave if they're classified minimum security C3 (men) or Category 1 (women). They must:

- > be serving 24 months or more fixed sentence or non-parole period;
- > be free of dirty urines (tests in which drugs are detected) for three months;
- > have completed half their minimum term;
- > have a C3 (males) and Category 1 (women).

Different kinds of leave have their own rules:

- > work / education leave can be considered for commencement from 18 months to Earliest Possible Release Date (EPRD);
- > day leave and weekend leave require an approved sponsor (family member or friend approved by CSNSW);

- > day leave each 28 days, 9 months from EPRD (12 months from EPRD for inmates in a camp/farm location) progressing to weekend leave each week 2 months from EPRD after completion of 3 day leaves;
- > weekend leave 4pm Friday to 8pm Sunday 2 months from EPRD and after 3 successful day leaves. Weekend leave, with an approved sponsor, can be taken every weekend.

Inmates serving 12 months or more, either with intellectual disability receiving support from Statewide Disability Service, or young male offenders who have graduated from Stage 3 Young Adult Offender Program at Oberon Prison, are eligible to apply.

Once approved, day or weekend leave can be taken every 28 days, or every 14 days from some isolated centres. To get day or weekend leave, inmates need a sponsor. The sponsor must be with them the whole time they're out of the prison. Being a sponsor is a big responsibility. It's often best if there's more than one sponsor to share the load. Sponsors must:

- > be over 18 years of age, with ID;
- > have known the inmate for more than 12 months before they entered the prison;
- > have no outstanding criminal charges;
- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating



to the importation, manufacture, distribution or trafficking of a commercial quantity of drugs during the previous ten years;

- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating to the sale of a commercial quantity of drugs during the previous five years;
- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating to a serious crime of violence during the previous three years;
- > have not served a term of imprisonment as an adult during the previous three years or periodic detention as an adult during the past two years.

Sometimes exceptions can be made for a partner who's facing criminal charges or has been in prison in the last three years if the Governor of the prison interviews them and gives approval.

Your family member in the prison must make the application for day or weekend leave. If they ask for you to be a sponsor, you'll then be contacted by staff from the prison.

## Planning for release

Inmates are encouraged to start planning for their release three to six months before they leave the prison, especially if they've been inside for a long time. Inmates may do the NEXUS program, which helps them get ready. Some

families regret having taken a family member back after feeling pressure to do so. If you don't feel able to have your family member home with you, tell them well beforehand rather than just before release. This will give them time to get used to the idea and make other plans. Don't tell their Community Corrections Officer that you can have them home unless you mean it. You could end up making things worse for your family member if they don't have stable accommodation in the first few months after they're released.

There are a limited number of places at supported accommodation services that cater especially for people leaving prison. Some of these services have special expertise in working with people with drug or mental health issues. Your family member will need to apply for these programs before they leave prison. They can talk to the Services and Programs Officer (SAPO) or Community Corrections Officer about these options.

You may be able to encourage them to consider them, but you can't make the arrangements for them. If you're concerned about your family member's ability to make these plans, you can contact the SAPO or Welfare Officer to alert them to your concerns.



## Transitional Accommodation

CSNSW provides a number of different services that help to plan for release out of prison and to help make the first few months back in the community as smooth as possible. These include:

### Transitional Supported Accommodation (TSA)

Up to 12 weeks supported accommodation provided to offenders under the supervision of Community Corrections with locations including Glebe House, Enmore, Rainbow Lodge Glebe, Adele House Coffs Harbour, Namatjira House, Alstonville and new locations opening in Wyong and Waratah.



### Initial Transitional Support (ITS)

Up to 12 weeks support by an ITS case worker, who works collaboratively with CCO's in support of the offenders case plan to reduce risk of reoffending. Areas covered are Bathurst, Campbelltown, Dubbo, Kempsey, Lismore, Mt Druitt, Parramatta, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong and Wyong.

### Extended Reintegration Service (ERS)

Up to 12 months of support for individuals who need supported accommodation and have complex health needs. This service is limited to the South West Sydney area. Your family member can get more information about transitional accommodation from their SAPO.

## Exit Checklist

Inside the prison, inmates should be given a copy of the *Planning Your Release NSW Exit Checklist*. This is a booklet prepared by CRC for CSNSW. It guides inmates through the main things they need to do to get ready for release, and gives useful tips and contact numbers.

Important tasks include:

- > getting ID (e.g. birth certificate, Medicare card);
- > finding accommodation;
- > dealing with debts – even if these can't be paid off, making

arrangements beforehand will make life easier;

- > arranging follow-up medical care, including methadone, suboxone or bupe (bupranorphine);
- > planning for more study or work;
- > finding support so people aren't on their own.

If you've been holding ID for a family member, you may need to send it back to them during this time as they'll need it straightaway when they're released.

You may be able to help your family member by getting information about local TAFE options or employment services, or other agencies that may offer them support. Sometimes inmates try to rely on the prison 'grapevine', but this may not provide accurate or up-to-date information.

Remember that you can provide options but you can't make your family member follow them up.

## Release day

Inmates will be expected to organise their own transport back home. They can be given the fare to where they are going to live. Prison staff can organise travel vouchers for inmates who don't have any other transport options.

It's a big encouragement for an inmate if they have someone to meet them at the gate when they're released. However, if you want to set limits about the support

you can give your family member, meeting them at the gate may give the wrong message.

There are usually a lot of practical things to do in the first couple of days after release. These can include:

- > opening a bank account;
- > going to Centrelink;
- > attending Job Search or other employment interviews;
- > meeting with their Community Corrections Officer if they're on parole;
- > buying essentials such as food and toiletries;
- > connecting with health care or pharmacotherapy (e.g. methadone) providers.

Be aware that after the initial excitement of release things can often feel flat. Your family member may be the centre of attention in the beginning, but soon after people have to get back to their normal lives.

Your family member may find it overwhelming having to deal with people and may withdraw a bit. Try not to expect too much in the early days.

# 15. Coming home

## When a family member comes home from prison

Returning home to family from prison can be challenging for everyone. Family roles and relationships have often changed while the family member has been away, and it can be hard to adjust. Former inmates may find it tough to step back into community life. Finding work and coping without the structure and routine of the prison may be difficult. Often there are high expectations by at least one party which can't be met.

## Do you want your family member to return to your home?

Families often face a lot of pressure to take in a family member who's leaving prison. This pressure may come directly from your family member, or from others, sometimes including service providers working with your family member. Think carefully about whether you want to do this. You need to weigh up the needs of all the family, including children, before making this decision.

If in the past you've experienced violence or abuse from your family member, or have been affected by their use of drugs or alcohol, don't assume that just being away in prison has changed things.

Remember that once your family member is released and living with you, it's often very hard to get them to leave.

If you're feeling guilty about not wanting your family member back, don't let your feelings push you into a decision that may be bad for you and for others at home. It's okay to care about someone but still not want to live with them. Your family member will have to take responsibility for their future if they're to successfully adjust to life 'outside'. You can't rescue them, or take on their responsibilities for them.

## Changing roles

### Former inmates

An inmate returning to their family has to make many difficult changes as they readjust to family life. This is true for parents, sons, daughters or partners. Life in prison is highly structured. There are few decisions to make and little need to deal with other people's feelings and choices. Inmates have described life in prison as being quite 'black and white'. Family life is much more complex. It isn't possible just to focus on yourself. Although inmates are usually keen to leave the prison, they may find it very hard to settle back into the family.

## Partners

Partners often have to take on more responsibility for financial and other matters while their partner is in prison. They may feel surprised or even uncomfortable about how well they've coped during that time. Some may not love their partner any less, but they've been able to get on with life without them. Others may question whether they want to continue the relationship after release. This independence can create difficulties for the former inmate as well. They may assume that everything will just be the way it was before they were incarcerated. Men in particular may be used to being in charge, and may have mixed feelings when they realise that their partner doesn't depend on them the way they did before. Inmates who have had a lengthy sentence may also find it hard when they're dependent on their partner to help them cope with things that have changed



while they were inside, like using a mobile phone or the internet.

## Children

Children respond in different ways when a parent comes home from prison. This partly depends on the child's age and partly on how long their parent has been away. Younger children may feel insecure. They may need reassurance that the parent is not going to leave again. Children may be clingy, and get worried when the returned parent leaves the house or even the room. Some children withdraw from the parent, or avoid them. They may feel they can't rely on them, in case they leave again. Some children ignore the parent or treat them like a stranger in the house. Older children may feel upset about the changing roles in the family. They may 'test the limits' by acting up or resenting the attention that the returned parent is receiving.

There can often be competition between an older child and a returned parent. Older children have often taken on extra responsibilities while their parent was away. They may react badly when the returned parent tries to discipline them. Their attitude may be 'Who are you to tell me what to do? You've been in prison.'

Some older children

feel protective of the other parent and angry with the returned parent because their actions have hurt or stressed other people in the family. If they've faced teasing or rejection from peers, they may be angry with the parent whose actions have led to this.

It's really important to talk to children about what's happening. They need you to listen hard and let them say what they think. Let them know that it's normal to have a mixture of feelings, some good and some bad, towards the returned parent. If children feel safe to talk about how they feel, they're less likely to withdraw or behave aggressively.

If you find it hard to talk with your children, another trusted adult may be able to help. Some children find it hard to talk to parents because they're trying to protect them. A family friend, school counsellor, teacher or youth worker may sometimes be an easier person for them to talk to. You could also give them the number of Kids Help Line – **1800 551 800** and allow them privacy and support to make the call. You can help by letting them know you understand they may need to talk with someone outside the family, and by respecting their privacy. Avoid trying to get them to tell you what they've said. If you keep communication open, they'll tell you when they're ready.

## Carers

Resuming care of children after time in prison can be challenging for the parent, the carer and sometimes the children. It can be hard for carers to let go, especially if they're not confident about the former inmate's ability to look after the children, or have different priorities in parenting. Carers often form close bonds with children in their care, and it can be hard for both children and carers if this relationship is suddenly disrupted.

Try to talk about the children's care in the visits before the parent is released, rather than leaving everything until they get out. This can clarify whether everyone has the same needs and expectations, or whether there are issues to be resolved. Some carers may be quite happy to let go of their role once the parent returns, especially if they've only been caring for the children for a short time. In other situations it may work better for the parent to gradually take over responsibilities. This will work better if the parent is confident that the carer will support them and isn't trying to prevent the children from going home. It may work well for everyone if the carer can have an ongoing role in the children's lives and can provide back-up for the parent.

Parents may find it harder than they expect to resume parenting responsibilities. They may benefit from a family service that can assist

them with strategies and support as they adjust to their role. If carers have real doubts about the parent's ability to cope with the children on release and feel they can't address these issues directly with the parent, they may need to seek legal advice.

## Parents

Parents with a son or daughter in prison may have conflicting feelings about their child's release. They may be relieved that they'll no longer have to visit the prison. If their family member has had a long sentence, they may feel anxiety about this next stage. Some parents may have had a more peaceful life while their family member was in prison than when they were outside. They may be worried about what it will be like to have them back home again.

Many parents worry that their family member may reoffend or use drugs once they're released. They may try to monitor or control their family member's behaviour to prevent this. Unfortunately this can backfire, with the family member offending or using drugs as a way of 'breaking out' of their parents' control and asserting their own will. If your son or daughter is going to live with you when they're released, try to talk about how they would like you to support them, rather than monitoring them behind their back.

At the same time, remember it's

your home and you have the right to set house rules for the people who live there. Reasonable house rules include expectations about paying board, having visitors, doing washing, tidying up, and not using drugs or doing other illegal activities on the premises. If there's an unresolvable conflict about what's acceptable behaviour, it may be better for your son or daughter to find somewhere else to live (see '**Planning for release**' on **p.107**). You'll need to think about this if your family member will be on parole and living at your place is a condition of their parole order. Community Corrections Officers prepare a release plan that includes where the former inmate will live. This happens about six months before a release date.

## Readjusting to life outside

If your family member has been away for a long time, they'll have lost touch with many day-to-day things. For example, they may not know how much things cost, or how to use public transport. The names and expectations of government and community agencies may have changed while they were away. Many former inmates suspect that other people can tell they've been in prison, even if they don't tell them directly. Fear and insecurity can lead to withdrawing from the world altogether, locking themselves in



a room much as they were when in prison. They may experience severe mood swings and become emotionally unpredictable.

In prison your family member might have had to use threats, violence or withdrawal to try to deal with conflicts. These strategies won't work well on the outside. Try not to take negative reactions personally. Seeing these behaviours as coping strategies that your family member needed in the prison can help you find the patience you'll need. This doesn't mean you have to accept their negative behaviour. Let them know how you feel. For example, 'I feel hurt when you don't respond to me when I talk to you'. For your own safety and that of your children, don't tolerate violent, controlling or abusive behaviour. If your family member tries to deal with situations in this way, get outside help fast. Excusing violence because your family member has been inside means they don't have to take responsibility for learning to deal with situations differently. If this behaviour escalates, it can be dangerous for everyone.

## Expectations of partners

Because of the limitations placed on a relationship when a partner is in prison, both inmates and their partners outside can have quite unrealistic expectations about what the relationship will be like after prison. Inmates have a lot of time to day dream about how things will

be, with little opportunity for 'reality testing' these fantasies. Prison relationships can sometimes seem 'perfect' away from the real world.

Once the inmate is back home, both partners have to face reality. Sometimes partners have put up with the offender's abusive behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse, or criminal lifestyle, for years. It can be tempting to believe that a partner has 'learnt their lesson'. They may have made promises that things will be different, and you may want to give them the benefit of the doubt. For your own sake, be realistic.

You need to talk about issues and expectations clearly before your partner leaves the prison, or as soon as possible after release. If you can't talk about these things, ask yourself whether things have really changed. Some tips for getting back together:

- > take it slowly to allow time to get reacquainted;
- > be prepared for your partner to have difficulties adjusting;
- > be honest about the problems you had before your partner went into the prison – time alone won't have changed them;
- > allow for privacy and personal space;
- > make time for your own needs, including relaxation and recreation;
- > be honest and open about your feelings;

- > negotiate your expectations of each other and the roles each of you will take on;
- > spend time talking to the children, before your partner is released, about what will happen;
- > get support, either separately or together, from family, friends and professionals.

## Addressing family issues before release

An inmate's actions may have had a big impact on family members. Family may have been victims of crimes committed by the inmate, or may have suffered because of other people's reactions to what the inmate has done.

Family Group Conferencing can provide an opportunity for the inmate to meet with their family and for the family to acknowledge the hurt they've suffered as a result of what the inmate has done. The presence of an independent facilitator ensures that the meeting stays safe and focused. Conferencing can prepare everyone for when the inmate is released, and can help people decide what future involvement they may have, or choose not to have, with the inmate.

Family Group Conferences can be arranged through the Services and Programs Officer (SAPO) at the prison.

## Concerns they will use drugs after release

If your family member has a history of drug use, you may be understandably concerned for them once they leave the prison. While you can provide support, you can't stop them from using drugs if they decide to do so. If your family member uses drugs like heroin when they get back outside, there's a real risk they could overdose, especially when they first start using again. The first 72 hours is the period where they'll be at most risk of overdosing, although there's a risk in injecting drug use at any time.

If you're worried about your family member using safely, you may want to make sure they know about the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC). The MSIC operates at 66 Darlinghurst Rd, Kings Cross, seven hours a day, five days a week – phone **9360 1191**. Clients must be over 18 years old.

The centre is totally confidential and non-judgemental. It has booths where people can inject themselves, waste bins for used syringes, a fully equipped resuscitation room to manage drug overdoses, and a counselling room. There are two trained staff, including a registered nurse permanently on duty.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program (see p.120).

**9361 8000**

**1800 422 599**

### Child Protection Helpline

Contact FACS if you're concerned that a child is at risk of harm or to request assistance.

**132 111**

### Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres offer free legal advice. Contact them to find the centre nearest you.

**9212 7333**

**[www.clcnsw.org.au](http://www.clcnsw.org.au)**

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

Provides support to inmates, former inmates and their families.

**9288 8700**

**[www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au)**



### Family Drug Support



Family Drug Support offers information and referral, family support groups and courses for families affected by a family member's drug use.

**1300 368 186**

**[www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)**

### Fams



Contact Fams to find the nearest family service. Family services are non-government organisations whose support workers can help with parenting and other family matters through home visiting, counselling and groups.

**8354 3799**

**[www.fams.asn.au](http://www.fams.asn.au)**

### Kids Helpline

24-hour telephone counselling service for children and young people.

**1800 551 800**

**[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)**



### Lifeline

24-hour telephone counselling and referral.

**13 11 14**



### Lifeline – Sexual Assault and Family Violence Counselling Line

Assistance and referral for people affected by domestic violence.

**1800 200 526**

**1800 RESPECT**

## Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC)

**9360 1191**

## NSW Rape Crisis

24-hour counselling and support for people affected by sexual assault, domestic and family violence.

**1800 RESPECT**

[www.nswrapecrisis.com.au](http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au)



## NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)

Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.

**8354 7300**

**1800 644 413**

[www.nuaa.org.au](http://www.nuaa.org.au)



## Parentline

Advice, counselling and referrals for parents and carers of children 0-18 years. Monday to Friday 9am-9pm; Saturday & Sunday 4pm to 9pm.

**1300 1300 52**



## Relationships Australia

*Relationships Australia.*  
NEW SOUTH WALES

### Relationships

Australia provides face to face and online counselling services and family therapy. They also provide Aboriginal counselling services.

**1300 364 277**

[www.relationshipsnsw.org.au](http://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au)

### SHINE for Kids

Services include support, advocacy and referral for children of inmates, inmates and carers. **See p.75** for more details.



Silverwater..... **9714 3000**

Parklea..... **9933 7900**

Windsor ..... **4573 3900**

Kariong ..... **4340 3836**

Bathurst..... **6328 9900**

Cessnock..... **4993 6800**

Wellington..... **6845 5000**

Junee ..... **6934 6000**

Kempsey ..... **6561 3800**

Call **9714 3000** for details about Nowra and Goulburn services

[www.shineforkids.org.au](http://www.shineforkids.org.au)

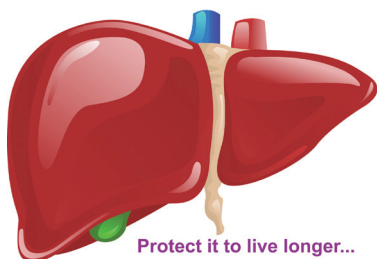
## 16. Health issues



Medical services for inmates are available in all prisons. If your family member in prison is concerned about their health ask them to contact the medical staff at Justice Health.

### Health issues after a family member has been in prison

People in prison generally have higher rates of blood-borne viruses than the general community. Injecting drug users are especially at risk of contracting these viruses. If you have a family member in prison, make sure you know the facts about Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS. This does not mean that prisons cause disease, just that people should be aware of the risks. With the facts you can make sure everyone in your family looks after their health.



### Hepatitis

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Viral hepatitis refers to hepatitis caused by a few specific viruses, most commonly hepatitis A, B, or C virus. You can get vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B, but

there's no vaccine for Hepatitis C. Hepatitis can be caused by other things which are not virus related, for example alcohol related hepatitis or fatty liver.

### Hep C

#### What is Hep C?

Hep C is passed on through blood-to blood contact. The most common way to get Hep C is through sharing needles (fits) and other injecting equipment such as swabs, spoons and filters. It can also be passed on through unsterile tattooing and body piercing. It's rare for Hep C to be passed on through sex, but this can occur if there's blood-to- blood contact (e.g. via menstrual blood). It can take 10 to 15 years for symptoms to start developing, and they will affect people in different ways. They can include pains in the liver area (the upper right side of the abdomen), tiredness, nausea and flu-like symptoms. Some people may develop serious liver problems later in life. Getting tested for Hep C is a good thing to do so you can get treated early. A healthy lifestyle, avoiding alcohol, eating a balanced diet and doing exercise

can improve wellbeing and prevent liver damage later on.

### Will my partner, family or friends catch it?

Hep C can't be passed on to others through everyday social contact. Hep C can't be passed on by hugging, or by sharing plates, cutlery, cups, toilets, baths or laundries. Although it's extremely unlikely to be passed on through sex, there's a small risk if there could be blood-to- blood contact. It's important to use condoms or avoid sex at times when there could be blood present from either person. Mothers with Hep C are encouraged, as are all mothers, to breastfeed their babies. It's unlikely that the virus can be passed on through breastfeeding unless nipples are cracked or bleeding. If they are, mothers need to express and discard the milk until nipples are healed. If unsure see a doctor.

Avoid direct contact with blood, for example don't share personal items such as toothbrushes and razors which may have blood on them. Other personal care items such as hair and nail clippers may also pose a risk if they haven't been cleaned between uses. Don't reuse syringes or share any drug using equipment.


### Living with Hep C

If you know you have Hep C, there are things you can do to look after yourself. A well-balanced and healthy diet (low in animal fat) may help to relieve symptoms

AROUND **2,500**  
**AUSTRALIANS ARE CURED OF HEP C EACH MONTH**

To find your local doctors and pharmacies for hep C treatment, Google "hep nsw directory"  
Or call the Infoline

**HEPATITIS INFOLINE**  
**1800 803 990**  
**INFO, SUPPORT, REFERRALS**

 **Hepatitis NSW**

[www.hep.org.au](http://www.hep.org.au)

and reduce damage to the liver. Drinking less or giving up alcohol (and other drugs, including cigarettes) is recommended for someone with Hep C as these can be hard on your liver. Resting when tired helps combat fatigue. Mild exercise and maintaining a healthy weight is also important. Regular check-ups with your GP or health clinic are recommended.

There are new highly effective treatments for Hep C available through Medicare, including for people in prison, which are 8-24 weeks in duration and provide a cure for approximately 95% of people.

For more information about treatment, speak with your GP or health clinic, or phone the Hepatitis Infoline on **1800 803 990**.

If you've never had Hep A or B, then a vaccination is recommended to prevent infection. There is no vaccination for Hep C. Even if you already have Hep C, stay clear of blood-to-blood contact to avoid contracting other blood borne viruses such as HIV or Hep B.

## HIV/AIDS

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It's passed on through sexual fluids and blood-to-blood contact. Unsafe sex and sharing of injecting equipment are the most common means of transmission. You can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by practising safer sex, and by not reusing syringes or sharing drug use equipment.

Safer sex means correct use of a condom and water-based lubricant during penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex, using condoms or dental dams during oral sex, and wearing latex gloves when penetration with the hands or fingers occurs.

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) provide new syringes and injecting equipment either free or at low cost. To find your nearest program contact ADIS on **9361 8000 or 1800 422 599**.

## Pregnancy and HIV/AIDS

If you're pregnant or wish to have a baby, it's important to know if you have HIV, because if you're HIV positive you may pass it on to your baby. If you're HIV positive, getting the right medical care early

in pregnancy can greatly reduce the chance of passing HIV on to your baby. Talk to your partner, doctor or counsellor about what being infected with HIV means for you and your baby.

## Getting tested

Your family member may have been tested for Hep C or HIV/AIDS while they were in prison. It's their decision what to tell you about the tests or results. You can encourage open discussion of these issues by showing you understand the facts about these diseases, and won't panic or over-react. If you've been sexually active or have been involved in high-risk activities such as injecting drugs while your partner was in prison, you should also consider being tested before your partner is released.

## Testing for Hep C

You can't tell if someone has Hep C unless they have a blood test. You can look really healthy but still have Hep C. One in four people will clear the virus from their system within the first 12 months of being infected. A standard Hep C test will show they've been exposed to the virus and have antibodies. A PCR test will check to see if the virus has been cleared from the body or is still active. If a person has cleared the virus, they can't pass it on to others. Even if a person has cleared the virus, there's no protection from getting reinfected



with Hep C. The only way to avoid reinfection is avoiding contact with other people's blood.

### Testing for HIV/AIDS

Testing for HIV/AIDS involves a blood test. Although there's no vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS, there are medications that are very effective in treating the effects of the virus. Early identification of HIV and regular health checks are important for the best outcome.

### Where to go for testing

You may feel comfortable discussing these issues with your doctor. But if you don't, there are information services you can contact for confidential information and advice. If you're not sure about being tested, contact the Hep C Helpline on **9332 1599 or 1800 803 990**, or the Sexual Health Info line on **1800 451 624**. You can get tested for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases at a Sexual Health Centre (generally free of charge) or through your own doctor.



Health centre, Dillwynia Correctional Centre

## Need help?

### Aboriginal Medical Services

The Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council can help you find an Aboriginal Medical Service near you. Services are also listed on the Council website.

**9212 4777**

[www.ahmrc.org.au/members.html](http://www.ahmrc.org.au/members.html)

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)



Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program.

**9361 8000**

**1800 422 599** (from outside Sydney)

### AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)

ACON is a health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, with a focus on HIV/AIDS.

**9206 2000**

**1800 063 060**

[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)



### Hepatitis Infoline & Hep Connect: Hep C Peer Support

Provides information, support and referrals about Hepatitis.

**1800 803 990**

[www.hep.org.au](http://www.hep.org.au)



### Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service (MHAHS)

Bilingual services for people with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis.

The website provides information in community languages.

**9515 1234**

**1800 108 098**

[www.mhahs.org.au](http://www.mhahs.org.au)



### NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)

Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.

**8354 7300**

**1800 644 413**

[www.nuaa.org.au](http://www.nuaa.org.au)



### Sexual Health Infolink

Information on sexual health and to find your nearest services.

**1800 451 624**



## **Women's Information and Referral Service**

Ring this service to find your nearest Women's Health Centre.

**1800 817 227**

## **Sydney Sexual Health Centre**

Free testing for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, counselling and treatment services.

**SSHC**

Level 3, Nightingale Wing  
Sydney Hospital  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney

**9382 7440**

**1800 451 624**

## **Need help caring for a family member with mental illness?**

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health (JH&FMH), Family Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS) and NSW Family & Carer Mental Health Program help families who are carers of a family member with mental illness. Families and carers can get support to keep going in their important caring role in a sustainable and satisfying way. This in turn supports longer term gains to patients' health, recovery and quality of life.

The JH&FMH Family & Carer Consultant has developed a resource package to assist carers and Client Liaison Officers are contacts for concerns or enquiries about patient care and feedback on Justice Health Services.

Call to get a resource package and further assistance.

## **Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health (JH&FMH)**

**9700 3000**

## **Family & Carer Consultant**

PO Box 150  
Matraville NSW 2035

**9700 3000**

## **Client Liaison Services**

PO Box 150  
Matraville NSW 2035

**9700 3000**

## **Mental Health Line**

(available 24 hours a day)

**1800 011 511**



## **Family Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS)**

**9391 9000**

## **NSW Family & Carer Mental Health Program**

**1800 011 511 (Mental Health Line)**



**Sydney**

- Silverwater Complex (MRRC, Silverwater Women's, Dawn de Loas)
- Long Bay Complex (Long Bay Hospital, MSPC)
- Parklea
- CDTCC
- John Morony
- Dillwynia
- OMMPPC
- Amber Laurel
- Emu Plains
- Mary Wade

## NSW prison addresses

### Amber

Laurel.....Old Bathurst Rd  
Emu Plains  
NSW 2750  
(02) 4735 0254

Bathurst.....Cnr Browning St &  
Brookmore Ave  
PO Box 166  
Bathurst NSW 2795  
(02) 6338 3282

Berrima.....Argyle St  
Locked Bag 1  
Berrima NSW 2577  
(02) 4868 7333

Brewarrina...Arthur Hall VC Way  
Locked Bag 1  
Brewarrina  
NSW 2839  
(02) 6874 4717

Broken Hill...109 Gossan St  
PO Box 403  
Broken Hill  
NSW 2880  
(08) 8087 3025

Cessnock.....Lindsay St  
PO Box 32  
Cessnock  
NSW 2325  
(02) 4993 2333

Compulsory Drug  
Treatment....66 Sentry Dr  
Parklea  
PO Box 3001  
Stanhope Gardens  
NSW 2768  
(02) 96784171

Cooma.....1 Vale Street  
Locked Bag 7  
Cooma  
NSW 2630  
(02) 6455 0333

Dawn de  
Loas.....Holker St  
Silverwater  
Locked Mail 115  
Silverwater  
NSW 1811  
(02) 9289 5339

Dillwynia.....The Northern Rd  
Berkshire Park  
Locked Bag 657  
South Windsor  
NSW 2756  
(02) 4582 2501

Emu Plains ..Old Bathurst Rd Locked Bag 8006 Penrith NSW 2751 (02) 4735 0200	Kariong.....Central Coast Highway Private Mail Bag West Gosford NSW 2250 (02) 4340 3400	Oberon .....via Shooters Hill Rd Locked Bag 2 Oberon NSW 2787 (02) 6335 5248
Glen Innes ...Gwydir Highway Locked Bag 900 Glen Innes NSW 2370 (02) 6730 0000	Kirkconnell ..Sunny Corner Rd Locked Bag 7029 Bathurst NSW 2795 (02) 6337 5317	OMMPCC.....The Northern Rd Berkshire Park Locked Bag 8651 South Windsor NSW 2756 (02) 4582 2304
Goulburn.....Maud St PO Box 264 Goulburn NSW 2580 (02) 4827 2222	Lithgow .....596 Great Western Hwy Marrangaroo PO Box 666 Lithgow NSW 2790 (02) 6350 2222	Parklea.....66 Sentry Drive Box 6148 Blacktown NSW 2148 (02) 9678 4888
Grafton .....170 Hoof St PO Box 656 Grafton NSW 2460 (02) 6642 0300	Long Bay Complex (Long Bay Hospital, MSPC).....1300 Anzac Pde Malabar PO Box 13 Matraville NSW 2036 (02) 8304 2000	Shortland.....Lindsay St Cessnock PO Box 32 Cessnock NSW 2325 (02) 4993 2333
High Risk Management Maud St PO Box 264 Goulburn NSW 2580 (02) 4827 2430	Macquarie...Mudgee Rd Wellington PO Box 386 Wellington NSW 2820 (02) 6845 5699	Silverwater Complex.....Holker St Locked Bag 115 Silverwater NSW 1811 (02) 9289 5600
Hunter.....Off Lindsay St PO Box 32 Cessnock NSW 2325 Visits 1 (02) 4050 6320 Visits 2 (02) 4050 6321	Mannus .....Linden Roth Dr Mannus via Tumbarumba NSW 2653 (02) 6941 0333	Silverwater Women's.....Holker St Locked Bag 130 Silverwater NSW 1811 (02) 9289 5100
Illawarra.....34-40 Lady Penrhyn Drive Unanderra NSW 2526 (02) 4239 7700	Mary Wade..169 Joseph St Lidcombe Locked Bag 4006 Chullora NSW 2190 (02) 8737 5000	St Heliers ....McCullys Gap Rd PO Box 597 Muswellbrook NSW 2333 (02) 6542 4300
Ivanhoe.....33 Mitchell St PO Box 109 Ivanhoe NSW 2878 (02) 6995 1403	M.R.R.C. ....Holker St Private Bag 144 Silverwater NSW 1811 (02) 9289 5600	South Coast (Nowra).....Oxford St South Nowra (02) 4424 6000
John Morony .....The Northern Rd Berkshire Park Locked Bag 654 South Windsor NSW 2756 (02) 4582 2222	M.N.C.C.C. (Kempsey) ..37 Aldavilla Rd PO Box 567 West Kempsey NSW 2440 (02) 6560 2700	Tamworth ....Cnr Dean & Johnson Sts PO Box 537 Tamworth NSW 2340 (02) 6766 4977
Junee .....197 Park Lane PO Box 197 Junee NSW 2663 (02) 6924 3222		Wellington...Mudgee Rd PO Box 386 Wellington NSW 2820 (02) 6840 2800

# Community Corrections offices

Albury .....	Level 1, 558 Kiewa St, Albury, NSW 2640 (02) 6058 8100
Armidale .....	85 Faulkner St, Armidale, NSW 2350 (02) 6771 8400
Bankstown.....	47 Rickard Rd, Bankstown, NSW 2200 (02) 9707 2144
Batemans Bay .....	1 Beach Rd, Batemans Bay, NSW 2536 (02) 4472 4987
Bathurst.....	108 William St, Bathurst, NSW 2795 (02) 6332 2737
Bega .....	Bega Centre, Level 1, Suite 9, 106 Auckland St, Bega, NSW 2550 (02) 6494 8700
Blacktown.....	Level 1, 13 Kildare Rd, Blacktown, NSW 2148 (02) 9854 5250
Bourke .....	51-53 Mitchell St, Bourke, NSW 2840 (02) 6870 8000
Bowral .....	1 Boolwey St, Bowral, NSW 2576 (02) 4868 4200
Broken Hill .....	361-365 Argent St, Broken Hill, NSW 2880 (02) 8082 3000
Burwood.....	Level 1, 52 Railway Parade, Burwood, NSW 2134 (02) 8775 4800
Campbelltown .....	22 Minto Rd, Minto, NSW 2566 (02) 8796 1900
Casino .....	Shop1, 121 Barker St, Casino, NSW 2470 (02) 6662 4311
Cessnock.....	Cessnock Correctional Centre, off Lindsay St, Cessnock, NSW 2325 (02) (02) 4991 1702
City .....	13-15 Wentworth Ave, Sydney, NSW 2000 (02) 9265 7500

Coffs Harbour.....Level 1, 129 West High St, Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450  
(02) 6690 4500

Cooma.....27A Vulcan St, Cooma, NSW 2630  
(02) 6452 1903

Coonamble.....22 Castlereagh St, Coonamble, NSW 2829  
(02) 6822 6100

Dubbo.....138 Talbragar St, Dubbo, NSW 2830  
(02) 6883 5000

Glen Innes .....233 Ferguson St, Glen Innes, NSW 2370  
(02) 6732 2644

Gosford.....Level 1, 125 Donnison St, Gosford, NSW 2250  
(02) 4345 4900

Gunnedah.....35-37 Abbott St, Gunnedah, NSW 2380  
(02) 6742 5220

Hornsby .....61 Hunter St, Hornsby, NSW 2077  
(02) 9479 2110

Hurstville.....Level 2, 2 Woodville St, Hurstville, NSW 2220  
(02) 9579 6200

Inverell .....127 Otho St, Inverell, NSW 2360  
(02) 6721 0309

Kempsey .....Level 1, 24-26 Clyde St, Kempsey, NSW 2440  
(02) 6561 3100

Lake Macquarie...Level 1, 7-9 Kelton St, Cardiff, NSW 2285  
(02) 4918 7900

Leichhardt.....Level 1, 23 Balmain Rd, Leichhardt, NSW 2040  
(02) 9508 2500

Lismore.....Conway Plaza, Suite 14B, 21 Conway St,  
Lismore, NSW 2480  
(02) 6623 7200

Lithgow.....43 Main St, Lithgow NSW 2790  
(02) 6352 1555

Liverpool.....Level 3, 269 Bigge St, Liverpool, NSW 2170  
(02) 9612 0800

Maitland.....2 Caroline Place, Maitland, NSW 2320  
(02) 4937 8200



Moree .....215 Balo St, Moree, NSW 2400  
 (02) 6750 7800

Muswellbrook .....55-57 Bridge St, Muswellbrook, NSW 2333  
 (02) 6549 0600

Newcastle.....Level 2, 7-9 Kelton St, Cardiff, NSW 2285  
 (02) 4918 7998

Nowra.....108 Kinghorne St, Nowra, NSW 2541  
 (02) 4424 6700

Orange.....150 Lords Place, Orange, NSW 2800  
 (02) 6361 4666

Parramatta.....Level 5, 106-108 Church St, Parramatta, NSW 2150  
 (02) 9685 2666

Penrith .....Danallam Building, Ground Floor, Suite 8, 311 High St,  
 Penrith, NSW 2751  
 (02) 4777 8400

Port Macquarie....Level 2, 75-77 Clarence St, Port Macquarie, NSW 2444  
 (02) 5534 3200

Queanbeyan .....11 Farrer Place, Queanbeyan, NSW 2620  
 (02) 6132 8700

St Leonards .....Level 4, 156 Pacific Highway, St Leonards, NSW 2065  
 (02) 8423 6400

Sutherland .....9-15 East Parade, Sutherland, NSW 2232  
 (02) 9521 3544

Tamworth.....Noel Park House, Level 2, 155-157 Marius St,  
 Tamworth, NSW 2340

Taree .....68 Wynter St, Taree, NSW 2430  
 (02) 5594 6600

Tumut.....Riverina Highlands Building, 76 Capper St,  
 Tumut NSW 2720  
 (02) 6947 4106

Wagga Wagga .....34 Kincaid St, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650  
 (02) 6932 7400

Wellington.....Parole Building, Wellington Correctional Centre,  
 Mudgee-Goolma Rd, Wellington, NSW 2820

Windsor .....Shop 4, 266 George St, Windsor, NSW 2756  
 (02) 4571 6000

Wollongong ..... 16 Gladstone Avenue, Wollongong, NSW 2500  
(02) 4267 6500

Wyong ..... Suite 105, Level 1, 1 Bryant Drive, Tuggerah, NSW 2259  
(02) 4355 7700

Young ..... 3 Junction St, Young, NSW 2594  
(02) 6382 3599

## District Offices

Fairfield..... Level 2, 119 The Crescent, Fairfield, NSW 1860  
(02) 8717 4600

Forbes ..... 68 Lawler St, Forbes, NSW 2871  
(02) 6851 9900

Goulburn..... 56-58 Clinton St, Goulburn, NSW 2580  
(02) 4824 2299

Grafton ..... Level 2, 49-51 Victoria St, Grafton, NSW 2460  
(02) 6643 2585

Griffith..... 104-110 Banna Avenue, Griffith, NSW 2680  
(02) 6964 2242

Mount Druitt ..... Level 1, Suite 4, 5 Mount St, Mount Druitt, NSW 2770  
(02) 8886 6000

