

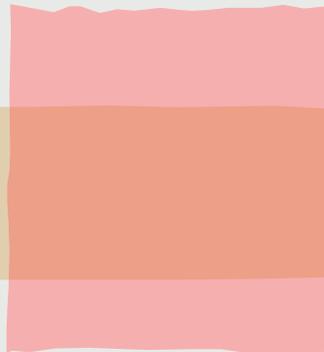
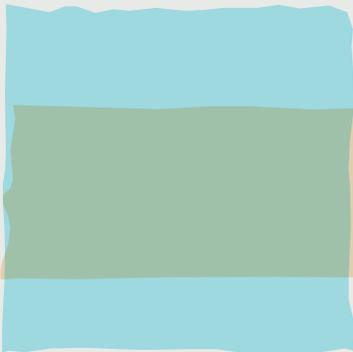


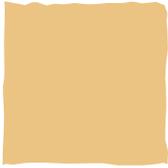
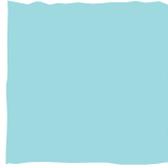
Family Resource



icpo

Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas





Family Resource

**A resource for Irish families with
a loved one in prison overseas**



icpo

Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) provides support to approximately 1,100 Irish people in prisons in more than thirty countries, the majority of whom are in the UK, with many more detained throughout the USA, Australia, Europe, South and Central America, and Asia. The ICPO was established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1985 in response to serious concerns regarding the number of Irish men and women in UK prisons. In recent years, we have been able to extend our services to prisoners and to expand our existing services to prisoners' families. The ICPO works for all Irish prisoners wherever they are. We makes no distinction in terms of religious faith, the nature of the conviction or of a prisoner's status.

The information contained in this Family Resource is general in nature. Individuals are solely responsible for their own decisions and actions and ICPO assumes no warranty or liability from the use of this resource.

The ICPO operates under the Hierarchy General Purposes Trust, a registered charity in Ireland (CHY 5956) and in England and Wales under the Irish Chaplaincy (1160365/280742).

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**Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs



Society of St Vincent de Paul



**IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**
COMHÁIL EASPAG CAITLÍCEACH ÉIREANN

The ICPO would like to thank ICPO intern Elodie Coyard for her work on this booklet.

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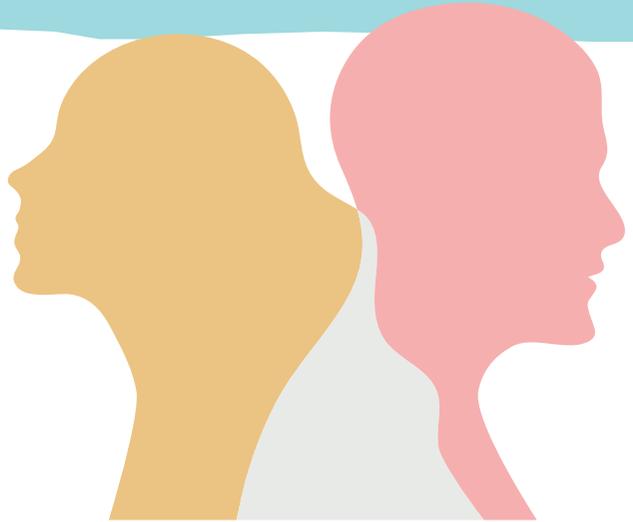
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About this booklet

When you first learn that someone you care about has been arrested in another country it can bring on a range of difficult emotions. Families may initially struggle to get basic information about their loved one, such as which prison they are being detained in, causing anxiety and uncertainty. Very often families have to navigate and try to understand a foreign legal and penal system, sometimes in a language they don't speak. The pain of separation is hard to bear and often feelings of shame make it hard to discuss the situation with friends. The whole experience can be frightening, confusing and destabilising and can result in families feeling vulnerable, isolated and afraid of what others will say.

The ICPO works with families going through this experience and supports them by providing individualised, person-centred assistance in a respectful and non-judgmental way that gives families the information they need, and the confidence and support to survive this difficult journey.

The ICPO has developed this booklet to provide information on different aspects of imprisonment overseas



and to give you as a family member an insight into what you may experience over the period of your loved one's sentence. It deals with some of the legal and practical issues as well as how to help yourself and other family members, especially children, through the experience of your loved one being in prison overseas. Whether you are in contact with the ICPO on a regular basis or are just hearing about our services for the first time, this booklet should help give you an understanding of the support available to you from the ICPO. More than anything, this booklet is intended to let you know you are not alone and that, with support and information, you will get through this very challenging experience.



We also support prisoners' families in a variety of ways, depending on their needs and those of their loved ones in prison overseas. This may include:

- Advising families on the country-specific processes around arrest and detention as well as providing information and advice on a wide range of issues, including repatriation, deportation, health and legal matters, discrimination and ill-treatment
- Assisting with setting up lines of communication between family members and their loved ones.
- Providing direct support to family members by phone, email and where possible in person
- Offering group support through Family Information Days and online monthly meetings to give families the opportunity to meet other people who have a relative in prison overseas
- Acting on behalf of families to represent their interests and those of their family member in prison to relevant parties (Irish embassies and consulates, welfare agencies, probation and legal officers)
- Monitoring applications of prisoners seeking to return to Ireland while on licence
- Assisting families with planning prison visits and providing grants for those on limited incomes
- Providing assistance to families in preparation for their family member's release.

Unfortunately, we cannot:

- Get your loved one out of prison
- Provide legal advice, recommend lawyers or pay for legal fees
- Fundraise for your loved one or your family.

Key words

Arrest

Being taken into custody (police station or prison) because of suspected involvement in a crime.

App (England and Wales)

“App” is an application form that prisoners must complete if they wish to order or ask for something that is not part of their usual and agreed routines.

Appeal

A legal process in which someone who is found guilty of a crime is seeking a re-evaluation of the verdict or of the sentence they received. In some countries, refusal of bail can also be appealed.

Bail

A legal arrangement allowing for the person’s release from custody while they await trial. Bail may only be granted if certain conditions are met, such as paying a security/bond to ensure that the accused will appear in court for their trial. It is often refused to foreigners as they are deemed to be a flight risk.

Buy-ups (England and Wales)

Buy-ups are purchases that can be made by prisoners while in prison such as food and toiletries, for example.

Conditional release

When a prisoner is released from prison before the full sentence has been completed. For example, if a person is sentenced to three years and gets out after two years. It is usually granted for good behaviour or demonstration of rehabilitation and there are generally conditions attached such as curfews or mandatory meetings to attend. It is called different things in different countries and not all countries have it.

Consulate

A consulate is a smaller diplomatic mission than an embassy but offers the same service and exists either where an embassy has not been established or in conjunction with the official embassy (for example, there is an Irish Consulate in Boston as well as the Irish Embassy in Washington DC).

Deportation

A process whereby a person is required to leave a country by its courts or the government and is sent back to their home country (for example, deporting an Irish citizen from the United States and sending them back to Ireland). It is usually because they have broken the law or have no legal right to be in the country, such as if their visa has expired.



Embassy

The main official governmental representation of a country abroad (for example the Irish Embassy in Paris, France). It represents the country's interests and its citizens abroad. It has similar functions to a consulate in addition to dealing with the official diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

Expulsion

Removing someone from a country as a form of punishment for a crime they have committed.

Extradition

The transfer of a person from one legal jurisdiction to another, usually because the person is suspected of or has been charged with a crime that is directly linked to a different state or country than the one they were arrested in.

Isolation (solitary confinement, box, special housing unit/SHU)

When a prisoner is kept in a cell where they have little to no contact with other people. This could happen for the protection of the prisoner or the protection of other prisoners. Isolation can also be used as a form of punishment for prisoners.

Lawyer

A legal professional that can represent a person or a party in a court of law. They are also qualified to give legal advice.

Probation/parole

Probation is when an offender is allowed to live within their community instead of or after a certain time in prison. There are conditions that must be respected such as not committing any other crimes and meetings with probation officers.

Release on licence

When a prisoner is allowed to leave prison and live in the community, subject to certain conditions (similar to being on probation/parole). They may be required to remain in that country. It is granted automatically, usually at the halfway point in England and Wales.

Remand

When a person is kept in custody or on bail until the date of their trial. If the person is thought to be at risk of reoffending or dangerous to others they will be kept in custody as opposed to on bail. Depending on the country and the offence the person is charged with, people may be remanded for months or sometimes a year or two before going to trial.

Repatriation

The transfer of a prisoner from one country to serve their remaining sentence in another country. Prisoners are generally only transferred to a country where they hold citizenship or residency.

Solicitor

A legal representative (similar to a lawyer) who can offer legal advice and perform legal services such as drawing up contracts or appearing in court.

Tariff

The minimum amount of time that a prisoner serving a life sentence will have to serve before being considered for release by a Parole Board. Tariffs only apply to life sentences in some countries (e.g. the UK).

Trial

A legal process where a person is tried for a crime that was committed. The aim is to determine whether the person is guilty of the offence(s). The guilt is determined by a judge or jury by assessing evidence and accounts presented to the court. It is a formal and sometimes lengthy process.

If you require more information, please contact your ICPO caseworker or find our factsheets on the ICPO website:

- icpo.ie/factsheets-for-prisoners
- icpo.ie/factsheets-for-families

SECTION 1

Supporting your loved one in prison

Finding out that your loved one has been arrested overseas can be a distressing and painful experience. While every family's experience will be different, there are some common issues that will come up for most families. This section is intended to guide you through some of the things that you may need to consider along the way, as well as areas where your loved one may need assistance and how you can best support them. It is based on queries and concerns that we support families with on a regular basis. In our experience, the information you need and the emotions you go through will change as you and your loved one go through the different stages of imprisonment overseas; from the anxiety of the initial arrest and detention, to a gradual acceptance of

“I never thought my brother would end up in prison; no parent rears their kids to end up in situations like this, my family certainly didn't. Families have done nothing wrong. I know my brother has done wrong and he is serving his prison sentence but we have done nothing wrong and yet we're suffering.”

the prison sentence, to the excitement and uncertainty of preparing for release.

Each stage brings its own challenges but the ICPO will be there to support you and your loved one throughout this difficult journey.





1.1 The legal process

My loved one has been arrested. What happens now?

You may be contacted by your loved one directly when they have been arrested or you may be notified by the Department of Foreign Affairs, if your loved one has asked that they inform you.

When arrested, your loved one is entitled to have the local Irish embassy or consulate informed of their arrest. This should happen without delay (according to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations), however, in practice the timeframes vary greatly from country to country. It is likely that you will only

Each stage brings its own challenges but the ICPO will be there to support you and your loved one through this difficult journey.

be told by the Department of Foreign Affairs about your loved one's arrest if they have given them permission to tell you. Sometimes families find out about an arrest from the person's friends.

If they have just been arrested, they may be detained in a police station.

If the alleged offence was committed in another country than the one your loved one is currently in, they may be detained pending extradition (transfer) to that country to face trial for the offence. In some cases, they may get bail,

which means they are not required to be in prison while they are awaiting trial. Bail is unusual in most cases involving foreigners, as a judge may consider them a 'flight risk', meaning they may

leave the country before they go to court.

The trial is where all the evidence is presented and your loved one will either be convicted (found guilty) or not (not guilty/acquitted). If they are found guilty, they will then be sentenced. This usually happens on a different day in court, after the trial has finished. Once sentenced they will then be brought to prison to serve their sentence. If they have been in prison since the time of their arrest (remanded in custody) this time should be taken into account and deducted from the sentence period. For example, if your loved one is sentenced to four years and they spent six months in custody on remand they should only serve a further three years and six months.



If your loved one has been convicted, they may appeal their conviction. They may also appeal the sentence they have been handed down. Decisions about appealing convictions or sentences need to be considered carefully in close consultation with your loved one's lawyer.



Try to find out as much as you can about your loved one's rights when they are arrested in a foreign country. The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCO) produces guides that can be helpful in understanding imprisonment abroad. You can access these guides on the ICPO website here: icpo.ie/prisoner-packs.

Fair Trials (fairtrials.org) is an international organisation that campaigns on issues that threaten the right to a fair trial or reinforce discrimination and inequality in criminal justice. Fair Trials has an excellent guide on the *Dos and don'ts after arrest* and the following is a brief summary of their recommendations:

- If the local consulate or embassy has not already been informed of your loved one's arrest, make contact with the relevant consulate/embassy or inform the Department of Foreign Affairs at 01-4082000 (ask to speak to Consular Assistance)
- If you can, get as much detail from your loved one as possible about their arrest including date of arrest, charges against them, where they are being detained and their prisoner number
- Advise your loved one to get a lawyer and offer to assist them if this is something you are able to do

- Advise your loved one to request an interpreter if they do not speak the local language fluently and recommend they not sign anything that they do not understand. If they are being asked to sign a document in a language they do not understand, advise them to request a translated version
- Advise your loved one to be cautious about relying on fellow prisoners for translation – they may not understand the document properly or they may deliberately mislead your loved one. It is usually advisable for your loved one to share as little as possible about their charges or details of the case with other prisoners
- If your family member has a health or medical issue, ensure they inform the prison authorities and that you inform the Department of Foreign Affairs or the ICPO
- If they have been mistreated or tortured, advise your loved one to keep a record of what happened including dates, times and people present.

Visit the Fair Trials website to access the *Dos and don'ts after arrest* or ask your ICPO caseworker for a copy of this guide. It is also available here: fairtrials.org/articles/information-and-toolkits/faq-dos-and-donts-after-arrest.



What can I do?

When your loved one is arrested overseas it can feel as if you are completely powerless and are unable to do anything to help. While you cannot change the situation they find themselves in, there are a number of practical things you can do to help them. In fact, you are probably doing many of them already – including consulting this booklet for help!

- Keep in regular contact with your ICPO caseworker
- Speak to the Department of Foreign Affairs or the local embassy/consulate or, if you prefer, ICPO can do this on your behalf. *Please be aware that both ICPO and DFA are bound by confidentiality and data protection laws and can only share information about your loved one if your loved one has given permission to do so*
- Work on setting up lines of communication. ICPO can advise you on this, and further information is provided on certain countries in section 1.2
- Explore the possibility of sending your loved one a small amount of money to help with the cost of phone calls, stamps and basic necessities such as toiletries, if you are in a position to do so (noting it is important not to send large amounts of money as this can attract unwanted attention in the prison). Clothes are usually handed in at the prison. They may be restrictions on what can be sent by the post but these can be explored. This is more straightforward in some countries compared to others but again speak to your ICPO caseworker for further advice on this
- Look into legal representation, if you are in a position to do so, or encourage your loved one to do so if they haven't already (further information on legal representation is provided in the next section).

While the above actions might feel like small actions in comparison to the difficulties you and your family are facing, they are important nonetheless and will help in the longer term.

It is common to feel as if you aren't doing enough to help your loved one but it's crucial to recognise that there are limits to what you, or anyone else, can do in this situation.

A lot of the questions and concerns you have will be possible to resolve but it can take time. If you can be patient and not become too overwhelmed you will be better able to support your loved one.

It is common to feel as if you aren't doing enough to help your loved one but it's crucial to recognise that there are limits to what you, or anyone else, can do in this situation.

Do we need a lawyer?

One of the earliest decisions you and your loved one may be faced with is hiring legal representation (a lawyer, solicitor or barrister – the name and their roles differ depending on the country). Having someone defend you in court is essential in most cases and lawyers are best placed to advise you and your loved one on the local legal system. The ICPO cannot provide legal advice and we are unable to recommend any lawyers. The Irish embassy/consulate can usually provide a list of English-speaking local lawyers but they cannot

make recommendations. If the embassy/consulate is unable to provide a list of local lawyers please contact your ICPO caseworker for further information.

Hiring a lawyer is costly. In many countries, the person accused of an offence may be entitled to free legal representation (legal aid). If it is available, you should consider carefully whether this is the right option for your situation. Depending on the country,

legal aid can be of a similar standard to legal representation you would pay for privately. Unfortunately, the ICPO and the Irish embassy/consulate cannot assist you with legal fees.

A lawyer is responsible for preparing all of the documents that are required for the court case.

Fair Trials have a very helpful guide 'How to instruct a lawyer and prepare a defence' which can be accessed on their website: [fairtrials.org/articles/information-and-toolkits/faq-how-to-instruct-a-lawyer-and-prepare-a-defence](https://www.fairtrials.org/articles/information-and-toolkits/faq-how-to-instruct-a-lawyer-and-prepare-a-defence).

Please ask your ICPO caseworker for this information if you do not have access to the internet and we can send it to you by post.



How do I deal with the media?

The media are sometimes interested in certain cases, for example if they are serious or shocking in nature or if there is a local angle. This can be challenging to deal with as although the content will relate to your loved one and their (alleged) offences, very often, the media's attention is directed at the family. Social media can also cause considerable stress for families as content posted is often very negative, misleading and distressing. If you are active on social media, try to take regular breaks from it and consider limiting the time you spend on it if you are finding the content is becoming too overwhelming or upsetting.

There are advantages and disadvantages to media involvement and it is important that you and your loved

one have considered these carefully before engaging with the media.

It can be an opportunity to raise publicity about your story or to highlight injustices or unfair treatment, or to raise awareness about prison conditions in a particular country or the risks of not abiding by local laws and customs. However, it can also have a negative impact on you or your loved ones. Terms such as 'off the record' should also be treated with scepticism. It is impossible to control what gets published and reports may be inaccurate or exaggerated and not how you wanted your story to be told. It may draw unwanted attention to the prison/justice system in the country of imprisonment, which could have negative consequences for your loved one. In some cases, the coverage may

do more harm than good, for example by drawing attention to something that might otherwise have gotten very little attention. This can have a negative impact on your loved one's resettlement as stories and media interest can resurface once their sentence is finished.

The important thing to remember is that you do not have to speak to anyone from the media if you do not want to. If you are contacted by the media, you should be aware that everything you say can be published. It may be advisable to avoid making any comment or statement to the media, at least in the early stages of your loved one's arrest, until you have a full picture of what has happened. It may be that media coverage is more beneficial at a later stage, when pressure is required to achieve something.

Can my loved one transfer to a prison in Ireland?

Transferring from a prison in one country to another country is possible, but there are many conditions to doing so. The person seeking to transfer must be sentenced and all appeals must be final. Depending on the country, it can

take a few years to get to this point. The country your loved one is detained in must have signed up to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons in order for a transfer to be possible. There are 68 countries that are part of this international agreement, including the UK, EU member states, the United States of America, and Australia. Your ICPO caseworker can inform you whether the country where your loved one is in prison is a signatory to the Convention.

Other criteria your loved one must meet include being ordinarily resident in the country they wish to transfer to, and having at least six months left to serve, among others. The ICPO has a factsheet on repatriation which you can access on our website: icpo.ie/repatriation. Your ICPO caseworker can also send you a copy of this and can provide more information on the transfer process as we monitor numerous applications each year as they progress through the process.

It is important to note that obtaining permission to transfer from another country is a lengthy and complicated process. Applications can take two years or more.





My loved one is being deported. What does this mean?

When a person is convicted of a crime and sentenced, part of their punishment may also involve deportation. This means they will be forced to leave the country once their sentence is completed and there will be restrictions on whether and when they can re-enter that country again. Some countries have an early release system whereby the prisoner can be released early if they agree to be deported.

For some, deportation does not have a huge impact on their lives as they may have only been in the country of arrest on a temporary basis and would have planned to leave that country at some point. For others, it is a devastating experience. Their entire lives may be in that country, including family, friends and employment, and to be removed to another country is extremely challenging.

In some cases, a person may be deported even if they have lived in that country for most or all of their lives. This can happen where the person has not applied to become a citizen, and they are therefore considered eligible for deportation as other foreign prisoners are. Your loved one may be held in an immigration deportation centre before they are deported back home.

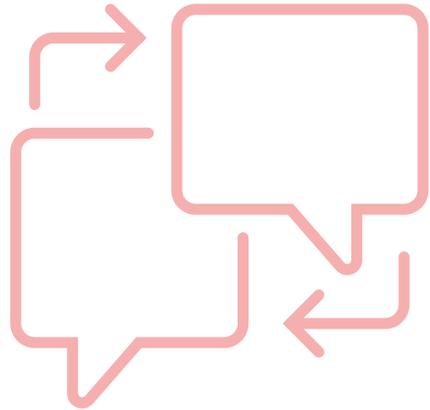
It may also be the case that your loved one is faced with expulsion; this is where the person is required to leave the country but must make their own travel arrangements. This can arise in European countries.

It is worth speaking to the ICPO well in advance of your loved one's deportation/expulsion so that we can help to put a plan in place for their resettlement.

1.2 Keeping in contact

Prison can be a lonely and isolating experience, not just for the prisoner but also for family members at home. You might feel you have to be strong for the rest of the family but everyone needs someone to talk to. It can be difficult to speak to other family members or friends about the situation as people feel embarrassed and ashamed. That said, using your family network to amplify communication with your loved one in prison has worked very well for some families. There is information on page 46 about ways you can get support so that you do not feel alone or isolated in dealing with this experience. Keep in regular contact with your ICPO caseworker, especially if you don't feel like you can speak to anyone at home.

The following section outlines ways you can remain in contact with your loved one in prison, if that is something you both want. Remember that it can be difficult for family members to remain in contact with their relative in prison. You may be feeling a range of emotions such as anger, disappointment and



shame towards your relative and this can make supporting them difficult. If you find yourself feeling like this do not put pressure on yourself; your feelings may change over time and you may feel better able to be in contact when the initial shock has subsided. It does not make you a bad person if you do not feel able to engage with them. The ICPO is a source of contact for them and may be able to organise another form of contact for them, such as a penfriend.

Please note that the following information and advice is general and may not apply in the country where your loved one is in prison.





Letters

While certainly a slower option compared to other forms of communication available, letters remain an important part of prisoners' contact with the outside world. In 2021 over 2,000 letters were exchanged between ICPO staff and clients. Generally, prisoners are allowed to write and receive letters even if they do not have access to other forms of communication, although there may be limits on how many letters they can send/receive.

To write to your loved one you will need their prison number and the address of the prison. If you do not already have this, ICPO or the Department of Foreign Affairs may be able to provide you with the details. Include your own name and address on the envelope too, as some prisons will not accept mail or pass it on to your loved one without this.

If your loved one is in prison in the United States it is especially important to check in advance for rules about sending letters; some prisons,

for example, don't accept letters on coloured paper. The address for correspondence could also be different to the geographical or street address, as some prisons use a PO Box or a central sorting address. Some prisons don't accept any kind of labels or stickers, including stamps. If this is the case, you can get your letter franked at the post office. If you can, check the prison website before sending anything or speak to your ICPO caseworker.

It can be difficult to know where to start when writing a letter. It is not something many people do in their day-to-day lives and you may never have had a reason before now to write a letter to your loved one. Try not to worry about what to write; just imagine you are having a conversation with your loved one and that just because it is written down doesn't mean it has to be formal or impersonal. Remember that you know your loved one and you know their interests, their likes and dislikes. Family members often worry about upsetting their loved one by telling them any good news or what they have been doing. You are the best judge of this but generally people in prison are happy to hear some local news, find out how other family members or friends are and hear about how things are at home. The only area to avoid discussing in letters is the alleged offence or other circumstances relating to their case,

especially if your loved one has not stood trial yet. This can be difficult, especially if this is the only form of communication you have with your loved one, but as letters are opened and checked by prison staff it is better to avoid writing about anything that could compromise them or their case in any way. Instead, you should seek to speak to your loved one's lawyer about these matters. Remember that you do not have to write a very long and well thought-out letter; your loved one will be happy to hear from you regardless of the length of your letter.

Phone calls

Many prisons around the world allow prisoners to make phone calls. Generally, they will need to pay for calls and the cost of international calls can be very expensive. It is very unlikely that you will be able to phone your relative directly. In most prisons, calls are monitored and recorded which may

limit your loved one's ability to speak freely about personal matters or their legal proceedings.

It is possible to reduce the costs for your loved one by renting a Skype number that is a local number to the prison but is diverted to your phone. For more on how to set this up see the information panel on the next page.

UK: Prisoners are allowed to phone friends and family that they have on an approved contacts list. When a person enters prison they will be given the opportunity to submit numbers to be added to their list and security staff may ring these numbers to check them before they are approved. It can take a few days for a prisoner's list to be set up which may mean your family member cannot call you immediately.

For other countries, please contact your ICPO caseworker who can advise you on the rules depending on where your family member is in prison.



Video calls

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and restrictions on in-person visits to prisoners, many prisons around the world now offer video calls. For England and Wales these are conducted through one of two apps, either *Prison Video* or *Purple Visits*. To find out which app your loved one's prison uses, visit the prison's webpage which can be found here: gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales. You need to use a smart phone or a tablet for video calls. Other countries have their own systems for video calls, such as *Zoom* and *Skype* in Australia, *Getting Out* and *JPAY* in the US, and the *Line* app in Thailand, so please speak to your ICPO caseworker for more information.

Emails

Email contact between prisoners and their family and friends is possible in some countries. In the UK *Email a Prisoner* is used across almost all prisons. Visit: emailprisoner.com to check that the prison your loved one is in operates this system. You will need to set up an account and add credit. There is a charge of £0.40 per email sent to a prisoner and you can include an option to receive a reply from the prisoner for an extra £0.25 (there is no cost to the prisoner). It is possible to attach photos or pictures in most prisons.

The same system is available in some prisons in Australia. Visit: emailprisoner.com.au to find out if it is operating in the prison your family member is detained in. It costs

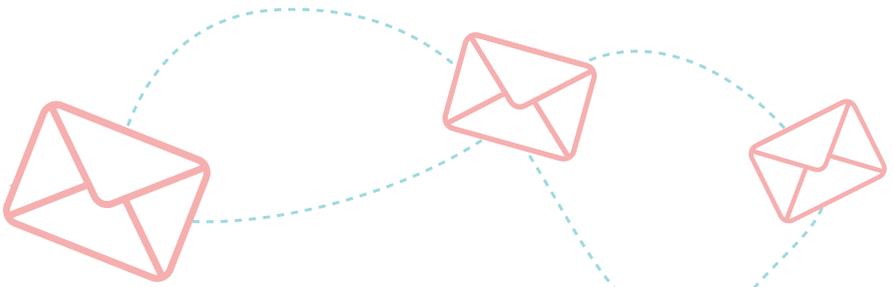
Setting up a Skype number

- Visit: skype.com and look for the Skype Number tab
- Select the country you want to buy the Skype number in (i.e. the country where your loved one is in prison)
- A local number will appear and you will be asked to log in to your account (or to set up an account if you don't have one already) to purchase this number
- You choose whether to sign up for a month, three months or twelve



months. The monthly rate is cheapest if you sign up for twelve months

- You then enter your payment details and, depending on the country, you may have to upload ID/proof of address.



AUD\$0.95 to send a message, AUD\$0.75 if you request a reply and AUD\$0.65 per photo uploaded (not available in all participating prisons).

There are a number of different services operating across the United States. *JPAY*, *Corrlinks* and *Connect Network* are some of the providers that facilitate email contact (as well as video calls and money transfers) but it will depend on the prison and the state your family member is detained in. Consult their websites for a list of prisons they operate in or speak to your ICPO caseworker. There are also some services that facilitate photos or personalised postcards to be sent to prisoners. These include *Flikshop* (photo postcards): flikshop.com, *Pelipost* (photos): pelipost.com and *Ameelio* (free photos and letters): ameelio.org.

Visits

Visits can be an important part of supporting your loved one during their sentence. However, it can be expensive to travel overseas and there can be other factors, such as not speaking the local language, which can make it difficult for family members to visit.

If you are able to afford a visit to your loved one in prison, there are many practical things to take into account:

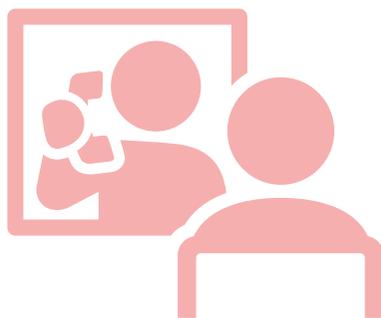
- Give yourself plenty of time in advance of your visit to plan and organise the trip
- Allow time to obtain permission from the prison to visit and be prepared to provide additional documentation if requested such as ID, proof of address, proof of relationship to the person in prison
- Book your travel and accommodation as far in advance as possible to keep the costs down
- Try to book flexible options for travel and accommodation so that if there are any last-minute changes you can rearrange with little or no cost
- Ensure that you check the visiting hours in advance of booking flights or other transport as prisons usually operate set times for visits
- Additional visits may be granted if the prison is aware that you have

travelled from overseas so ask your loved one to look into this well in advance of your visit so that you can factor this into your bookings

- Many families like to attend their loved one's trial but consider whether this is actually the best time to visit. Court dates can be postponed at short notice, and it may not be possible to get time with them except for seeing them in Court.

Before undertaking a visit, it is also important to consider the emotional impact of seeing your loved one in prison. Remember that:

- They may be in prison uniform or they may be restricted in some way e.g. behind glass
- Their appearance may be different: their hair might be cut in a different way, they may have grown facial hair, they may be thinner
- Leaving them at the end of the visit can be very difficult, particularly if you and your loved one know it might be some time before you see each other again
- Bringing children with you can alter the experience and is something you should consider carefully. There is more information on visiting with children on pages 51-52
- Sometimes the person in prison will not want their family to visit them in prison and while this may be difficult for you, it is something you should



respect. It is very likely your loved one will have thought long and hard about this so if they ask you not to visit it is probably something they have considered carefully. If you go against your loved one's wishes they may refuse to see you, which is likely to be very disappointing for you, and may cause strain in your relationship. However, you may want to continue to offer to visit them as your loved one may change their mind at some point. ICPO may be able to support families with limited income to visit their family member overseas with a travel grant. Please contact your caseworker for more information. Families in receipt of social welfare can apply for an Additional Needs Payment through their local Community Welfare Officer for financial support to visit their loved one in the UK. ICPO can provide you with information and assistance to prepare your application. A detailed guide on prison visits is also available on the ICPO website: icpo.ie/consular-area.

Visiting for the first time

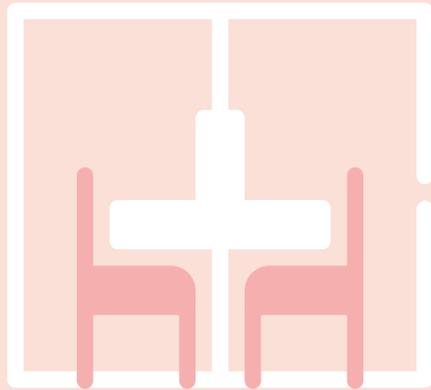
Your first time visiting a prison can be a daunting experience. Many people will feel anxious and worried about this but knowing what is ahead of you is key to managing those feelings. While there are many practical things to remember when visiting a prison, the procedures are somewhat similar to those you would experience going through the airport. The better prepared you are in advance the less stressful the experience will be.

- ✓ Ensure that you leave plenty of time to reach the prison so that if transport takes longer or you get lost, you will not risk missing the visit
- ✓ When you arrive, ensure you have ID and any other documentation that is required

- ✓ You will more than likely have to leave your belongings, including your bag, wallet, phone etc., in a locker for the duration of a visit. Make sure you have coins in case you need to pay for the locker. Some prisons don't have lockers and expect you to leave your belongings in your car or elsewhere
- ✓ Ensure you are dressed appropriately for the visit. Many prisons will have a guide for what is acceptable or not and can enforce this strictly for both men and women. This is particularly true in the US
- ✓ You will be searched before being allowed to enter the visiting room. This might involve a pat down by a prison officer and passing through a metal detector, while your belongings go through a scanner



- ✓ If you wear a bra, you may want to consider wearing a non-wired or sports bra to minimise the chance of setting off the metal detector, however even zips or other metal parts of clothing can set them off so it might not be possible to avoid this entirely
- ✓ There may be sniffer dogs on hand to search for drugs. They should be under the control of the prison officers and are generally well trained
- ✓ Prisons all have very different visiting rooms. Some are large open rooms with small tables for you and your loved one to sit at (common in the UK); others have long tables and benches and you will be sitting opposite your loved one (common in US). There may be a screen between you and your loved one and you might have to use a handset to speak to them. If you can find out ahead of your visit what the visiting set up is it will help you to be more prepared. Your loved one may be seated before you arrive or they may be brought in after you are seated
- ✓ Try to find out in advance how much contact is allowed with your loved one so that you are not disappointed if it is a non-contact visit for example
- ✓ In some countries there are different types of visits for different categories of people. Conjugal visits



are permitted in many European countries but evidence of being married or in a civil partnership is required

- ✓ Try to find out in advance how long the visit will last, so that you have a realistic sense of how long you will have with your loved one
- ✓ You may be allowed to bring in coins or a debit/credit card to pay for snacks and drinks during the visit
- ✓ Expect delays and try to be patient – it can take time to process visitors. You may have some time to wait before being allowed into the visiting area. Most prisons have a waiting room but if not, you will be expected to wait outside
- ✓ Speak to your ICPO caseworker in advance of and after the visit. Visits bring up many emotions, especially early on, and it can be helpful to talk to someone afterwards to help you process these.

My first visit to my brother in prison in the UK

The first visit to see my brother in prison in the UK will be an experience I will never forget. I never felt so unsure of anything, millions of questions going through my head ... For me the not knowing what to expect was the most frightening thing of all. Being honest, I was so embarrassed by all of this I felt people were judging me and I hated every second of it.

The practical side of me kicked in, arranging flights, accommodation, documents needed for visit etc. Once there I didn't sleep all night; the next day I embarked on the longest journey ever. The nearer I got to the prison the sicker I felt. I found the prison with the big walls, the barbed wire, the cold-looking building that will stay imprinted on my mind forever.

There was a building by the gate called the family reception. I went into this shocked to see so many people, especially children. It was not what I expected at all ... I was so embarrassed, to be honest, thinking everyone knows but forgetting everyone was here for exactly the same reason.

I gave my name and went through the process – photo taken, locker given, coins in bag etc. I waited to be called. An officer led the way through what I can only describe as hell; the big gates, the sound of those keys being turned, the barbed wire, the humiliation, the thoughts of my brother in this dump ... Next the scanners

and then sniffer dogs, all the while your heart is pounding in your chest and you are sweating not knowing what the hell is happening here. Dreading that the dog will stop in front of you despite knowing he has no reason to.

On entering the hall where I was to meet my brother I was hit by another wave of sadness. I took my seat and waited for what felt like an eternity and then he came through another key turning door looking like death warmed up and I was so angry, relieved, confused even.

The meeting started late because of the process of getting in. I got tea etc. for my brother and we chatted; I hated that you had to whisper and pretend like all was ok when it clearly wasn't. All too soon they were calling time and I was annoyed that I didn't get the full two hours I was entitled to having travelled so far.

After leaving the building that will be forever imprinted in my mind, I had such a headache and a pain in my chest. I walked right out in front of traffic and thankfully it was slow enough that I had time to pull back once they blew the horn on the car. This just added to how absolutely awful this whole experience was from start to finish.

But thankfully as each visit went on the experience did get easier. The big key-turning doors are not so daunting anymore ...

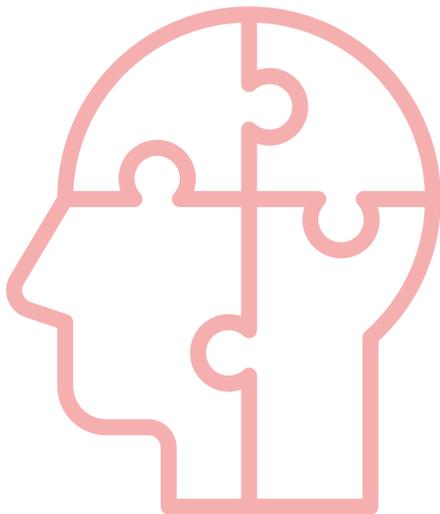
1.3 Your loved one's health and well-being in prison

People in prison often have existing health issues that need to be looked after while they are serving their sentence, or they may develop health problems while they are in prison. These can be physical illnesses such as heart conditions or diabetes or mental illnesses such as depression or schizophrenia. Each are equally as important as the other and deserve to be treated with equal seriousness and care. However, the quality of prison health care around the world differs greatly and how illnesses are understood and treated varies.

It can be difficult to deal with if your loved one develops physical or mental health issues while in prison. Their symptoms may be unfamiliar to you and could affect their behaviour and mood. This section aims to guide you through the supports that may be available for your loved one in prison and to equip you with information so that you can support them as best you can, recognising that the physical separation and distance places limits on what you can do.

What you can do if your loved one has a health concern or requires medication:

- It is essential that you mention this as soon as possible to your ICPO caseworker. We can work with the



prison or the local embassy or consulate to advocate for medical treatment for your loved one

- If your loved one requires urgent medical care and is unable to pay for it, ICPO may be able to provide a medical grant to assist with the costs of treatment
- Advise your loved one to visit the prison doctor/nurse to discuss the issues they are experiencing
- Encourage them to avail of mental health supports if available. In some countries, such as the UK, prisoners can call the Samaritans helpline or speak to a 'Listener' within the prison – this is another prisoner who has been trained in counselling skills
- If you are worried that your loved one is at risk of suicide or self harm you should contact the prison directly to inform them of your



concerns. If your loved one is in prison in England or Wales you can contact the Safer Custody phonenumber (the number can be found on the prison webpage). If you have trouble contacting the prison or do not speak the language, please inform your ICPO caseworker or the Consular Assistance team in the Department of Foreign Affairs on 00 353 1408200.

Mental Health

Prison is a difficult environment to live in and it can be damaging to prisoners' mental health. While you cannot change their environment, you can support them and encourage them to proactively look after their mental health and well-being.

- If your loved one does not already have a copy of *Beo Beathach: Alive and Well*, please ask for a copy by contacting the ICPO Maynooth Office on 01-5053156

- Encourage them to look after themselves physically by looking after their personal hygiene, eating well, and exercising or getting fresh air
- Keep in touch with your loved one and ask other friends and family to do so too. This will help your loved one feel connected and not forgotten. There are lots of ways to keep in touch including letters, phone calls, emails and video calls (depending on where they are in prison) as outlined in section 1.2
- Encourage your loved one to seek support within the prison, if available. This could be by speaking to a social worker, chaplain, or someone in the medical/healthcare staff
- Suggest they try learning a new skill, a hobby or a trade. This can help to pass the time and build your loved one's confidence. There are many things that can be done from a prison

The ICPO has produced a guidebook on well-being in prison called *Beo Beathach: Alive and Well*. The idea of the guide is to help prisoners cope better with their sentences. It provides practical exercises and activities which prisoners can use, in their cells, to help with their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. It also gives information on different things they can do for their own personal development, such as improving their reading and writing skills, art and languages.



cell, such as learning a new language, crafting, art, or puzzles and the ICPO can send your loved one the materials they need (depending on prison rules)

- Help your loved one to make plans and set goals. Having something to work towards gives people a sense of purpose and focus, which can help to alleviate some of the boredom and monotony of prison life
- Advise your loved one to keep in contact with their ICPO caseworker. Having contact with a support organisation on the outside can be a lifeline
- Encourage your loved one to explore activities such as yoga, meditation and mindfulness. These are beneficial techniques to help deal with the stresses of being in prison and are easy to practice in a cell. ICPO can provide materials and other resources that can help guide your loved one through these.

Substance Abuse

Illegal substances, such as drugs, are often widely available in prisons. The pressures of being in prison can result in prisoners seeking out illegal substances, and this can be a challenge whether your family member has a history of drug use or alcohol dependency or not. However, it is not inevitable and many people complete their prison sentence without ever taking drugs. Drug or alcohol use in prison, if detected, can carry additional punishments and can result in prisoners building up debt. It goes without saying that it is better for both prisoners and their families if the prisoner can avoid illegal substances while in prison. It can be helpful for you to encourage your loved one to keep busy while serving their sentence, by taking up a hobby or going to the gym or, if available, getting a prison job.

If your family member enters prison with an addiction, they may be able to avail of a detox programme. However, places in these programmes are often

very limited and in some countries not available at all. Many prisons run AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) groups which can be helpful in coming to terms with addiction and moving towards recovery.

If you want to speak to someone about your family member's drug use you can:

- Contact ICPO
- Contact the HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline on 1800 459 459, email: helpline@hse.ie or visit: drugs.ie
- Attend a Family Support Network meeting – these are peer-based support groups that are available in locations around Ireland and run by various different community organisations. For more information visit: fsn.ie/directory-of-groups.

1.4 Financial supports

When a family member is imprisoned overseas it can have a significant impact on the household's finances. The person in prison may be the main earner for the family, and so the primary source of

income can suddenly come to an end. Even if there are other income streams available, there can be cost implications to supporting someone while in prison. While prisons in most countries provide for the basic necessities that a prisoner will need, having some additional money can make their time in prison more comfortable. Each person and family will be different, but the following are some costs that may need to be considered:

- Buying credit for phone calls to keep in touch
- Buying additional items in the prison shop which are not provided, such as certain toiletries
- Supplementing their diet by buying additional food in the prison shop
- In some less developed countries, prisoners have to pay for basic essentials such as clean water, a mattress to sleep on or even 'rent' for a cell
- Paying for travel and accommodation if you are visiting your family member.



When finances are limited, these additional costs can represent a huge strain on the family at home and may result in you having to make difficult choices. Very often, the choices may feel overwhelming and it may seem easier to just avoid making these decisions. If you are feeling like this it may be worth seeking independent advice and support to help you make decisions and feel more in control of your finances.

Sometimes the person in prison can be so consumed by their own situation that they do not consider the impact their imprisonment is having on their family. They may make demands that you are unable to meet, such as sending them more money than you can afford, or paying for legal fees, or visiting them more often than you are able to.

Remember that you can only do what you can do and you do not need to feel guilty for not being able to meet all of their requests.



Remember that you can only do what you can do and you do not need to feel guilty for not being able to meet all of their requests.

Talk to your ICPO caseworker if you are considering sending money to your loved one as they can provide you with suggestions and advice. The ICPO may be able to provide a Hardship Grant to your loved one if they are experiencing extreme hardship and family members are not able to support them financially.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help families experiencing financial difficulty. MABS

is a free and confidential service for people in Ireland and they have offices around the country. Their trained money advisors can:

- Help you deal with your debts and make out a budget
- Examine your income to make sure you are

not missing out on any of your entitlements

- Contact creditors on your behalf with offers of payment if you are not able to do it yourself
- Help you decide on the best way to make payments.

The MABS Helpline is 0818 072000 and is open Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m. Details of your local MABS office are available here: mabs.ie/about/find-a-mabs-office or by contacting your local Citizens Information Centre.



Sending money to your loved one

Very few prisons provide for all the needs of their prisoners. If you are in a position to send money to your family member it can make a significant difference to their physical and mental well-being. However, having too much money in a prisoner's account can attract unwanted attention so try to send a small but consistent amount on a regular basis so that your loved one knows when they will have money in their account and can budget based on this. Prisons usually set a maximum amount they will allow in a prisoner's account so please check with the prison, your loved one or the ICPO about this in advance of sending money.

There are many different ways of sending money to prisoners, depending on the country where they

are imprisoned. The following are some examples of payment systems but please contact your ICPO caseworker if you want information about other countries.

England and Wales: There is an online payment system for families/friends to transfer money to their loved ones: [gov.uk/send-prisoner-money](https://www.gov.uk/send-prisoner-money). You can only use this service if you have a debit card and you must have the person's prison number and date of birth. It is free and quick (the money is usually in a prisoner's account within three days). If you do not have a debit card or cannot use the internet, you can apply to the prison for an exemption by filling in a form and providing proof that you were refused a debit card. Please speak to the ICPO Family Support Officer if you would like assistance with this.



Legal Aid

When a person is arrested overseas, it is advisable to get legal representation (as discussed on page 15). They will be able to inform your loved one about the local legal process and provide legal advice. They may also be willing to provide information and updates to families. A state-appointed legal representative may be provided free of charge. However, this may depend on certain criteria being met – for example meeting an income threshold or the seriousness of the charges being faced. The alternative is to hire a lawyer/solicitor privately and pay for their services. However, the cost of doing so can be prohibitive. It should also be noted that in many developing countries there is no provision for free legal aid.

If you and your family member decide to hire a private lawyer/solicitor you may want to consider agreeing a

fee and payment schedule. Lawyers may look for an upfront payment before undertaking any work; if this is the case ensure you are clear what actions they will take and when they will take them. Wherever possible, insist on written agreements and provide only a partial upfront payment and agree to pay the remaining amount based on actions undertaken.

The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office produce very helpful guides to being in prison in a foreign country. Although intended for British citizens in prison overseas, they contain information on different aspects of the legal and prison system, including information on whether legal aid is provided in the country of your loved one's detention. They can be accessed on the ICPO website here: [icpo.ie/prisoner-packs](https://www.icpo.ie/prisoner-packs). Your ICPO caseworker can also send you a copy by email or post.

1.5 Consular assistance

The Department of Foreign Affairs through the Consular Assistance Team in Ireland, and through Irish embassies and consulates around the world, provides a range of help and support to Irish citizens overseas.

This is known as consular assistance. It includes advice and practical support offered to Irish citizens abroad who are in distress. Everyday examples of consular assistance would be helping Irish people abroad who have lost their passports, or offering advice and support to citizens in the unfortunate case of a death, serious accident or illness. It also includes providing assistance in cases of arrest or detention.

Regardless of the charges, all Irish citizens who are arrested or detained abroad are entitled to seek consular assistance from the resident or accredited Irish embassy or consulate, provided they entered that country on their Irish passport.

The Irish embassy or consulate will do all that is possible to ensure that the treatment afforded to a detained Irish citizen is not compromised in any way on account of being a foreign citizen in the host country. They also seek to ensure that Irish citizens are treated no less favourably than a local citizen would be treated if they had committed a similar offence.

Consular assistance provided to Irish prisoners abroad includes:

- ✓ Help with keeping in contact with family or friends
- ✓ Providing information about prison arrangements and arranging for funds sent by family/friends to be transferred to the prisoner
- ✓ Seeking to ensure the person is not discriminated against in any way on account of their nationality
- ✓ Seeking to ensure access to appropriate legal representation
- ✓ Ensuring local authorities fulfil their obligations in relation to the person's health and safety.

Consular assistance does not include:

- ✗ Getting the person out of prison, paying fines or giving the arresting authorities guarantees on their behalf
- ✗ Offering legal advice, formally recommending or paying for legal representation
- ✗ Providing financial support – they can only transfer funds from family and friends, where possible.

Any information provided to the Consular Assistance Team or the embassy or consulate is treated in a **strictly confidential** manner. They will not share information about an Irish citizen in detention, even to family, without the consent of the prisoner. The Department has no money or



budget available to financially support detained Irish citizens overseas directly. However, the Consular Assistance Unit and the relevant embassy or consulate will transfer funds to a prisoner's account on behalf of families, via the Advance of Funds process.

Embassies and consulates will maintain close and proactive contact with Irish prisoners detained in the jurisdiction of their consular responsibility, in as far as this is possible and subject to the wishes of the prisoner. Irish detainees retain the right to refuse all offers of contact, support and consular assistance offered by Department of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, the embassy or consulate ensures that their contact details are left with the prison authorities in the event that assistance or support is required at a future time.

While the amount of assistance that can be provided might be limited by where the person is incarcerated, it is the right of any Irish citizen overseas to seek consular assistance, if they need it.

In many situations the ICPO and the local embassy/consulate work closely together to provide assistance to the person in prison. It can be beneficial for your loved one to engage with the local embassy or consulate as their presence in the country/region may mean they can provide local information and insights which the ICPO may not have access to. This is especially the case in countries where there are few Irish prisoners and where information on the prison system may not be widely available. In countries where English is not the first language it can also be advantageous to have the local embassy or consulate involved. If your loved one is experiencing difficulties in prison (for example not getting access to medication or being discriminated against) the ICPO can make representation on their behalf to the prison authorities, however it is likely to be more impactful if done in conjunction with the local embassy/consulate.

SECTION 2

Looking after yourself when a family member is in prison



When a member of your family is in prison overseas it can feel like your world has been turned upside down. You may have trouble sleeping and eating and doing normal daily tasks. Coping with the emotions involved can be challenging and draining for you and other family members. Many people experience feelings of loss and grief when their family member is imprisoned overseas. While you may still have some form of contact with them, such as telephone calls or video visits, the fact that you cannot easily visit them and see them in person can create a very real sense of loss.

Almost all families will experience anxiety and concern

Here are some feelings that families might initially experience:

- **Disbelief:** ‘This must all be a big mistake and they’ll be released soon.’
- **Stress and worry:** ‘Are they OK? Are they safe?’
- **Panic and loss of control:** ‘I don’t know how to help them.’
- **Intense emotional pain:** Thinking about separation and their future.
- **Anger:** ‘I can’t believe they’ve gone and done this!’
- **Self-blame:** ‘Why didn’t I tell them to stay away from those people? I knew they were trouble.’
- **Uncertainty:** At the start, it can be hard to get news on how your family member is or even the charges they are facing.
- **Shame:** ‘What will people think of our family?’
- **Relief:** ‘At least now I know where they are. Maybe this will finally be the wakeup call they need to turn their life around.’
- **Low mood or depressed:** ‘I can’t face getting up in the morning.’
- **Distancing from the person:** ‘I can’t believe they’ve done this to us again. This is the final straw.’

for their family member in prison. This can be most severe at the start of a sentence or when there are significant events happening, such as the trial or sentencing.

We frequently hear from families we work with that they feel a lot of shame about the situation and struggle to tell other family members and friends about what is happening. Given the stigma associated with imprisonment generally it is understandable that people don't want to share the information but it can lead to people feeling isolated and alone as they try to cope with it on their own.

The range of feelings and emotions that you experience while your family member is in prison may change over time. What is important to remember is that feelings are not permanent; whatever you are feeling, you will not feel like this forever.

Remind yourself of the following when you are feeling overwhelmed:

- You can still love and support your loved one but not like what they

did and the situation they find themselves in

- You have experienced something extremely traumatic and you are allowed to cry and feel completely devastated by what has happened
- This situation can happen to anyone
- You are not to blame for a decision that another adult has taken.



The ICPO has worked with countless families over the past decades and in our experience, no matter how hard it may seem at times, families do find ways to cope and get through the experience.

There are many things that can help you to manage the very real emotions you will go through at different stages of your family member's sentence. The following are suggestions to help you cope and move forward.





2.1 Practising self-care

Focus on your own needs

First and foremost, you have to look after yourself. It can be hard to focus on your own needs when

you are concerned about your loved one but if you are not looking after yourself you will be less able to look after your family member in prison and other family members.

We wouldn't expect a car to keep running without looking after it and as people, we are no different. Try to check in with yourself regularly to ensure you are managing to function and to recognise times when you are really struggling and need extra support. These signs are different for everyone but might include things like racing thoughts, difficulty sleeping, being

irritable, feeling like crying a lot, having difficulty getting up in the morning and not caring about things that you usually love doing.

It is normal to experience immense

stress and changes in your usual behaviour when you are first dealing with the news of your family member being in prison overseas. If you experience this over a prolonged period of time however it can affect your mental health, resulting in low motivation, poor sleep and anxiety, as

well as affecting your physical health by increasing blood pressure, lowering immunity, and causing fatigue.

Get active outdoors

Being active in the outdoors is great for improving your physical and mental well-being. It has been shown to reduce

The range of feelings and emotions that you experience while your family member is in prison may change over time. What is important to remember is that feelings are not permanent; whatever you are feeling, you will not feel like this forever.



anxiety and stress, improve your mood and increase self-esteem. Going for a walk or cycle, or playing sports, can provide a welcome distraction from your worries.

Even if you don't feel able to exercise, sometimes just being outdoors and spending some quality time in nature can have a positive impact on your mood and sense of well-being. Try taking some time to just sit and take in your surroundings, whether that is watching ducks on the canal, walking along a beach or sitting on a bench in a park.

Get enough sleep

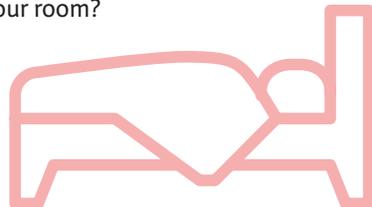
Everyone is different in terms of how much sleep they need but experts generally recommend between seven and nine hours' sleep each night. This is easier said than done when you are worried and stressed about your family member in prison. However, there may be small adjustments you can make to your routine that can help you to get a good night's sleep.

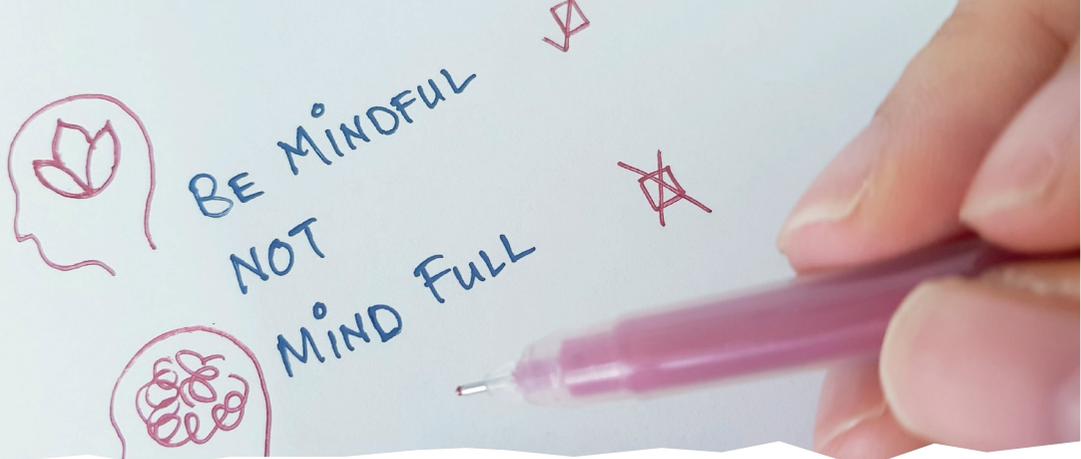
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day

- Avoid screens for an hour before bed
- Make sure your bedroom is completely dark
- Reduce your intake of caffeine and cut out caffeinated drinks in the afternoon and evening.

It might be worth keeping a sleep diary to help you identify things in your routine that may be impacting on getting a good night's sleep. Think about the following and keep a record of your responses for a week or ten days, so that you can spot behaviours that may need to change:

- What time did you go to bed? How long did it take to get to sleep? How many times did you wake? What time did you wake? How much did you sleep in total? What did you eat/drink before bed? What activities did you do before bed? What was the temperature, noise and light like in your room?





Do something you enjoy

Try to make time on a regular basis to do something you enjoy. It can be easy to forget about the small things in life that give you comfort when you are feeling overwhelmed, but carving out some time to spend on a hobby or with a friend can make a huge difference to your mood and well-being. Making a plan to do something you enjoy will give you something to look forward to. Family members often say they feel guilty if they are enjoying themselves while their loved one is in prison, but remember that they may feel relieved and less guilty about the pain they have caused you if you can continue doing the things you enjoy.

Connect with others

Getting support from family and friends as you journey through difficult times can give you the strength and energy you need to keep going. Build a small network of trusted friends and/or family members who you know you can rely on

‘You cannot pour from an empty cup – look after yourself first.’

for support. If you have a lot of family and friends who want to help, try to divide up tasks and give people specific areas of responsibility, such as sending books, updating other family members, sending money, etc. This will help avoid all of the contact falling to one person, which can be draining.

If you don't have support from family or friends, there are other places where you can turn. There are many helplines you can contact, such as the *Samaritans* on 116123 or a new text-support service called *Text About It*, where you just text HELLO to 50808 to start a conversation with a trained volunteer. It's free, available 24/7 and is for anyone feeling overwhelmed or in crisis. ICPO organises monthly online Family Coffee Mornings and two in-person Family Information Days a year for all our clients' families. The events are friendly

spaces where families going through similar experiences can exchange experiences and coping strategies. You can also meet and talk to ICPO staff. We have had very positive feedback from families who have attended. They found the events to be helpful, informative and reassuring. Please contact your caseworker for more information.

If you spend a lot of time following social media, try to take regular breaks from it or think about setting a time limit on how long you spend on it each day.

Faith and spirituality

Spirituality means different things to different people. It may relate to a person's religion or their faith or it may be more about a person's values and how they understand the world and their place in it. However you understand it, a person's faith or spirituality can be a source of comfort in times of difficulty, helping people to cope with the challenges and stresses that they face. It can contribute to a person's sense of overall well-being as it can give people a sense of purpose and a feeling of being connected to

something bigger than themselves. It is normal to feel abandoned or let down by your beliefs in times of difficulty, but it is often at the most challenging of times that people find great strength in connecting with their faith or spirituality.

A Prayer for Comfort and Strength

Every day I need you Lord, but this day especially,
I need some extra strength to face whatever is to be.
This day, more than any day, I need to feel you near,
To fortify my courage and to overcome my fear.
By myself, I cannot meet
The challenge of the hour,
There are times when humans help,
But we need a higher power
To assist us bear what must be borne,
and so dear Lord, I pray,
Hold on to my trembling hand
And be near me today.

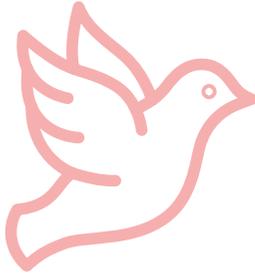
Pope St John XXIII



Connecting with faith and spirituality

Some people find strength in the practice of their faith by regularly attending Mass and/or reading prayers, poems and reflections which have helped them in the past. More often than not, what people are looking for when it comes to connecting with faith and spirituality is a measure of hope to help them deal with whatever life throws at them. Hope is what keeps us going especially when times are difficult.

We should always remember that we are not alone in our search for hope and meaning in life. There are people who can help us and they may be closer than we think. They may even be family members, relatives or friends. People are important. They help us realise that in having to deal with the anxieties and stresses of everyday life we are not on our own. Hope is intrinsic to our very being and we can all be people of hope for others. It has been said that it is only with friends that one can have hope in this adventure we call life (Philip Berrigan).



Prayer for Hope and Peace

God, by whose grace
we live, and move and have our
being,
enable us amid the turmoil of our
days to create a space into which
you might enter and find us, a space
where we may find hope and peace
in you.

*Fr Gerry McFlynn, ICPO Project
Manager*

ICPO Family Prayer

Lord, someone I love with all my
heart is in trouble,
and I don't know which way to turn.
I feel alone and isolated and I don't
know how much more I can take.
Give me the courage to get through
this day and all the days to come.
Give me strength to be here for my
family and for those who are here
with me.
Help me to be kind to myself and
not give in to blame and despair.
Give me something to laugh at, a
reason to smile,
and peace at the end of the day for
a restful sleep.
Amen.

Bernie Martin, ICPO Administrator

Speak to the ICPO

Check in with your ICPO caseworker on a regular basis. There doesn't have to be a particular reason or any development in relation to your loved one; it can be good to just speak to someone who understands. ICPO caseworkers are here to accompany you while your family member is in prison and after their release and are happy to make time for you whenever you need support. We will not judge, only listen and try to support you the best we can. We can often explain the system around arrest and detention in the country concerned and can point you towards resources that help. Gaining knowledge of the system may help you feel more at ease. ICPO may also be able to arrange a

“I really appreciate the opportunity to be myself at these meetings and not having to cover my situation; obviously I have family members who are not aware of my son's situation. A big thank you to all the family members who welcomed me, the compassion shown to me was so heart-warming, you have helped me so much in coming to terms with my situation.”

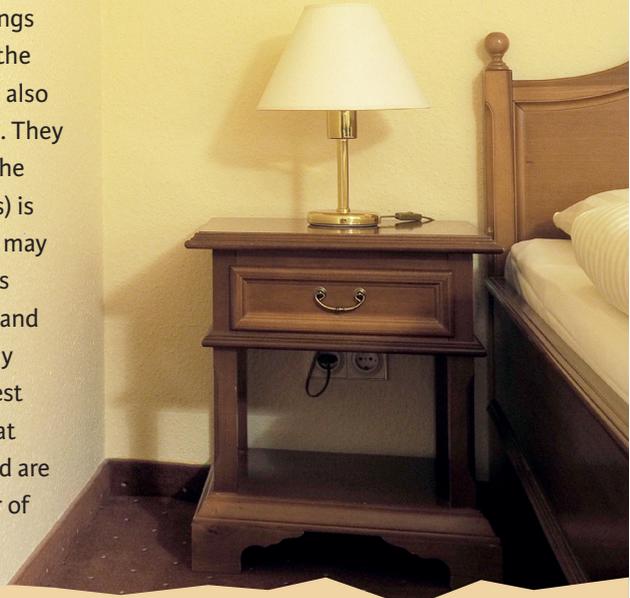
prison visitor for your loved one and meet you for a coffee and a chat where possible. You can always contact ICPO and speak to a caseworker as well as attend our virtual Coffee Mornings or our Family Information Days (more information on page 42).



2.2 The impact of a loved one being in prison on other family members

Looking after yourself is critical, not only so that you can sustain yourself and your loved one in prison but also for the sake of other family members. Siblings are often severely impacted – whether they are adult or child siblings – because they are not only feeling the loss of their sibling in prison but are also seeing the impact on their parent(s). They may also feel resentful at times, as the focus and attention of their parent(s) is solely on the person in prison. They may feel a variety of conflicting emotions and this can be a source of stress in and of itself. It is important that all family members try to have open and honest discussions with each other, and that worries and concerns that are shared are listened to respectfully without fear of them being dismissed.

“With the passing years, we fear we may never see our son again and the thought of this is heartbreaking. We feel like the whole family is being punished for the actions of our son.”



“Before my brother ended up in prison, we were lucky enough that we never had any other family member in prison so we never imagined how hard it could be. I really would hope no other family would have to go through what we have gone through. Elderly parents having to travel to the UK in the early hours of the morning for two- or three-day trips just to get a two-hour visit and then having to do the same journey home. My mam, she’s picked up a lot of illnesses along the way. She has spent three days in bed after visiting my brother because that’s how much it takes out of her. For my brother, he just wants to get out and take care of my mam, that’s all he’s thinking about. The effect it has had on our family ... My brother has lost a parent, our dad, while he was in prison; he had to deal with that on his own with no family.”

2.3 Additional support

There are a wide range of supports, information and tips available online on how to improve your mental health.

Minding Your Wellbeing is a HSE programme designed to help you look after your mental health and well-being. The programme is delivered through online videos that guide you through how to practise self-care, understand your thoughts, explore your emotions, build positive relationships and improve your resilience. Each video is about twenty minutes and there are five in total. To access this programme visit: www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/minding-your-wellbeing-programme.html.

There is also a range of great supports on:

- yourmentalhealth.ie
- mentalhealthireland.ie
- mindful.org/how-to-practice-mindfulness

There are many phone apps available to help with relaxation, sleep and anxiety. The following are available to download for free:

- **Calm, Smiling Mind and Headspace:**

These three apps all have guided meditations and mindfulness exercises which can help relieve stress, help us slow down our thoughts and breathing as well as encourage sleep. Smiling Mind has sections specifically for children, teenagers and adults



- **The Worry Box:** This app is aimed at people who worry a lot. It encourages people to question their thinking patterns and you can record and put your worries in a box on the app
- **Sleep With Me podcast:** This app is different as it encourages you to tune out from what is being said. The author tells stories which are meaningless and rambling, making it difficult to stay awake. Many users will testify that it is very hard to stay awake while listening to this one!

If you are feeling very down and struggling to cope, consider talking to your GP about a referral for counselling. Although there can be long waiting lists for counsellors there are some private organisations that offer accessible and low-cost counselling.

Let go of your stresses

A psychologist walked around a room while teaching stress management to an audience. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they would be asked the “half-empty or half-full” question. Instead, with a smile on her face, she inquired “How heavy is this glass of water?” Answers called out ranged from 8 oz. to 20 oz.

She replied, “The absolute weight doesn’t matter. It depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute, it’s not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I’ll have an ache in my arm. If I hold it for a day, my arm will feel numb and paralysed. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn’t change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes.”

She continued, “The stresses and worries in life are like that glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and they begin to hurt. And if you think about them all day long, you will feel paralysed – incapable of doing anything.”

It’s important to remember to let go of your stresses. As early in the evening as you can, put all your burdens down. Don’t carry them through the evening and into the night. Remember to put the glass down.



Author Unknown

2.4 Simple relaxation exercises

- **Deep breathing:** Take a deep breath for the count of four, hold for two and breath out for four. Imagine your belly is a balloon and inflate it when you breathe in and deflate when you breathe out
- **Visualisation:** Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Imagine you are in your favourite place. What can you see? What can you hear? What does it smell like? What are you touching? Maybe you are on your favourite beach, looking at the sea, hearing the waves and the birds, feeling the sand beneath your feet and smelling the sea
- **Grounding:** If in any moment you are feeling overwhelmed, run cold water over your hands, push your feet into the ground, push your hands together tightly, stretch, tense your muscles slowly, rub nice-smelling cream into your hands, or count backwards from ten.

SECTION 3

Supporting children with a parent in prison

The imprisonment of a parent is a challenging and painful situation for children. As their parent/caregiver it can be difficult to support them during this time. This section is dedicated to information and resources that can help children with a parent in prison.

3.1 Impact on children

Having a parent in prison can affect a child in a number of ways. The main impact is the separation from their parent. The child may experience loss or grief from their parent's absence. This loss can take different forms and change depending on the child and their age. Other impacts can include lower grades and concentration problems at school, stigma from peers, and emotional, psychological or physical health issues. The child may also feel guilty, embarrassed or responsible for their parents' absence, and worry about their well-being or safety. Such impacts are a normal response to parental imprisonment. Children may wish to protect the parent at home, or indeed the parent in prison, by not telling them how they are really coping. It is important that the parent does

not assume the child is doing fine and taking it all in their stride.

3.2 Talking to children about their parent's imprisonment

Disclosing parental imprisonment can be a very difficult and sensitive topic to discuss with children. Although it will be an upsetting conversation, honesty is usually the best policy rather than finding another explanation for the parent's absence. The child will likely find out the truth or sense that something is wrong. Even younger children notice and ask questions about their parent's absence. It is better that children hear it from their loved ones rather than finding out from their peers, neighbours or the media. When discussing the situation, use simple concepts and age-appropriate language for the parent's absence. Try to use explanations that are not too upsetting and that don't demonise the parent in prison. There are tools that you can use to





explain the situation in a child-friendly way such as *'My Story and Me'* books (details at end of section) that explain parental imprisonment with stories. The child might struggle to understand or accept the absence of their parent; this is normal and it may take time for them to process the information.

3.3 Supporting children

There are many ways that you can support children during this difficult time. The simplest thing you can do is answer their questions when they have any and make it known that they can ask you questions about their parent's absence at any time. On the other hand, if they do not want to talk about it try not to force the conversation.

Loss and grief

The child may experience a sense of loss and grief from their parent's imprisonment and go through the different stages of grief. It is not uncommon to feel grief when someone is absent, even though they are still

living. The different stages of grief include shock, denial, pain and guilt, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. During this time, you can support the child by explaining that what they are feeling is normal and give them time to adjust and process the news. There are child-friendly stories and videos explaining grief and parental incarceration that could be helpful to the child (PACT – Stories and videos: prisonadvice.org.uk/Pages/Category/for-children). The best thing you can do is to let the child know that you are there to support them.

Mental health

The child may struggle with the situation and face problems that you are incapable or unqualified to help them with such as mental health issues. In this case, do not hesitate to reach out to professionals such as therapists who can help the child cope with this painful situation. The following is a list of sources of support for children experiencing mental health difficulties:

- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):** The child will need a referral from a GP to access these services: hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs
- **Tusla:**
 - » *Family Resource Centre* (find the nearest centre): tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/family-resource-centres/find-family-resource-centre
 - » *Counselling*: tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/counselling
- **Mental Health Ireland:** mentalhealthireland.ie/get-support
- **Youth Work Ireland**
 - » *Here4U*: National listening service for teenagers: youthworkireland.ie/youth-work-centre/here4u1
 - » *Be Well*: identifying and addressing anxiety: youthworkireland.ie/youth-work-centre/be-well

3.4 Changes in the family

When a parent is in prison overseas, significant changes may occur within the household. If the parent was the main source of income for the household, the implications could be far-reaching and will likely be noticed by the child. These could include less spending money for food and clothes, cutting back on hobbies/extra-curricular activities and pocket-money, differences in childcare and possibly having to move to a different home.

Changes in childcare

The incarceration of a parent can result in childcare changes. If that parent was the primary or only carer for the child, other adults will have to become the new caregivers. The new primary caregivers are usually other family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles or siblings but it can vary depending on each family. The child will have to adapt to the new person(s) taking care of them along with their lifestyles. It may be challenging for both the child and their new caregiver(s) to adapt to this new life. It is important for the child to understand that their new caregiver is there to help them and take care of them during their parent's sentence. The child may feel anger and resentment towards their new caregiver as they associate that person with being away from their parent. Give them time and space to process this and ensure they know that the new caregiver is there for them if they need anything. Having a regular routine and dedicated time to play and see their friends can help the child to adjust and can be helpful when children are going through a difficult and uncertain period.



Moving house

Sometimes the imprisonment of a parent can lead to having to move to another home. This can be due to the loss of an income or changes in childcare. A move can be stressful and upsetting for a child. To help them adjust to a move, you can take the child to the new home and neighbourhood before the move (if possible) and show them around so they are familiar with their new home. Give the child as much information as possible on their home: the location, what they can do in the area and where they will be sleeping. This will help the child adjust more easily. Make it known to the child that leaving their old home doesn't mean friends will be left behind and that they can keep in touch after the move. For more information and children's books on moving house, please visit the Bright Horizons website: brighthouse.com/family-resources/Articles/E-News/moving-and-relocating-helping-you-and-your-child-cope.

3.5 Maintaining a relationship with the parent in prison

Having a parent in prison results in the physical absence of the parent. However, this does not mean that the relationship between the child and the parent must be non-existent. There are a range of ways that the child and their parent can keep in touch during their absence. Some of the options outlined below may not be available depending on the individual prison.

In-person visits

Visits to the prison can play an important role in the child and their parent maintaining their relationship. However, depending on the prison, the conditions and rules may be different. Some prisons will facilitate visits for children by having family-friendly areas for the visits, others may just have a visitor centre where all visitors go. In some cases, the visit will be a screened visit, which means there will be no physical contact with the parent and



their child. Before the visit, try to get as much information as possible about the visit and the prison to prepare your child in advance of the visit. There will be more complications for prison visits abroad and the rules and conditions of visitation may be very different to what would be expected in Ireland. Children may not enjoy visits or even want to go for a visit. If they do not wish to visit, that is okay, tell them they can ask for a visit when they feel comfortable.

This may result from boredom or the lack of child-friendly spaces within the prison (no physical contact, screened visits, noisy rooms, lack of privacy). Ask why they don't like or want to visit and see if there is anything you can do to accommodate them. Before a visit, prepare the child by explaining where you are going and the rules during the visits. For more information on preparing for a visit see pages 23–4.

Video calls

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, more prisons offer video calls to allow families to keep in touch. This can be a useful way to communicate with their parent especially if their parent is imprisoned far away from home. See page 22 for more information.

Phone calls

Calls are another way of keeping in touch during the parent's absence. If the child is old enough to speak and

understand, calls are a good way for the child to directly interact with their parent. Even if the child cannot yet speak, it can be beneficial for them to hear their parent's voice.



Letters

Written correspondence is another way of keeping in touch. Depending on the age of the child, it's a way for the parent to be up to date with the child's life and the child to communicate with their parent. If the child cannot read or write, it could be helpful to read the letter out loud and have the child reply with drawings or have them dictate their reply to another person that who can write it for them.

Other

Depending on the country and prison there are different services available to help children keep in touch with their parent. For example, some prisons offer the Storybook Dads/Mums service which allows parents to record stories for their children. Some prisons also organise family days where children and their parent can play. Please ensure you check with the prison for the different services they offer for families with children.



Links and resources

- **International Coalition for Children With Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP):** inccip.org
- **Barnardos:** barnardos.ie
- **Families Outside - Supporting Children and Young People:** familiesoutside.org.uk/professionals/young-people
- **iCare Sheets – Loss:** simplebooklet.com/icaresheetsloss#page=1
- **PACT – Stories and videos:** prisonadvice.org.uk/Pages/Category/for-children
- **PACT – Supporting my child:** prisonadvice.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Category/tell-my-child
- **PACT – Women Flip The Script:** prisonadvice.org.uk/women-flip-the-script
- **Prisoners’ families helpline (UK):** prisonersfamilies.org/useful-links
- **Storybooks Dads:** storybookdads.org.uk/participating-prisons
- **Spurgeons Children’s Charity:** spurgeons.org/our-services
- **Families Matter Too Booklet:** peerfamilysupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Families-Matter-Too-Booklet.pdf
- **Prisoners Abroad:** prisonersabroad.org.uk

SECTION 4

Coming home



The return of your loved one after a period of imprisonment overseas can be an exciting yet challenging time. It is a new start for both the person returning from prison and their family and an opportunity to rebuild family life. Feelings of insecurity and anxiety during this time are very common and it is natural to feel apprehensive about your loved one's return. You may wonder if prison has changed them, or if the relationship you have with them will be different, or how other family members will adjust.

Preparation is key to making the transition of your loved one returning home as successful as possible. The ICPO advises prisoners to start planning for their release six to twelve months ahead of their release date and families should consider speaking to their ICPO caseworker around the same time.

This section provides advice on how you can support and help your loved one when they return home after their sentence. The resources in this section do not necessarily apply to all families – you may not be in a position to help your family member with everything they need (whatever the reasons may be) and that is okay.

4.1 Helping your loved one prepare for release

Preparing for release requires time and organisation. This is especially the case when your loved one has spent a significant amount of time away from home. Prisons may offer support to prisoners to help them prepare for release but often foreign prisoners cannot avail of these services, leaving them more unprepared and at a greater disadvantage. This is why their plans

should be considered well in advance of their release date. Your loved one will likely have to complete most of the steps outlined below themselves but there are ways that you can support them during this time. You should encourage them to gather and keep any documentation they have in relation to their detention before they return home, as this can be helpful for accessing services once back in Ireland. For more information about resettlement in Northern Ireland, please contact your caseworker about referrals to organisations such as Niacro (niacro.co.uk) that can assist people returning to Northern Ireland.

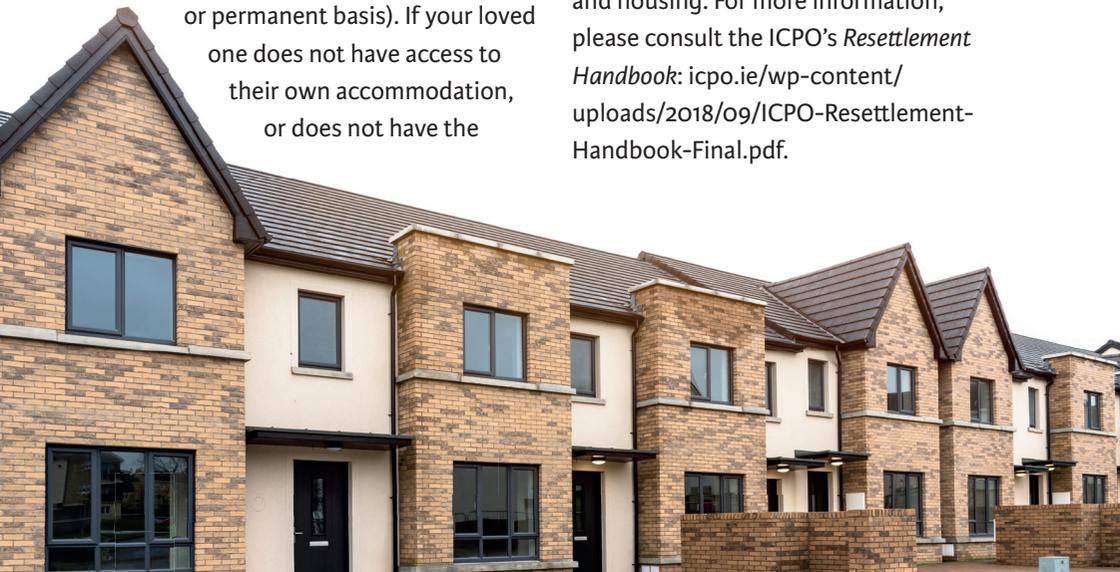
Housing/accommodation

Accommodation is a key part of rebuilding a person's life after a period in prison but it is one of the most challenging areas if your loved one is not returning to their own home or to your home (either on a temporary or permanent basis). If your loved one does not have access to their own accommodation, or does not have the

Please ask your ICPO caseworker for the ICPO's *Resettlement Handbook* if your loved one has not yet received one.



money to rent on the private market, they will likely have to access homeless services initially on their return. They will need to register with the local county or city council in order to join the social housing list. They will only be able to register with a council where they can prove a local connection. If you live in social housing or rented accommodation, it is important to notify the provider or landlord that your loved one will be moving in with you. ICPO can provide referrals to organisations such as the Crosscare Migrant Project and Safe Home that assist people accessing benefits and housing. For more information, please consult the ICPO's *Resettlement Handbook*: icpo.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ICPO-Resettlement-Handbook-Final.pdf.



Insurance

If your loved one is moving in to your home after their release (temporarily or permanently), your household insurance company must be informed of both their presence and the nature of their conviction. Failure to inform your insurance company may invalidate your insurance policy and could mean that any future claims are not paid for by the insurance company.

Education

When your loved one returns after their sentence, they may wish to get back into education. You should consider discussing this with them well in advance of their release so that you can support them by sending them brochures or links (if they have access to internet) to different colleges, universities, schools or institutes of technology depending on their needs. The ICPO can also assist you and your loved one with this, including referrals to agencies that assist people in learning trades and other skills. Important information to note is the dates for applications and the entry requirements (if any) to apply. If applicable and where possible, they can start working on their application before their release. Another aspect to consider is the cost of education and determining if they can afford it. There are organisations that offer

advice and support on returning to education such as The Pathways Centre: pathwayscentre.ie and The Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO): iasio.ie. Speak to your ICPO caseworker if your loved one is interested in accessing some of these supports, as certain services require an official referral.

Employment

Upon their release, your loved one will likely be looking for a job. Depending on individual circumstances, some jobs will no longer be available to your loved one due to their conviction. Jobs where the employees are in contact with children or vulnerable people may not be available depending on the nature of the conviction. For example, the following sectors require Garda vetting: education/teaching, childcare services, health services, residential services for children or vulnerable adults etc. To apply for jobs, your loved one will likely need to write CVs and cover (or motivation) letters. This may be the first time that they have had to write a CV or a cover letter in a long time. If they need support, encourage them to





contact the local Employment Service Office: gov.ie/en/collection/d6f636-employment-services-offices/ or Intreo Centre for advice. The Department of Social Protection may be able to refer your loved one to their local Job Club for further support, advice and training. You could also visit these services in advance of your loved one's release to gather any relevant brochures or material that could be sent to them before they leave prison. IASIO also offer support in this area but your loved one will need a referral to avail of their help; please speak to your ICPO caseworker about this.

Criminal record and registers

Depending on the crime they were convicted of, your loved one may need to declare their offence to the police, An Garda Síochána. If the crime is a drug trafficking offence or a sexual offence, legally they must declare it within seven days of arrival in Ireland to the Gardaí. The information needed is the person's full name (and other names they may use), their date of birth and their

address. If the Gardaí are not informed of the conviction within seven days after their return, your loved one will face a fine, imprisonment or both.

Applications (ID papers, social welfare etc.)

To prepare for life after prison, your loved one will likely need to apply for a range of services and documents on their return. This could include a passport, driving license, social welfare benefits or a PPS number for example. If you are in Ireland and have access to documents that they may need for such applications, you can support them by collecting them and providing them with these documents on their return (for example: birth certificate, passport, driving licence, PPS number, Public Services card, etc.).

Health

During their time in prison, your loved one may have developed or dealt with pre-existing health problems. Prisons can sometimes lead to new health issues that may not have been treated adequately. After their release, it is

possible that they will need specialised care. If your loved one requires medication, they should ensure that they have enough (e.g. one to two week's supply) leaving prison to last them until they can see a doctor in Ireland. It would be beneficial for your loved one to have a full check-up with a doctor to ensure that they are getting all the care they need. When they return to Ireland, they may be eligible for a medical card, which provides a range of free services (for more information about applications and eligibility, please visit: www2.hse.ie/medical-cards). If they are not eligible for a medical card, they may be entitled to a GP visit card, which provides GP consultations for free. They should also register with a GP practice as soon as possible. This can take time as it can be difficult to find GP practices that accept new patients. If your loved one urgently needs to see a GP but has not been able to register with one, or is awaiting their medical card, they may be able to attend a service called Safety Net, which runs clinics across Dublin. Please speak to your ICPO caseworker for a referral or for help accessing services outside of Dublin.

Mental health and addiction

Many people who have served a prison sentence will struggle in some way after release. They are likely to

experience ups and downs, setbacks and disappointments, and some will face mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety or PTSD) following their release. If this is the case, it may affect their emotions, sleep, appetite and motivation. They may also suffer with some form of addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling). If they require professional support there are organisations that can help:

- **Aware:** aware.ie
- **National Counselling Service (HSE):** hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service
- **Pieta:** pieta.ie
- **National Helpline for Addiction:** drugs.ie/phone
- **National Family Support Network:** fsn.ie
- **Gamblers Anonymous:** gamblersanonymous.ie
- **Helplink:** helplink.ie
- **Cuan Mhuire:** cuanmhuire.ie
- **Rutland Centre:** rutlandcentre.ie

The media

If your loved one was part of a high-profile case that has received media

attention in the past, their release may trigger further media coverage. This can be very difficult as it comes just at the time when you and your loved one are



hoping to be able to put the past behind you. It can raise tensions and prejudices in the local community, which can also be distressing for you and your family. Many of the same considerations that were discussed on page 16 in relation to media interest in the initial stages of your loved one's arrest/detention apply when they are released. Engaging with the media can end up prolonging their interest in the story and although it can be tempting to 'set the record straight' and for your loved one to tell their side of the story, it is important to remember that you have no way of controlling what is actually published.

Depending on the case, your family may request the 'Right to be Forgotten' which is the right to have information about a person removed from the internet and other places where information could be found. To do this you will need to contact search engines such as Google to request information about your loved one and your family is removed. This process can be difficult and your request may be refused.

4.2 Post-release

Coming home after a prison sentence is challenging for both the person returning and the family they are returning to. Both of you have lived through difficult yet different situations. It will take some time for everyone to adjust; some family members may adapt

better than others and it is important to be aware that everyone's response and reaction to this change in the



household dynamic may be different. It is also worth remembering that this will be a process and that things will change over time; how you, your family members and your loved one feel in the first few days and weeks will not be how you feel in six months' time or in a year.

Patience, perseverance and kindness – to your loved one and to yourself – are all essential qualities as you journey through this period together.

Minding yourself

The return of your loved one after their sentence abroad can be a challenging and possibly distressing time that will require a lot of adaptation on both sides by you and your loved one. During this time, it could be helpful for you to talk to people who are or have been in similar situations. You are very welcome to continue attending our monthly Coffee Mornings and our Family Information Days. You may also want to get professional help and talk to a counsellor (alone or with your loved one) about your experience. Speak to your GP about a referral for counselling or visit the

National Counselling Service: hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service). Don't forget that self-care is just as important now as you adjust to your loved one's return from prison as it was while they were away, so look back to page 40–48 for tips on looking after yourself.

Relationships and family dynamics

During your loved one's absence you and your family have adapted and continued to live your life without them. This may come as a shock to your loved one and be difficult for them to adjust to. The dynamics and relationships from their life pre-sentence may have changed and they will have to reintegrate into your household and family. When they return, they may struggle with changes such as their children being older or the passing away of a family member. They will have to re-learn how to live

as a family unit. Partners, parents and children may feel uncomfortable, distant or anxious around them especially if they have been absent for a long period of time. The relationships and the bonds that you and your loved one had before

Patience, perseverance and kindness – to your loved one and to yourself – are all essential qualities as you journey through this period together.

their absence will likely have changed. Depending on your individual situation, it may be that there are still unresolved conflicts or anger towards your loved one for their crime.

Communicating how you feel is beneficial for both you and your loved one to understand each other. You and your family will need time to adjust to your loved one being home. It is important to stay positive, be flexible and open to change. It might also be an idea to set some 'house rules', involving all members of the family, so that everyone sets out their expectations around behaviour and how the family unit will work going forward. This can be particularly important in situations



where the person returning from prison is going to live with their parent(s). Having honest discussions as a family early on, and continuing to have open communication as your loved one settles in at home, is key to making their return to the family unit as smooth as possible.

If you require help you can reach out to professionals for family or couples therapy to help you through during this time (familytherapyireland.com).

Supporting your loved one

Prison life is vastly different from your normal day-to-day life. A prisoner's daily routine is decided for them. They are told what to do, at what time and where. It can then be challenging for an ex-prisoner to re-adjust to life on the outside and having to make their own decisions. They can experience a form of culture shock. They are adapting to life on the outside and to living in Ireland. You may find that they are struggling to adjust to their new life and this is normal. They might struggle to take initiative or find motivation to do things for themselves because they have been so used to having things being done for them and having little control over their daily life.

It is important to be realistic about your loved one coming home. Try not to expect too much from yourself or from them. It will take time so don't assume your loved one will have everything

organised in the first few weeks, and resist the temptation of over-involving

yourself in tasks they can easily do for themselves. Helping your loved one to set small goals for their first few weeks and months after release is a useful exercise for you both. It is important to be prepared for rejection and disappointment; there will be setbacks along the way but try to help your loved one stay positive.

Helping them find a new structure and forming new habits is beneficial and helps them cope with their new life. Other helpful things are finding hobbies and friends, this will allow them to socialise outside of the household and using their time in a productive manner by getting involved in the community, e.g. by volunteering with a charity or getting involved in community groups. Adapting to new technologies can be challenging after spending some time in prison. Here is a resource to help with digital skills: nala.ie/publications/digital-matters.

Remember you can always call ICPO and talk things through with your caseworker.



A family's experience

We are Peter* and Linda*. Our youngest child Liam*, was extradited to the United States in 2018 when he was 30 years old, after a long and arduous fight against his extradition, lasting five years. We were heartbroken and extremely distraught not knowing when we would hear from him. After two weeks, we received an email from him. You can imagine the relief and happiness we felt.

We set up a support system, involving his four siblings and ourselves, with each having a job to do. 1 – Photos through Pelipost and Pelipals where anyone can send him photos through an app. 2 – Books through Amazon. 3 – Funds through Western Union for his commissary – we all contribute to this monthly. 4 – Email and message communications through WhatsApp and Corrlinks. He phones and WhatsApps us regularly. WhatsApp is absolutely brilliant – he emails us and it comes through as a WhatsApp message; we can reply to the message on our phones and he receives it as an email. It makes it easier for him to communicate with his friends too, who are also very supportive to him.

We also set up a family group chat to make sure everything runs smoothly and to give support to each other. This keeps everyone informed and updated. We have regular family get-togethers and most importantly, we're not afraid to talk openly about him in his absence and how it affects each and every one of us. He has been in four different prisons, with the resulting changes of systems such as for phone calls and funding

his commissary etc. It was sometimes difficult to figure out a new way to get emails and commissary funds to him, but we found with perseverance we were always able to overcome any obstacles that arose.

The ICPO has been of immense support to us, and the zoom meetings with other families have been informative and comforting, being able to discuss our situation openly with others going through the same thing.

We have visited him on two occasions, but with Covid it was impossible to do so in the past few years. Even now, the facility in which he's incarcerated is not allowing visitors. It's on code red at the moment; when it goes to green, we will be allowed to visit him. The only problem with that is that we could leave Ireland when the code is green, arrive at the facility and the code could be red and we will be refused entry – it changes constantly. Hopefully, we will get to see him soon.

We have a good friend living in New Jersey, who visited him a couple of times in some of the different facilities and is very supportive of him, and assured us that he was doing ok. This came as a tremendous relief for us, as it was coming from someone else other than Liam, that he was ok. On a lighter note, we are trying to keep his twenty-two-year-old pet cat alive, until he gets home in approximately nineteen months' time!

Peter and Linda

**names changed for confidentiality*

Conclusion

Dealing with a loved one being in prison overseas can be a difficult and, at times, overwhelming experience. There are different practical worries as well as a variety of emotions to manage. This booklet may help you to get through the experience and to point you in the direction of additional supports where needed. The imprisonment of your loved one will likely be a life-changing experience for you and your family and although you may crave for things to return to 'normal', it may be that you have to find a new way of being 'normal' as you learn to live with your new reality.

Try to remember that you are not alone and take comfort in knowing that many other families have been in your position before you and have found a way to cope. You too, in time, will also find ways to make the experience more bearable.

The ICPO is here to support you throughout the period of your loved one's imprisonment and on their release. Keep in regular contact and don't hesitate to get in touch ICPO if there is anything you want to talk about – no matter how big or small the matter may seem.





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