The Families Handbook

A Guide for Families and Friends of Prisoners
Box visit (non contact)
Inmate is separated from visitor by a screen, and no touching is possible.

Buy up
Purchases made through the correctional centres system.

Classo
Classification of inmates to varying security levels.

Correctional centre
Official term for prison.

Counsellor
An Offender Services & Programs Officer at some centres.

Dry cell
Bare cell where inmates are monitored, e.g. if self-harming, or if there are concerns about safety.

Lock Down
All inmates kept in their cells due to staff shortages or incident. No visits by families or external workers.

Lock In
Daily securing of inmates in wings for the night.

MOSP
Manager of Services and Programs.

MRRC
Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (Silverwater).

Muster
Inmate roll call.

Parole
Period of sentence that may be served in the community with conditions like reporting to a Parole Officer.

Prescribed property
Personal items that the inmate can have.

Prohibited visitor
When a visitor is banned from visits because they have breached visiting rules.

Restricted visitor
A visitor who has been restricted to non-contact visits. This may occur if a visitor does not follow requirements on visits.

Welfare Officer
Services and Programs Officer

SAPO
Services & Programs Officer.

Segro
Segregation – inmates are separated from other inmates for the good order and security of Correctional Centres.

SORC
Serious Offenders Review Council: makes recommendations about parole, classifications and programs for serious offenders.
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*Models have been used in the photographs that appear throughout this publication.*
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If you have ideas about how to improve this booklet, CRC would welcome your feedback. Please contact us at 174 Broadway, Broadway NSW, on 9288 8700 or at info@crcnsw.org.au.

To the best of our knowledge, the information in this booklet was accurate as of April 2009.
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Introduction

Who is this book for?
This book is a guide for families and friends of people imprisoned in correctional centres in NSW. When the book talks about ‘families’ we mean all the people who might be important to someone in a correctional centre, which includes people who aren’t directly related.

You may need additional information to address your particular situation. The book includes phone numbers of services that may be able to help you.

This book may also give general information to assist families and friends of prisoners in other states in Australia. As each state has its own prison policies and procedures, check p.5 for support organisations for prisoners and their families in other states.

How to use this book
You may find prisoners and correctional centre staff use words that are new to you. If so, the ‘Prison Talk’ guide on the inside front cover may help you.

Look out for the true stories of families affected by imprisonment of a family member. You’ll find them throughout the book.

Information about services listed here
Details of services are listed through the text and at the end of relevant chapters. Internet sites and phone numbers are included. Because there are too many agencies to list, details of key agencies are provided. If they can’t help directly, they should be able to refer you to any other local options. Where services have a range of programs or locations, you may be given a head office number where you can find out what they provide in your area.

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

If you don’t have internet access, check with your local library. In country areas you may find a Community Technology Centre which gives cheap computer access to people on Centrelink payments.

These details were current at June 2009, but may have changed since. If you find details that are inaccurate or out of date, please contact CRC.
Other useful information

You may also find the following helpful:

Drugs and Prison: A Handbook for Families and Friends of Prisoners
For a free copy contact Family Drug Support on 1300 368 186 or at www.fds.org.au. See p.45 for more information about Family Drug Support.

Putting Your Child First: A Survival Guide for Carers of Children of Prisoners, Their Families and Workers
For a free copy contact SHINE for Kids on 9714 3000. See p.105 for more information about SHINE for Kids.

Wurin Yan Wurrinwan Binga Murra Warra: Information for Aboriginal Women
For a free copy contact SHINE for Kids on 9714 3000. See p.105 for more information about SHINE for Kids.

Jailbreak Families CD
This free CD features interviews and stories about issues affecting family members of people in prison. For a copy phone CRC on 9288 8700 or email jbhealth@crcnsw.org.au.

Jailbreak Radio
This community radio program is broadcast in and around Sydney on 2SER 107.3 FM. It includes information on health and other issues affecting prisoners and their families, and includes music, stories and poetry.

www.dcs.nsw.gov.au
Corrective Services NSW has its own website. It’s not primarily for visitors but has some useful information, including a visitors’ handbook and details of correctional centres across NSW. Always contact the correctional centre directly if you’re planning to visit, as details may change.

ABOUT CRC: FROM A FAMILY MEMBER

‘I found out about CRC somehow the first time my brother was in custody. I needed support for myself, and I wanted to find out about the court system. They had someone who could talk to me over the phone. There were lots of little things, and if I had a question I could ring. I had to get what I had seen of prisons on TV out of my mind. It helped to find out what services the jail had, and what I could do.’
What is CRC?

CRC (Community Restorative Centre) is a community organisation dedicated to the support of prisoners, former prisoners and their families in NSW. We offer personal and practical assistance such as information and referral, transitional support (including supported accommodation), counselling, transport, court support, training and outreach to prisons.

Our services include:

- Telephone intake/information and referral service
- Transport service – we run a subsidised bus service to country prisons
- Family support – we provide information, advice, support and referral regarding issues associated with having a relative or friend in prison
- Post-release support – CRC provides a supported accommodation program and Transitional Support Program for people leaving prison. Referrals, assessment and support begin pre-release and continue up to 12 months post-release

NOTE: CRC has a limited number of supported properties available.

- Court Support Scheme – personal support to people attending local courts in Metropolitan Sydney
- Jailbreak Health Project – Health promotion with a harm reduction focus, including a radio show on 2SER 107.3 FM on Tuesdays at 6pm.

For information about CRC support programs contact:

**CRC Sydney**
174 Broadway (cnr Shepherd St)
Broadway NSW 2007
Ph: 9288 8700
Fax: 9211 6518
Email: info@crcnsw.org.au
Web: www.crcnsw.org.au

There are organisations similar to CRC in the following states and territories:

**Victoria**
VACRO (03) 9605 1900

**South Australia**
OARS (08) 82100811

**Western Australia**
Outcare (08) 6263 8622

**ACT**
Prisoners Aid (02) 62574866
Chapter 1 Understanding the NSW criminal justice system
**Arrest**

The arrest of a family member, partner or friend can be shocking and confusing. Arrests are often sudden and unexpected, and may be carried out with force. Witnessing an arrest can leave family members feeling totally helpless, since there’s nothing that anyone can do to stop a person being arrested.

Common reactions when a family member or friend has been arrested include:

- Disbelief that the person they know could have committed a crime
- Fear about the reactions of neighbours, friends or other family
- Shame
- Anger at the person who has been arrested
- Anger with the police and the criminal justice system
- Feeling exposed, especially if there’s media attention
- Worry or fear for the person who has been arrested
- Uncertainty about what will happen next.

Many people experience mixed emotions, ranging from anger at the accused to feeling extremely worried about them and lonely without them. It’s important to have people who can support you at this time. Even if you find it hard to make contact with others, try to think of someone who you can talk to about what has happened. If you don’t feel you can talk to family or friends, you may find it helpful to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or CRC (Community Restorative Centre) on 9288 8700.

If children witnessed the arrest, they may have seen their family member being handcuffed and put in a police vehicle, possibly with force. They may have been questioned or searched themselves. These experiences can be traumatic because it’s especially hard for children to understand how this can happen to someone they love. They need the chance to talk about what has happened and ask questions. They should be reassured that their family member is safe and they’ll get to see them again. They may need to hear that there’s nothing they could or should have done to protect their family member. (See also ‘What to tell the children’ on p.94).
The police can hold people for only a limited period of time before they must appear in court. To find out what’s happening to someone who has been taken away by the police, ring the police station where you think they were taken and ask to talk to the Custody Manager. If you’re concerned about how long it’s taking for your family member to go before the court, ring a Community Legal Centre for information and advice. To find your nearest Community Legal Centre phone 9212 7333 or go to www.nswclc.org.au.

Your family member’s arrest could affect you in other ways as well. The police may have removed your property as part of their investigations. Or you may be concerned that you could also be questioned or charged at a later stage. You may need legal advice as well. Check with a Community Legal Centre on 9212 7333, go to www.nswclc.org.au, or ring Law Access on 1300 888 529.

**Bail**

After your family member has been arrested and charged, they can sometimes be released on bail. This means they’ll be allowed to live in the community until they go back to court. Bail conditions may include reporting to a police station on a regular basis.

Most people who get bail won’t have to leave money as a guarantee. Sometimes they must deposit a sum of money to the police or courts before they’re released on bail. This money is returned when they appear in court.

Some people will need a guarantor to deposit a ‘security’ (usually money) on their behalf. This person is called a ‘surety’. They guarantee that the person will appear in court at a particular date and time. If the person doesn’t show up in court, the surety loses their money to the state.

As a family member of the accused, you may feel under pressure to put up bail money. However, if you can’t afford to pay this money – or lose it – then you should think carefully before agreeing to pay bail.
Most people charged by police receive bail. Bail will usually be refused if the charge is serious. It may also be refused if they have previously breached bail, or if the court or police are concerned that they will:

- fail to appear at the court hearing
- reoffend while on bail
- endanger the public
- interfere with witnesses or obstruct the course of justice.

Bail may also be refused if there has not been enough time to clarify these issues.

**Remand**

Remand prisoners are held in custody before and during their trial on criminal charges. They may be in custody because:

- They didn’t apply for bail
- They were refused bail
- They couldn’t meet the bail conditions
- They didn’t have the money or surety needed for bail.

Time on remand varies. For major trials it can be more than 12 months, but in most cases it’s much less than this. If a person is convicted, the time they have already spent in custody on remand is taken off their sentence.

Depending on where they have appeared at court, they may remain in police cells until their next court appearance, or go to a reception centre. Especially if someone is charged over the weekend, they may remain in the cells for several days before transfer to a reception centre. You won’t be able to visit them until they’ve been admitted to the reception centre, and it can be difficult to get information during this time. Your family member may not be able to phone you until they’ve been at the reception centre for a day or two.

See p.20 on how to find out where your family member is being held, and for more information on reception centres.

**Pre-trial period**

It can take a long time for a trial to reach the courts. Waiting for the trial can be hard for families. It can be hard to accept that your family member may end up being sentenced to a correctional centre. It can feel like life is ‘on hold’ until the trial is over.

Sometimes getting information about possible outcomes can help families to feel more in control. Your family member’s lawyer may be able to give you some idea about this, but privacy laws can limit what they can say, since your family member is their client. If you’re able to talk with a lawyer, insist on an honest opinion so you can prepare yourself for the best and worst
outcomes. Also remember that no one can be totally sure about the outcome of a case, and sentences for apparently similar crimes can vary considerably.

It can be frustrating that you can’t do much to help your family member with their court case. Sometimes you may be able to assist by getting references or support letters from people like your family member’s employer. Check with your family member’s lawyer to see if this would be helpful.

You may be wise to prepare for the possibility of imprisonment, even if you believe this is an unlikely outcome. The pre-trial period gives people on charges a chance to see those who are important to them, especially those who might not be able to travel to a correctional centre to see them. It can also be a good time to think about practical issues like financial commitments and accommodation plans, so that all the relevant family members can be involved and important decisions don’t have to be rushed.

If your partner has been accused, the pre-trial period may be a good time to talk about what to tell others, especially children. Talking to children at this stage allows them to have more time to understand and accept that their parent may be taken away. (See ‘What to tell the children’ on p.94 for more information.)

The uncertainty of living ‘in limbo’ can be very stressful. See ‘Looking after yourself’ on p.73 for tips on how to cope with stress during this difficult time.

**Trial**

Courts can be intimidating places. The language used during a trial can be hard to understand, and the court has strict rules for conducting business. Some charges will be heard in a local court, where a magistrate will hear the evidence and give the sentence. More serious charges will be heard by a judge, sometimes alone and sometimes with a jury. Once a person is found guilty, there may be a delay before their sentencing.

CRC (Community Restorative Centre) has trained volunteers at local courts throughout the Sydney area to provide support in the community for people appearing at court and their families. They can provide information, support and referral to Legal Aid, but they don’t provide legal advice. CRC can be contacted on 9288 8700.

Some trials will be covered on TV or in newspapers, especially if the charge is serious. If there’s media coverage, this makes it more likely that other people will find out about your family member’s situation. It can be helpful to think about whether you’d rather tell people yourself, rather than having them find out from a news report.
During the trial you may hear things that upset you or that you believe are wrong. However, unless you’re a witness, you won’t be able to voice your opinions during the trial. If you’re a witness you’ll only be able to respond to direct questions, so you still may feel frustrated that you can’t talk freely. As a witness, you may not be able to attend the trial until you’re called to the stand. When going to court be prepared for long waits as there may be a number of matters listed on one day. Families coming to court from country areas should bring an overnight bag in case the trial is carried over to the following day. Judges generally don’t approve of children being in the court. Children can easily become bored, worried and confused, and there are no childcare or play facilities if they need time out. It may also be hard to concentrate on the children if you’re feeling distressed. It’s a good idea to arrange for childcare during court proceedings, if possible.

**Sentencing**

Hearing your family member being sentenced can be a big shock. For many people it’s the first time they’ve realised that their family member might be incarcerated.

Sentencing usually takes between 40 minutes and an hour. If your family member is given a prison sentence, they’ll be taken by court officers into a police van and directly into custody. Families are not able to say goodbye to their family member before they’re taken away. Try to say goodbye beforehand while you have the chance.

Being at the sentencing can be highly stressful. If there’s someone in the family who suffers from a medical or psychiatric condition, they should be accompanied by someone who knows about their condition and what to do in an emergency.
How to get legal representation

For information about the legal system contact Law Access on 1300 888 529.

Free legal representation may be available through Legal Aid if your family member meets the income and asset rules. Contact them on 9219 5000. Aboriginal families can contact the Aboriginal Legal Service on 8842 8000.

If your family member can’t get Legal Aid, you may want to help find a lawyer for them. During business hours you can contact the referral service at the Law Society on 9926 0300 or 1800 422 713.

If someone is arrested outside business hours it can be hard to find a solicitor. If you have internet access, check the ‘Find a Lawyer’ section of the Law Society’s website, www.lawsociety.com.au. In large centres you may find an after-hours number for a big legal firm listed in the phone book. Always ask about fees before you arrange a meeting with a legal representative.

Generally, the first time someone comes to court they’ll be able to access legal advice. Even if they’re not eligible for Legal Aid, the Legal Aid solicitor will give them advice on their first appearance. After that they’ll have to arrange their own representation or represent themselves.

Sometimes Legal Aid won’t represent people because they’re already representing another party in the matter, and there may be a conflict of interest. In this case you can go to a private solicitor, and they can apply for Legal Aid to pay them to provide representation if they’re on the Legal Aid list of approved solicitors.

If you’re not sure what to do, contact a Community Legal Centre as soon as possible. To find your nearest Community Legal Centre contact 9212 7333 or go to www.nswclc.org.au.
**Need help?**

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

If you’re not sure what kind of legal help you need, contact LawAccess NSW on 1300 888 529 (1300 888 LAW) or www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au.

**Community Legal Centres**

There are around 40 Community Legal Centres (CLCs) throughout NSW. They provide legal advice on and assistance with a range of issues, including debt, tenancy, parole and family law. To find your local CLC, contact the State Office:

9212 7333
www.nswclc.org.au

**Legal Aid Commission of NSW**

Legal Aid provides free legal representation to disadvantaged people.

9219 5000
1300 888 529
Under 18s Hotline: 1800 10 18 10
www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

**Prisoners Legal Service**

Prisoners Legal Service is a specialist section of Legal Aid for prisoners. Solicitors visit correctional centres around NSW by appointment.

9219 5888
1800 806 913
www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

**Women’s Legal Resources Centre**

Provides free legal advice, information and referral on all aspects of the law as it affects women.

9749 5533
1800 801 501 (outside Sydney)
Indigenous women: 1800 639 784
www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au
### Aboriginal Legal Service

**Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd**  
(Head Office)  
Parramatta 8842 8000  
www.alsnswact.org.au

Legal services are provided at the following locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armidale</td>
<td>6772 5770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathurst</td>
<td>6331 1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourke</td>
<td>6872 2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken Hill</td>
<td>8087 3233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>6249 8488</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubbo</td>
<td>6882 6880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grafton</td>
<td>6640 1400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>6962 7675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kempsey</td>
<td>6562 5990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lismore</td>
<td>6622 7088</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moree</td>
<td>6752 5700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moruya</td>
<td>4474 2400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>4926 1571</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nowra</td>
<td>4422 3255</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parramatta</td>
<td>8842 8000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redfern</td>
<td>8303 6600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamworth</td>
<td>6761 3766</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wagga Wagga</td>
<td>6921 9230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walgett</td>
<td>6828 2039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>4225 7977</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Service

Aboriginal legal service for women.  
9569 3847  
1800 686 587 (from outside Sydney)  
www.wirringabaiya.org.au
My son went to jail four years ago when he was 18 years old. He was sentenced for a murder that took place at my home while my son was under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

I look back to when he was arrested, and it’s like I was in a big hole. I couldn’t think.

I can remember I could hear my heart beating and my blood pumping. I couldn’t get warm. I felt like I was not in my body, but outside, and looking down.

When I was allowed back home three days later, there wasn’t a drawer left closed. The police had turned over everything, and left all their gloves and nebulers all over the place. I had to clean up. It was a crime scene. I felt so violated, I threw out all my belongings. But how do you throw out the smell of death? I didn’t just lose my son, I lost my home. Before I could give the keys back I had the local priest come to bless the house. When we went to the real estate agent I couldn’t get out of the car, and I had to get my mother to do it.

You know the worst thing that happened to me was that I forgot how to read for six months. That was terrible. I used to read two books a week, and get the paper every day to do the crossword. I couldn’t do it. It was dreadful. Most nights for the first three months I was in bed at six o’clock. Not sleeping, I’d just play relaxation tapes and write in the journal I was keeping. That was my release, and I wrote and wrote. When I read it again two years later it was like the ravings of a lunatic, but it really helped at the time.

I felt like I had a neon sign flashing on my head, ‘I’m the mother of a murderer’. No one knew what to say so they said nothing or they avoid you, which happened a lot. When eventually I did go back to work, some of them wouldn’t even work with me. That was really hurtful to start with, but over time I got to the point where I could say that’s your problem, it’s not mine. My boss was supportive. I asked them if they wanted me to resign, and they said no.
‘I hope by telling my story I can help even one other mum so they won’t have to go through what I had to.’
Going to the court hearings on my own was dreadful. It would have been better if I’d had someone with me. They asked me to make a statement, but I couldn’t cope with standing up in court, so I did it in writing. The day my son was sentenced the court was so full, and the reporters were next to me. I climbed over them as soon as he was sentenced and I ran from the court right down to the station. All I could think was ‘I’ve got to get home’. It was the outcome I was expecting, but I didn’t expect it to be so long. I didn’t realise it would be all over the TV and the newspapers, national and local.

For the first two years I just didn’t feel well. If it wasn’t for Lifeline I would definitely have been around the twist. It got to the stage I was ringing so often they gave me another number to ring so I wasn’t on their crisis line. My saving grace was my eldest grandson, who was a little ray of sunshine.

Not long after my son went to jail, my doctor put me on anti-depressants. Later I was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Four years on the dose I’m on is not so strong, but if I don’t take them I don’t sleep. If I don’t sleep I can’t function. I don’t know why there’s a stigma about medication because it’s really helped. I viewed myself as a reasonably strong person, but maybe you need to be strong enough to recognise that you can’t do it without help. Now four years on I feel strong enough to take on the things I need to. I hope by telling my story I can help even one other mum so they won’t have to go through what I had to.
How to locate your friend or family member in a correctional centre

To find out where someone is in the corrective services system, contact Sentence Administration on 8346 1310 (9am–5pm Mon–Fri). After hours (7 days until 10pm) 9289 5258.

You’ll need their date of birth or their MIN, a six-digit identification number that’s given when someone enters the correctional system in NSW for the first time. It will be their identification number any time they’re in a correctional centre. Families should obtain this number from the person in the correctional centre as soon as possible, and write it somewhere safe.

How long will they be incarcerated?

When the court sentences an offender to be imprisoned for more than 36 months, there may be a minimum (non-parole) prison term set, followed by a period of time which may be spent in the community on parole. Prisoners can’t receive time off their sentence for good behaviour during this period, so you should expect that they’ll serve the full amount of their minimum sentence.

Reception at the correctional centre

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

All prisoners go through a reception process. This includes:

- Handing in personal property to be stored while they’re in custody
- A strip search
- A shower, and provision of correctional centre clothing, bedding and basic toiletries
- Health assessment by a qualified Justice Health nurse. This covers physical and mental health issues, any current prescription medication, and history of drug and alcohol use
- Assessment of immediate risk of self-harm or suicide. If immediate concerns are identified, the prisoner will be closely watched.

See p.163 for more information about specialist services for prisoners who may have health issues or need additional assistance.
Prisoner orientation

While prisoners are waiting during reception, they may see a video that explains the reception process and gives them information about prison life and services. They’ll find out about phone access and visiting, and be given information about looking after their health and safety.

They may be introduced to an inmate delegate. Delegates are prisoners who are familiar with the prison system and can help other prisoners to cope. They can refer prisoners to services and/or programs, explain the correctional system, and provide support to vulnerable prisoners. There are Aboriginal delegates, and delegates from different cultural and religious groups.

Prison activities

Programs

Correctional centres provide various programs to help address issues which may have led to prisoners being incarcerated. These include:

- Alcohol and other drugs programs
- Violence prevention programs
- Sex offenders programs
- Young offenders programs.

Self-help groups like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or NA (Narcotics Anonymous) are offered in some correctional centres.

Participation in programs can help prisoners move faster through the system and can help when they apply for parole (see p.142). To participate in programs, prisoners should talk to the Manager Offender Services and Programs (MOSP) or case management team. Programs may only be available at certain prisons and may be in high demand. Prisoners may need to wait until vacancies become available.

Employment

Remand prisoners can ask to be employed. Sentenced prisoners are expected to work. They may be employed directly in providing prison services (e.g. being a sweeper (cleaner) or working in food preparation) or may work on commercial projects for CSI (Corrective Services Industries). CSI services include laundry, food preparation, light engineering, farming, telemarketing, printing and packaging. See www.csi.nsw.gov.au for more information on CSI.

Prisoners will be paid for their work but at a lower rate than in the community. Wages will be paid into their prison account to purchase items through the ‘buy up’ system (see p.63 for details of buy up).
**Education**

A range of education options is available in correctional centres. Prisoners can find out about courses through education staff or through case management meetings.

AEVTI (Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute) provides courses focusing on reading, writing and number skills up to Year 10 standard, and work skills training, to help prisoners find work when they leave the correctional centre. AEVTI certificates are recognised around Australia. Courses include:

- General education
- Communication
- Information technology
- Koori education
- Visual art.

TAFE courses are also offered to prisoners in some correctional centres. Prisoners can complete courses in the community once they’re released if they don’t finish while in the correctional centre. Courses may include:

- Aboriginal arts and cultural practice
- Food skills
- Business skills
- Horticulture
- Trade skills
- Information technology.

**Recreation**

Prisoners will spend quite a lot of time locked up in their cells. They may watch TV or read. Most correctional centres have libraries, or prisoners may have books in their unit. Newspapers may be available, or may be ordered through the buy up system. You may able to send in newspapers or magazines. You won’t be able to send books, as these are too time-consuming to check, and you aren’t allowed to send in pornographic magazines.

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

**Religion**

Prisoners can practise the religion of their choice while in prison.

Chaplaincy services are provided by major Christian denominations and representatives from the Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish communities. Prisoners can access a chaplain by contacting the Welfare Officer, Service & Program Officer or other staff person. If you wish to speak to a chaplain, call the prison and ask what days the chaplain of your faith visits the prison and how you can get in contact with him or her.
Food
Prisoners are provided with three meals a day. The food is prepared by prisoners under supervision. Special diets can be provided for religious (e.g. Muslim or Jewish) or health reasons (e.g. diabetic). Meals will usually be eaten in prisoners’ cells, although some units may have dining tables if prisoners aren’t locked in.

Prisoners may be able to purchase lollies, cake mixes, noodles, sauces, tinned food and rice through the buy up system. They may also be able to buy a sandwich maker or rice cooker for use in their cell. (See p.63 for more details about buy up.)

Coping in prison
In the correctional centre, new inmates will need to cope with:
- Loss of personal freedom
- Separation from people they love
- Fear and uncertainty about prison life.

The early days and weeks can be the hardest. Many prisoners feel depressed, anxious and fearful during this time. Correctional centres can be tough places, and, while the levels of violence have decreased in recent years, bullying still does occur. Many prisoners feel that showing sadness, fear or distress may make them appear ‘weak’. Some prisoners try to act ‘tough’ so they won’t be seen as vulnerable. Others try to stay safe by withdrawing and keeping a low profile. You may notice changes in your family member as they develop strategies for coping in the correctional centre.

Some prisoners will even cut off contact with families outside because they find it hard to open up to family for visits and phone calls then close down during day-to-day life in the correctional centre.

However, prisoners with strong family ties generally do better when they’re released. If you’re finding that your family member seems emotionally withdrawn, or is not making contact as often as you’d like, it may help to understand why this may be occurring. Don’t assume that this behaviour means that the person doesn’t love you or care about you anymore. If you’re concerned about the emotional wellbeing of your loved one, please contact the correctional centre and ask to talk to the Welfare Officer, Service & Program Officer, other staff person or General Manager, so that support can be provided to your family member.
Classification of prisoners (classo)

Classification is the process of determining the level of security for the prisoner. They’ll be placed in a correctional centre which serves that classification. Decisions about classification are based on sentence length, on the prisoner’s program and support needs, and on vacancies in different centres. Prisoners can ask for the location of their family to be taken into account. This doesn’t guarantee prisoners will be able to be close to family.

For most prisoners, classification and placement recommendations are made by the Case Management Team (CMT) that meets with the prisoner after they’re sentenced and then every 12 months. The final decision is made by the Corrective Services Case Management Committee.

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

Male prisoner classo levels

A1 and A2 – maximum security, where prisoners are always within secure physical barriers, e.g. walls, towers, electronic surveillance

B – medium security; there are physical barriers, but lower walls and less security than maximum. Prisoners may have longer visits

C – minimum security:
- C1 – prisoners confined unless with an officer
- C2 – can do community projects under supervision
- C3 – can go into the community without supervision on day or weekend leave, education leave or work release.

Prisoners who have escaped from a correctional centre will be given an ‘E1’ classification in maximum or an ‘E2’ in medium security correctional centres. They can apply to the Escape Review Committee to have this changed to a ‘C’ classification.

Serious offenders will probably start off with an A1 or A2 classification, and it will take a long time for them to come down to a B. Prisoners with short sentences won’t get work release or day release.

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

**Women prisoner classo levels**

Category 4 – continuous supervision within walls
Category 3 – behind a physical barrier unless supervised
Category 2 – may not be behind a barrier but will be supervised. Can do community projects under supervision
Category 1 – can go into the community without supervision on day or weekend leave, education leave or work release.

Prisoners who have escaped from a correctional centre will be given an ‘E’ classification. They can apply to the Escape Review Committee to have this changed.

Serious offenders will probably start with a category 4, while others will enter as a category 3 or 2.

**Transfer of prisoners**

Prisoners can be transferred at any time. They may not get much notice when this happens. Prisoners are responsible for telling family members that they’ve been transferred – you won’t hear from the correctional centre. Always check with the correctional centre before visiting so you can be sure your family member is still there.

You can expect that prisoners may be transferred after they’ve been sentenced, or when their classification changes. They may also be transferred to access services such as health or specialist programs. Sometimes you may not know why someone has been transferred.

See p.20 for information on how to find a prisoner if they’ve been transferred.

**Protection**

If there are concerns that a prisoner is at risk of harm from other inmates, they can be placed on protection (also called ‘limited association’). Protection means being placed in a special section of the correctional centre, or being sent to a correctional centre where everyone is on protection. Protection orders are reviewed after 14 days, then after three months and six months.

Prisoners can ask to be placed on protection, or the General Manager may place them on protection because
of information received from inside or outside the correctional centre. Although protection may offer prisoners a safer environment, the decision to go on protection should not be taken lightly. Issues with protection may include:

- Many correctional centres providing protection are in country areas, which may mean the prisoner is more likely to be away from family.
- Going on protection may make it harder to access education or other programs.
- Other prisoners can have negative attitudes to prisoners who have been on protection. This can make it very difficult to go back into the mainstream after being on protection.

**Segregation (segro)**

Segregation is isolation for prisoners who pose an extreme risk to other prisoners or staff of the correctional centre. The decision about segregation is made by correctional centre staff, and prisoners don’t have a choice.

**I’m worried about sexual and physical assault and bullying**

Although violence and sexual assault do occur in correctional centres from time to time, this happens much less often than people think. Prisoners who keep a low profile and don’t get involved in ‘prison politics’ can usually avoid trouble. If you have reason to believe that your family member is getting bullied (‘stood over’) in prison, you should tell a correctional centre staff member immediately. Correctional centre staff will need some information before they can take action. Useful information can range from being told about an incident to simply noticing a change in your family member’s behaviour that has made you feel worried.

Your family member may have told you not to tell correctional centre staff about their situation because they fear that talking to authorities about another prisoner will make their situation worse. In such situations you may also feel it’s best not to do anything. You could consider informing the correctional centre anonymously by phone call or letter.

If you aren’t sure what to do, contact CRC (Community Restorative Centre) on 9288 8700. For more information about CRC see p.5.
**I’m concerned about self-harm**

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

**What signs indicate that someone might be at risk?**

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

**Who may be particularly vulnerable?**

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

- who are ‘first timers’ or on remand
- who have suffered a recent death of a friend or family member
- who have recently experienced a broken relationship
- without family or friends to visit and care about them
- with a history of depression or other psychological disturbances
- with a history of self-harm or past suicide attempts
- with a history of substance misuse.

**Responses that are helpful**

- Ask your family member directly whether they want to self-harm or commit suicide. Contrary to popular belief, this question won’t ‘put the idea in their head’. It often allows people to express something that they’ve kept bottled up for fear of worrying people.

- Let them know you’re there for them to talk to if they need to.

- Accept and acknowledge that your family member is in pain, without judging them.

- Support and encourage them to get psychological help.
Be available to them, but also set reasonable limits about how often you can visit them in prison, send letters or speak on the phone.

Make it clear from your behaviour that they don’t need to self-harm in order to receive love and caring from you. Be consistent with caring gestures, even if they’re not always returned. Don’t withdraw your love from your family member.

Responses that are not helpful

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

Look after yourself

- Be honest with yourself about how self-harm makes you feel. Don’t pretend to yourself that it’s okay if it’s not. Many people find self-harm frightening.
- If you need help dealing with your feelings, talk to a counsellor, social worker or psychologist. (See ‘Getting support’ on p.136.)

What should I do?

If you have concerns about your family member in a correctional centre:

- Report your concerns to staff in the visitors centre before you leave the correctional centre, or
- Ring the prison and speak to a Services and Programs Officer, Welfare Officer or other staff member (see inside back cover for prison phone numbers), or
- Ring the Justice Health 24 hour Telephone Counselling Service on 1800 222 472. This counselling service is for inmates, their relatives and friends as well as Corrective Services officers who may be concerned about the welfare of a person in a correctional centre. The line is staffed by trained mental health nurses who address the concerns raised by the caller and feed back information about the outcome. The counsellor can also help families with referrals to community services.
I’m concerned that my family member may need psychiatric help

All prisoners are assessed on reception. Mental health screening units operate for men and women at Silverwater so that inmates with mental health issues who are identified during reception can be assessed and stabilised.

Inpatient mental health services are provided for male and female prisoners with acute psychiatric problems at the Forensic Hospital, located outside the perimeter of the Long Bay Correctional Complex. The hospital is operated by Justice Health (funded by NSW Health). Justice Health employs psychiatrists and mental health nurses. Some psychiatric services for regional areas are provided through video link (called Telehealth).

Psychologists employed by Corrective Services NSW provide treatment services in conjunction with health staff. Many prisoners have mental health issues, and services prioritise those prisoners with the most urgent needs.

If you’re concerned that your family member has an untreated mental illness, talk to staff at the correctional centre or phone Justice Health on 1800 222 472.

Need help?

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

Justice Health 24 Hour Telephone Counselling Service

Staffed by mental health nurses for prisoners, their families and correctional centre staff. 1800 222 472

Lifeline

Free and confidential counselling, 24 hours. 13 11 14

Mental Health Information Service

Details of mental health services in NSW, information about mental health, and details of support groups. 1300 794 991
My family member has an intellectual disability

Prisoners with disabilities will generally be identified during the reception process. Although many prisoners with disabilities are able to be accommodated in mainstream correctional centres, there are two units which are just for prisoners with intellectual disabilities, one at Long Bay (Malabar) and one at Goulburn.

Corrective Services NSW has a Statewide Disability Services Unit (Ph: 9289 2136 or 9289 2091). Staff from the unit are involved in case management and pre-release planning for prisoners with disabilities where needed. Some people won’t need additional support because they’re already linked with services.

Generally, if families are concerned about a family member with a disability, the best starting point is to talk with a Welfare Officer, Service & Program Officer or other OS&P staff at the correctional centre. However, if families remain concerned, they can contact Statewide Disability Services and discuss their family member’s needs with staff there. If you have copies of reports about your family member’s disability, these can be very helpful in assessment and planning, and you can forward them to Statewide Disability Services (Fax: 9289 2134).

Statewide Disability Services can be involved with prisoners with a wide range of disabilities, including people across the range up to borderline intellectual disability, people with acquired brain injury, and people with functional difficulties who may not have a clear diagnosis. Where prisoners have mental health issues, these are managed by staff from Justice Health. If a prisoner has a dual diagnosis that includes a physical or intellectual disability, Statewide Disability Services will address the disability issues.

The families of those with disabilities may already have experienced many challenges, including isolation and lack of support. Coping with their family member’s imprisonment may feel like the last straw. It may be helpful to know that people with a wide range of disabilities have been accommodated in correctional centres, including people with Down syndrome, Asperger and other autism spectrum disorders, fragile X and cerebral palsy.

Being questioned by police or appearing in court can be very difficult for people with an intellectual disability. The Intellectual Disability Rights Service provides legal casework and advice for people with intellectual disabilities. They have access to prisoners in correctional centres, and can assist people who are being
Going to prison

Interviewed by the police. They can also give advice about guardianship, wills and care and protection matters where a parent has an intellectual disability. They have a volunteer network, the Criminal Justice Support Network, through which trained volunteers can assist people with intellectual disabilities who are being interviewed by police.

**Need help?**

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

**Intellectual Disability Rights Service**
A Community Legal Centre working with people with intellectual disabilities.
9318 0144
1800 666 611

**Criminal Justice Support Network (24-hour Helpline)**
1300 665 908
www.idrs.org.au

**Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association**
Provides advice, information and referrals for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with a disability and for their families and carers.
9891 6400
1800 629 072
www.mdaa.org.au

**NSW Council for Intellectual Disability**
Provides information and referral on a range of issues, including where people with intellectual disability are involved in the criminal justice system.
9211 1611
1800 424 065
www.nswcid.org.au

**Statewide Disability Services (Corrective Services NSW)**
Case management and pre-release planning for prisoners with disabilities; contact them if you have spoken to an Offender Service & Program Officer at your family member’s correctional centre but are still concerned about your family member with a disability.
Ph: 9289 2136 or 9289 2091
Fax: 9289 2134
My family member is a forensic patient

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

Some forensic patients are detained in prison and some in psychiatric hospitals. The Mental Health Review Tribunal reviews all forensic patients at least every six months and makes recommendations to the Minister of Health regarding detention, treatment, transfer and release, under conditions if necessary.

There are three kinds of forensic patients. (A government review is currently being conducted, so there may be changes to these arrangements.)

Unfit to be Tried

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

Need help?

The Gender Centre

Information and outreach support for people with gender issues.

9569 2366

www.gendercentre.org.au
Transferees and Detained Persons on Remand
A prisoner serving a sentence, or a person on remand, may be transferred to a hospital if involuntary treatment for a mental illness becomes necessary.

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

Forensic patients are not eligible for parole, home detention or work release. After completing detention they may be transferred to a secure hospital ward, or placed on community treatment orders.

Having a family member who is a forensic patient brings extra stresses. Some people may believe that the forensic patient has avoided punishment if they haven’t been tried in the usual way. Victims or their supporters may feel unhappy that they haven’t had their story heard by a court. Their reactions may make things more difficult for the family, especially if there has been media coverage, or a strong reaction in a local community. Sometimes people within the family may be victims too.

A Forensic Patient Victims Register is kept by Justice Health. Victims can be notified of forthcoming Tribunal hearings and their outcomes, and can make submissions to those hearings. Families may find it unsettling that their family member’s circumstances are being reviewed regularly, so that the possibility of the forensic patient returning to a mainstream correctional centre or being released is always on the agenda. See p.34 for agencies that can offer support to families facing such issues.

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

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

**Forensic Patient Victims Register**

Information about the Forensic Patient Victims Register.

8372 3070

**Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS)**

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

9745 4277

**Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT)**

Reviews circumstances of forensic patients.

1800 815 511

www.mhrt.nsw.gov.au

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**What health care is available in correctional centres?**

Health services are provided in correctional centres by NSW Health through Justice Health. Justice Health nurses staff clinics at all correctional centres in NSW. Prisoners who are ill or injured receive treatment at the correctional centre clinic. Prisoners who need surgery or complex treatment may be transferred to a correctional centre with the necessary facilities. This will usually be Long Bay at Malabar or Silverwater Women’s Centre. Sometimes services will be accessed through local hospitals.

Doctors and dentists visit clinics to provide medical and dental services. After screening at reception, prisoners receive a detailed medical check-up. Health plans can be developed and reviewed each year for prisoners with longer sentences. Before discharge, prisoners can receive assistance from Justice Health to ensure they can continue to access medical treatment in the community.

Optometry services can be accessed at most correctional centres through local contracted optometrists who visit the centre.

At some correctional centres, Aboriginal prisoners may also be able to access medical services provided by Aboriginal medical organisations.
Your family member may not be able to get health care straight away. There may be delays because of staff shortages or difficulties with transport. Sometimes correctional centre staff may not agree that your family member has a health problem, or may not prioritise their treatment. See p.28 on ways to advocate for your family member if you’re concerned that they’re not getting health care that they need. If you have an urgent concern, ring the 24 hour Justice Health Telephone Counselling Service on 1800 222 472.

Justice Health also promotes public health projects such as vaccination and stop smoking programs. Justice Health can be contacted on 9289 2977.

**Can mothers have children living with them in a correctional centre?**

Once women are sentenced they may be able to have children living with them in the Mothers and Children Program if they meet the program requirements. In the program, children can live with their mothers full time until they start school. If a woman gives birth in a correctional centre while serving a sentence, she may be able to keep her baby in her care while participating in the Mothers and Children Program. Children staying with their mothers as part of the Occasional Care Program can be up to primary school age. To be accepted into the program, women and their children must be assessed, recommended by a committee, and approved by the Commissioner. This can take up to eight weeks after a woman is sentenced. The Mothers and Children Program is based at Emu Plains and the Parramatta Transitional Centre. Generally women and children join the program at Emu Plains, and may move to Parramatta to prepare for release.

While women are on remand they can’t have children with them. Women on remand often have to move between correctional centres while their case is being heard, and most correctional centres don’t have facilities for mothers and children. Women can apply to be accepted into the Mothers and Children Program while on remand to reduce the waiting time to join the program after they’re sentenced. If a woman gives birth while on remand, she won’t be able to care for her baby in a correctional centre unless she is accepted into the Mothers and Children Program after she is sentenced.

Children of women on remand are generally cared for by family. Where this is not possible, they’re usually placed in foster care through the Department of Community Services.
Can prisoners be transferred interstate or overseas to be closer to family?

Under some circumstances, prisoners can be transferred from NSW to other states of Australia, or from those states to NSW. Prisoners can apply in writing for a transfer to be considered. Decisions about transfers are made by the State Minister or the Commonwealth Attorney-General, depending on whether the prisoner was convicted under State or Federal law. Decisions about transfers can take some months to process. Applications may be refused because of concerns about the administration of justice, or other matters. Prisoners can’t appeal the refusal of transfer application, and applications can only be made once within each 12-month period.

Prisoners can discuss transfer applications with the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer at their correctional centre. The prisoner must make the application for a transfer – it’s not possible for family to apply on their behalf.

**Need help?**

**Mothers and Children Program (Corrective Services NSW)**

The Mothers and Children Program Coordinator can talk to families about options for children to be cared for by their mother within a correctional centre, and can visit women who may be eligible for the program to discuss their plans for their children.

9854 7225
Prisoners may be able to apply for a transfer to or from Australia in certain circumstances. Transfers must be agreed to by both countries, and the processing of applications is likely to take a long time. The countries involved must reach agreement about the length of sentence the prisoner will serve once they’re transferred. Generally, only Australian citizens can be transferred from overseas countries to Australia. Similarly, overseas countries will generally only accept transfers of their own citizens. Australia has extradition arrangements with some countries. This means that people can be apprehended in one country and sent to another country to face court charges.

**Need help?**

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

**Prisoners Legal Service**
A Legal Aid service for prisoners. Solicitors visit correctional centres across NSW and prisoners can make an appointment to see them.

9219 5888
1800 806 913

**NSW Law Society Pro Bono Scheme**
Provision of free legal representation where Legal Aid has been refused.

9926 0367
www.lawsociety.com.au
We can’t even tell you where he is

Sandra’s son was charged in another state, and was sentenced and imprisoned there. She describes what it’s been like having a family member in prison so far away from home.

When my son went to prison it just came out of the blue. It was very much out of character. He just went away saying he was going on a short trip interstate with friends and he’d soon be back. The next thing I knew the police were at the door saying he was in the remand centre in another state. It was a big blow because I really didn’t know how I could get information from interstate. They told me the name of the centre, but that didn’t mean anything to me. It took me a while to find out where he was. We found out he could get bail, so my husband drove there and managed to get him out and he came home until his trial.

Even though I had a very good lawyer it was still very difficult, because you’re not prepared. On the day he was convicted, one minute he was there standing in the dock, and the next minute he was gone without us even being allowed to say goodbye. My lawyer said I could visit him at the remand centre and gave me the address. I managed to last through the night, and next morning I went to the remand centre, and they said ‘We can’t even tell you where he is’. The lawyer didn’t even know that I couldn’t visit him until he’d been processed. I was alone in a strange city where I didn’t know anyone. It was the weekend – I couldn’t get in touch the lawyer. I stayed through the weekend, and on the Monday I managed to find out where he was. I asked if I could phone him – I didn’t even realise that he wouldn’t be able to get phone calls.

It’s like you’ve entered a different world where you’re an alien. Even when I went to visit it was so hard – there was no one I could talk to and no one to support me. They said ‘You can have a double visit because you’re from interstate’. There was barbed wire, tall walls; I really thought that my son would never see the daylight. I had no idea. That’s where you need the support, to know what it’s going to look like, to know what happens in the prison. The more people know realistic information about prison, the easier it is to digest, rather than leaving it to your imagination.
‘These days I visit my son once every three months. If you know your rights as a family member, you can get things done.’
Before the visit the adrenaline kept me going, but then I felt such loneliness and isolation afterwards. I just wanted to be with people, and I went and sat at the back of a church during one of the services. Someone turned round to say hello and I burst out crying. From that I met two people who became very good friends, and I would see them when I went to visit my son. The social worker at the remand centre kept in touch with me too. She was terrific. I called them my three angels. Knowing them normalised my life there. If I felt a bit low I could call them. Knowing someone there made me feel like I belonged too.

Now I know his routine, I know when he comes out, I know when he’s locked up. I know what times he comes out, I know when he has meals, I know the date he’s going to try to ring me. I can put money in his account if he doesn’t have money. It’s a new lifestyle you have to adapt to. When he rings, the time is very limited. All you can say are positive things. The hardest thing is when he says he’s been unwell.

When I’m at the prison I’m a different person. I think of myself as someone with a strong personality and able to make decisions fairly well, but when I’m there in that prison system I’m stripped of everything, I’m absolutely helpless. I get confused, I start stuttering, I can’t express myself properly.

These days I visit my son once every three months. If you know your rights as a family member, you can get things done. My son was in the assessment centre then one day out of the blue he called me and said ‘Mum, I’ve moved’. I didn’t even recognise the name of the town and I didn’t know how I would get there. I had to leave on the Friday to get the evening plane interstate, then take the bus for a four-hour trip and stay the night. The only hotel I could stay at was on the highway. I would go and visit him the next morning, stay the whole day and then get the bus back to the city. It was pouring rain and there was only a bus shelter. The majority of the prisoners were Aboriginal and the bus shelter was filling up with women who had come from other parts of the state. They were waiting with me there in the rain with no proper shelter.
Chapter 3

Drug use and prison
Up to 80% of people in NSW correctional centres are incarcerated because of drug use or related crimes. Correctional centres have strict security measures to limit access to drugs. Correctional centres offer programs to help people reduce or stop drug taking, so that being incarcerated can offer new opportunities for prisoners to address drug and alcohol use.

**Drug testing in correctional centres**

Drug detector (sniffer) dogs are used to detect drugs in searches of correctional centres, including cells, prisoners and their property. They may also be used in visiting areas. Random urine testing is also used to detect drug use among prisoners.

If a prisoner is found to be trafficking drugs, or has traces of drugs in their urine, they may be moved to a more secure correctional centre, may lose privileges, and may face disciplinary action or new charges. This could increase their time in the correctional centre and make it harder to get parole.

**Can prisoners get help for drug problems while they’re in a correctional centre?**

The correctional centre reception process includes screening for alcohol and drug use. Medication can be given to treat symptoms of withdrawal where necessary.

All correctional centres have options for drug and alcohol treatment. Options include:

- Group programs, including information sessions and relapse prevention courses
- Residential programs, which are specialised treatment programs for three to five months at several correctional centres
- Self-help programs such as NA (Narcotics Anonymous) or AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Pharmacotherapy (e.g. methadone, bupranorphine) for heroin and other opioid dependence.

Some interventions may only be available at certain centres. Where prisoners have come into the correctional centre because of alcohol or drug use, they’ll be encouraged to make use of treatment programs. Progress to a lower classification, or success in applying for parole, may depend on people participating in drug or alcohol intervention programs.

**What if I’m asked to bring in drugs?**

No matter how much a prisoner begs you to bring them drugs, DON’T DO IT. Correctional centres have highly sophisticated mechanisms for detecting drugs on visitors, including children. See p.61 for more information on correctional centre security. If you’re
found with drugs, you’ll be arrested and charged by the police. You can also be prohibited from visiting a correctional centre for 12 months or more.

**What is Compulsory Drug Treatment?**

Offenders who have repeated drug related convictions may be referred to the Drug Court for consideration of a Compulsory Drug Treatment Order. (See below for information about the Drug Court.) Some people will be excluded from this option because they’ve committed violent offences or sexual assault, or because of the risks they may pose in the program or in the community.

The program is only available at Parklea, and provides group programs and support for prisoners in residence and those living in the community under intensive supervision. Only the Drug Court can make referrals to the program.

**Drug Court**

**What is the Drug Court?**

The Drug Court addresses the cycle of drug use and crime. Drug Court focuses both on the offender’s offending behaviour and on their drug use. Offenders agree to an individual plan that’s monitored at regular Drug Court sessions. Offenders must attend counselling to address their drug use and their offending behaviour; counselling is provided by staff from the Departments of Health and Corrective Services. Offenders need to agree not to use prohibited drugs, and to limit use of alcohol and legal drugs so they don’t interfere with participation in the program. In some cases, participants will also need to agree not to use alcohol.

Many people on the Drug Court program are able to undertake treatment plans while living in the community with a suspended sentence. The Drug Court also has units at several correctional centres where people are incarcerated for the first part of the program, including the Compulsory Drug Treatment Program. They may also be able to access rehabilitation centres in the community while participating in the Drug Court program. If offenders fail to keep conditions of the Drug Court they may have to return to a correctional centre or, if they’re already incarcerated, leave the Drug Court program. Decisions about drug use while on the program are made on an individual basis and don’t automatically mean exclusion from the Drug Court program.

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

**Eligibility for Drug Court**
Participants need to be referred by a magistrate or judge sitting in a court in the Drug Court catchment area. The catchment area covers areas of Western Sydney. They need to be highly likely to be sentenced to full-time incarceration if convicted. They must be willing to participate, and to plead guilty. They won’t be eligible if they’ve been charged with an offence involving violence, a sexual offence, or some more serious drug offences. They also need to undergo a mental health assessment to ensure they’ll be able to participate in the program.

Priority will be given to people who haven’t previously had the opportunity to access the Drug Court.

**What does Drug Court participation mean for families?**
Individuals involved in the Drug Court and their families can really benefit from the relationships with staff, who have an expert knowledge of drug treatment and an ability to make referrals to a wide range of agencies. Families may see family members benefiting from treatment programs and addressing personal issues. The recognition of progress by the Drug Court can also be encouraging for families, who may feel that no one else appreciates how hard it is to change drug use or offending behaviour.

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

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

Participation in the Drug Court is restricted to certain areas, so this may affect the household if others in the family wish to move.

**How can my family member access home detention?**
If your family member has a history of drug or alcohol use, they should talk to their solicitor as early as they can before sentencing to see if the Drug Court is an option for them.
Need help?

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

**Family Drug Support**

Family Drug Support offers information and referral, family support groups and courses for families affected by a family member’s drug use. Ask for their guide ‘Drugs and Prison: A Handbook for Families and Friends of Prisoners’. This provides details about services inside correctional centres, and helpful information about how best to support prisoners with a history of drug use.

1300 368 186  
www.fds.org.au

**Al-Anon/Alateen**

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

9279 3600  
www.al-anon.alateen.org/australia

**Nar-Anon**

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

9418 8728  
www.naranon.com.au

**Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**

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

9361 8000  
1800 422 599
I first visited my son in prison three months after he was arrested. I had been speaking on the phone and sending money, but I couldn’t cope with seeing him until then. Someone came with me who’d visited the prison before for their work. I’d never been to a prison before and it was good to have someone with me who knew what was happening and could help me through the process. It was a shock seeing my son in the white monkey suit. You think of all the things you want to say, but he just wanted to hold me.

After he was at Silverwater for a while he was moved to Long Bay. I didn’t find out for five days until he wrote me a letter. Going there on my own was an hour to Central and then finding what bus to take. I didn’t realise it would take so long. When I saw all those rusty bars when I got to Long Bay I’m sure I held my breath until I was in with my son. And the process was different to Silverwater. You didn’t book. You just went and queued with everyone else.

He’s moved again since then. I don’t have a problem with any of the officers where he is now. They’re only doing their job. You get searched, your bag gets searched, the sniffer dogs come round, but once they’ve done it the first time you resign yourself to the fact that it’s going to happen. If you’ve got nothing to hide, there’s nothing to fear.

I keep an eye out for new people at the jail. They often don’t know what to do. Having fingerprints and photographs taken can be daunting. They don’t know what money they can take in for the vending machines. There are a lot of people and all some want to talk about is the crime, why they’re there, and how unfair it all is. I don’t listen to those people. I would rather speak to the people who are going for their visit saying ‘you have a great visit with your son’, ‘you have a great visit with your husband’ or whoever.

I used to be able to send books to him where he was before, but I can’t now. I send him a couple of pages of jokes every few weeks now. They do tend, once they get possessions of their own, to want to hang onto them. The inmates have a weekly buy up. They’re allowed to spend $60 a week. Most is spent on food, toiletries, etc. There is a separate buy up called ‘activities’. They can buy shoes, shirts, TVs, etc. This happens once a month. The
'I visit my son whenever I can. We don’t talk about miserable things ... I try and make the visits as comfortable and positive as I can for both him and me.'
government pay each inmate a small amount each week. This is for small personal items. If they don’t work or have anyone to put extra money in their account, it would be a terrible existence.

In the beginning, suicide was a big fear. Every now and again when you hear about trouble in the prison you worry, but I don’t worry about him suiciding anymore. He was threatened in one prison and had to be moved, so that was phone calls to the welfare officer, who I must say was fantastic. I went to a family day and got to meet some of the people in his wing. You can see that they try to look after each other. So that fear isn’t as bad as it was when he first got locked up. You hear about people getting bashed and raped and killed, but it’s not as bad as what is made out.

Since he went on the methadone program in prison, it’s like I’ve got my son back. He’s now down from 60mls a day to 2mls a day. He’s not addicted – heroin, pot, ecstasy, pills or booze. He’s clear-headed, he’s clear-eyed and he’s really good company. We just talk positive. I’ve got him starting to do education stuff. He’s done an art course, computers and some work for Year 10, although he can’t do that where he is at the moment. He enjoys reading now. I got it through his head that you can get lost in a good book. It’s very difficult for him though as he is dyslexic, but to his credit he is persisting.

I visit my son whenever I can. We don’t talk about miserable things. We talk about things I’m doing or he’s doing or about what the family is doing. There’s no point going in there and moaning and groaning, because they can’t change the situation they’re actually in right now. I try and make the visits as comfortable and positive as I can for both him and me.
Alternatives to detention

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

You may be able to help your family member access alternatives to detention by encouraging them to talk to their solicitor or staff from Probation and Parole, and also by offering support such as accommodation. Think carefully about the kind of support you can offer, recognising the demands this may put on you and your family. Be aware also that there will be many circumstances in which there’s nothing you can do to prevent your family member from detention.

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

Home detention

What is home detention?

Home detention means that an offender can serve their sentence at home, under intensive supervision and providing clear conditions are met. Offenders on home detention are monitored through electronic bracelets, visits from supervising officers, and drug and alcohol testing.

Who is eligible for home detention?

Offenders need to be sentenced to a term of 18 months or less. You can’t get home detention if you’re on remand (see p.10) or if your conviction involved threats or physical harm to others. This means it’s not available to people with a current or previous sentence for murder, armed robbery, sexual assault or domestic violence offences.

What does home detention mean for families?

Home detention has many benefits for families. It ensures that families can stay together and parents can continue to care for their children. It’s also possible for an offender to attend pre-approved study (e.g. TAFE) or work while on home detention. It means families are spared the pressure of worrying about what’s happening to an incarcerated family member. It also relieves them of the pressure of visiting a family member who may be in a correctional centre a long way from home.
Home detention can have downsides for families as well. They may feel obliged to have the offender in the home to protect them from incarceration, even if they would otherwise want them to leave the home. Relationships can be stressed if families feel they have to put pressure on the offender to keep to the conditions of their order. And everyone may be affected by visits and telephone calls which can come at any time to check that the offender is at home.

**Drug Court**

The Drug Court (see p.43 for more details) offers people with serious drug problems an opportunity to break the drug-crime cycle by involving them in programs that address their drug issues. In some circumstances people can live in the community while they participate in the Drug Court program instead of serving their sentence in custody, while other Drug Court participants will be in custody in the Compulsory Drug Treatment Program at Parklea. Participants who live in the community work with staff from Corrective Services NSW and NSW Health and must undertake tasks like attending counselling, education programs and participating in urine screening. Regular progress reports are provided to the court, and the court is advised of any breaches. Drug Court programs generally involve participants for 12 months or more. At the end of the program, participants receive a final sentence from the Drug Court that takes into account their original sentence and their progress in the Drug Court program.

There is also a Youth Drug and Alcohol Court which provides separate programs for young people aged under 19 years.

**Who is eligible for involvement with the Drug Court?**

Entry into the Drug Court program is only possible where people who haven’t been charged with violent or sexual assault offences are motivated to engage in treatment and are assessed as having potential for rehabilitation. Participants will need to plead guilty to charges.

Entry into the Drug Court is only available to people living in Western Sydney.

**What does the Drug Court mean for families?**

Participation in the Drug Court can enable people to remain at home, for example with their children. It can also ensure access to treatment programs that are designed to meet individual needs and are provided over an extended time period. Participation in the Drug Court will restrict a family member to living in certain areas so
they can participate in Drug Court programs. This could limit the family’s ability to live where they choose, or to move to respond to the needs of others in the family.

Programs are provided on a confidential basis, so family members will only know the details of assistance provided if the participant chooses to tell them.

Drug Court hearings aim to encourage participants by affirming progress and achievement. This can have a flow-on benefit for families, as they won’t be the only ones providing support and encouragement to their family member.

**MERIT**

**What is MERIT?**

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

**Who is eligible for MERIT?**

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

**What does MERIT mean for families?**

MERIT assists drug users to get treatment. Facing court is sometimes the trigger for people to accept help for drug use when they haven’t been willing before. This can be a big relief for families.

Participants won’t be punished for not completing their MERIT program, but the magistrate may take success into account when sentencing. You may find it stressful if you’re aware that your family member is not following through on their program requirements.

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

To find out more about MERIT ask at the Local Court or talk to your family member’s solicitor.
**Residential alternatives to custody**

Corrective Services NSW is establishing residential programs near correctional centres that provide accommodation for people who may be on remand in custody pending sentence, or who have been returned to custody because they’ve breached parole orders. Programs focus on people who have complex problems, such as mental health and drug and alcohol issues, which mean they’re at risk of reoffending in the community without supervision and support.

Accommodation in these programs will be time-limited, and participants may then move into other treatment programs in the community.

**Court orders that don’t involve detention**

**Fines**

For minor traffic offences and less serious criminal offences, the Magistrate can impose fines. Usually the law states the maximum fine that can apply to an offence. Fines need to be paid within 28 days; it’s possible for an extension or payment by instalments to be arranged. Unpaid fines will be referred to the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO). If fines remain unpaid, arrest warrants can be issued. If you want to talk to the SDRO about your family member’s outstanding fines, you’ll need them to phone the SDRO to give permission, or send a letter.

**Good behaviour**

A bond requires that the person is of good behaviour for a set period. There may be other conditions, such as accepting the supervision and guidance of a Probation and Parole Officer from Community Offender Services. There are different kinds of bonds. Depending on the seriousness of the offence and the kind of bond, if the person commits another offence or breaks the conditions of the bond, they could be sentenced to prison.
**Community Service Order**

The magistrate can sentence people to do community service supervised by a Probation and Parole Officer from Community Offender Services for up to 500 hours. A Community Service Order (CSO) could include other conditions, such as attending counselling or drug testing. Failure to complete the community work could mean being sent to prison.

**Need help?**

Encourage your family member to discuss alternatives with their legal representative.
Chapter 5

Keeping in contact
Maintaining family ties has real benefits for prisoners and their families. It can be hard work to keep in contact with a family member in a centre. Fares, petrol and other costs can make visiting expensive, and dealing with correctional centre security can be frustrating. Everyday demands can make it hard to find time for visiting or staying in contact in other ways.

However, prisoners who keep in close contact with family are less likely to reoffend once they’re released, do better on parole and have better mental health. Families also benefit from better mental health, and better family relationships when the prisoner returns home.

It’s easy for prisoners to become institutionalised, meaning that they can’t cope without the structure of a correctional centre. Keeping in contact with families helps maintain an identity as a partner, friend, brother, sibling or parent. Family ties remind the prisoner that they’re more than just an ‘offender’ and help them stay focused on the roles they can play beyond the correctional centre.

Away from home and loved ones, it’s easy for prisoners to believe that people will stop caring about them. This can produce feelings of isolation, hopelessness and despair. Regular visits and letters from family are important reminders to prisoners that there are people on the outside who love and care for them.

Keeping in contact also means family can assist prisoners in planning for the future, and supporting them after release. See p.144 for more information about exit planning.

**Should you visit?**

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

As well as physical violence, think about other ways in which you may be at risk of abuse or controlling tactics. Imprisoned partners can feel jealous about your real or imagined relationships with other people and react with threats, coercion, manipulation, emotional blackmail, intimidation or angry outbursts. They may also attempt to control your activities and movements, for example by asking friends or family to monitor what you do. Now that your family member is away from home, you may
have the time and space to think about whether to stay with them. You may find yourself paying more attention to people in your life who have questioned whether your relationship is safe and healthy. You may find it helpful to talk about this with a counsellor or support worker. See p.29 for contact details about services.

You may not want to take children to visit their parent in a correctional centre if you’re questioning whether you want to continue a relationship with that person. You may be able to ask a trusted relation or friend to take the child when they visit the correctional centre. If you don’t know someone who can do this, you may be able to arrange for a worker from SHINE for Kids (see p.105) to take the child on visits.

**Visiting and AVOs (apprehended violence orders)**

If you have a current apprehended domestic violence order (ADVO) or apprehended personal violence order (APVO), you can’t visit a correctional centre if this will contravene the conditions of the order. For example, if the order says that the prisoner can’t come within a certain distance, you won’t be able to visit them. Correctional centre staff are able to check whether there’s a relevant AVO.

If there’s an order, but you believe that you can still visit, you should take a copy of the order with you to the correctional centre. For example, the prisoner may be able to have contact with you, but only if they stick to conditions about their behaviour.

**Need help?**

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

For advice about AVOs contact:

**Domestic Violence Advocacy Centre**

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

8745 6999
1800 810 784

**DoCS Domestic Violence Line**

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

1800 656 463
Visiting prison

Who can visit?
Family, friends and community are encouraged to visit. Up to four adults can visit a prisoner at any one time. Check with the correctional centre if you want to bring more than four children. Inmates can decide they don’t want to attend a visit.

If an inmate has many people who are likely to visit, they should check with each other beforehand to avoid too many people attending at the same time.

If you let the inmate know in advance that you’re visiting, this will help them be prepared for the visit. You can do this by writing to them, or by telling them when they phone you. But remember that once you’ve told them you’re visiting, they’ll be counting on you coming. If you have to change your plans on the day, you won’t be able to contact the inmate to let them know.

Booking visits
Most correctional centres require you to book visits in advance. Contact the correctional centre by phone and ask to book a visit. You’ll need the person’s birth date and/or their MIN (see p.20).

If you don’t know which correctional centre your family member is in, contact Sentence Administration on 8346 1310 (9am–5pm Mon–Fri) or Inmate Records on 9289 5258 (weekdays 5pm–10pm or weekends 8.30am–4pm).

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

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

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

MRRC (Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre) at Silverwater and Silverwater Women’s Centre have visiting six days a week, but many centres will only be open for visits on weekends and public holidays. Remand centres may have different times, and different procedures to other centres, which may make visiting more difficult and time-consuming. They also have limits on the number of visitors a
prisoner may see. Visitors to remand centres may need to have an eye scan (see below) or be fingerprinted.

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

The first time you visit a correctional centre you’ll be given a VIN (Visitor’s Identification Number). This will be your VIN each time you visit the correctional centre. Allow extra time for the issue of a VIN on your first visit. You’ll also need to fill out a visitor’s form. This form will be different at different centres. Some centres conduct eye scans (biometric scans). To have a biometric scan you’re asked to stand still while a light shines in your face. The record of your eye scan will be used to check your identity at your next visit. Remember that you must provide identification each time you visit. You’ll need one form of ID from List 1 or three forms of ID from List 2. One of these must show the address where you currently live.

**List 1**
- Current driver’s licence with photo
- Photo card from NSW RTA or similar from interstate
- Current passport or one that has expired within the last two years
- Any current photo ID issued by a Government department or authority.

**List 2**
- Birth certificate (original or extract)
- Electoral roll (acknowledgement of receipt)
- Water, power or phone accounts issued less than six months before the visit date
- Current car or boat registration papers
- Marriage certificate
- Australian naturalisation or citizenship certificate
- Current entitlement card from a Government department or authority (e.g. Medicare card, pension card or travel concession card)
- Department of Immigration papers
- Credit or debit card with your signature.
Visiting for children

Arrangements for children
Children under 18 years must be with an adult. Take the children’s ID (e.g. birth certificate or passport) if you have it.
Visiting with children can be challenging, particularly if they’re young. They’ll be expected to stay seated near you and not to disturb other people. There will be no toys for them to play with, and they can’t bring toys or playthings from home. If you have sensitive issues to discuss with your family member in a correctional centre, it’s often better to leave the children at home that day.
SHINE for Kids provides childcare during visits at Silverwater, Windsor and Bathurst correctional centres. This MUST be booked in advance. Contact SHINE for Kids on 9714 3000.

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

Some families try to avoid telling children that they’re visiting a correctional centre. They may say that the visit is taking place at the family member’s work or some other setting. While it’s up to individual parents and carers to decide what to tell children when visiting a correctional centre, many people find that children cope best when told the truth. See p.94 for more information about what to tell children.

Child protection
Be aware that parents are expected to keep their children safe during visits. If parents are observed physically abusing children (e.g. smacking) or harming them in other ways, the visit may be terminated. Also Corrective Services staff are required to report child abuse to DoCS. Physical abuse includes hitting children around the head, or hitting them hard enough to mark them or hurt more than a few moments.
If you want to take a child to visit a prisoner who has been charged or convicted of an offence with a child victim, the prisoner will need to make a special application for the visit and will have to be assessed regarding the safety of the visit for the child. To find out more, phone the Child Protection Coordination and Support Unit on 8346 1333.
Help for children to visit parents in correctional centres

SHINE for Kids has centres at Silverwater, John Morony and Bathurst complexes. SHINE may be able to assist with transporting children to other centres if they’re unable to attend visits otherwise. Contact them on 9714 3000 or see p.105 for more information about how SHINE may be able to assist.

Security

Officers may ask you turn out your pockets, or your child’s pockets, and open bags or other belongings (where these are allowed into visiting areas). They may scan you with a hand-held scanning device, or ask you to walk through a metal detector. Sniffer dogs, trained to detect drugs, may walk around visitors and their children. Sniffer dogs can detect drugs on clothing from a week ago. Visitors need to make sure there are no traces of drugs on their possessions or in any car in which they travelled to the correctional centre.

Visitors will not be strip searched by DCS Officers, but police can strip search if called. Muslim women wearing a veil or hijab may be asked to remove it so it can be searched. You won’t be allowed to remove any clothing during the visit.

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

Visiting arrangements

Each correctional centre has individual visiting arrangements. The security classification (Maximum, Medium, Minimum) will make a difference to the arrangements during visits.

Generally the following will apply:

- No smoking
- You will not be admitted if under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and can’t behave in a disruptive way
- You must stay seated, and can’t sit on laps or tables
- You can only make contact with the prisoner you’ve been authorised to visit
- You can’t join other visitors at other tables
- You won’t be able to bring a camera, mobile phone, drugs, alcohol, syringes or weapons
- Maximum security correctional centres are generally very restrictive about bringing in items.
You should check with the centre about the following:

**Location of prisoner**
Check that the prisoner is still at the correctional centre you plan to visit. They could be moved at the last minute and be unable to let you know. Check as close as possible to the visit. A list of correctional centres and their phone numbers is on the inside back cover or this book, or you can check the Corrective Services NSW website at www.dcs.nsw.gov.au for the most up-to-date information.

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

**Baby care**
You may be able to bring baby food in a sealed jar or a baby bottle. You may be able to bring nappies, or nappies and wipes may be provided. Strollers will often not be permitted inside correctional centres. Check whether any other food will be permitted for toddlers and older children. In maximum security centres, no food may be permitted beyond that needed for infants.

**Medication**
If you need to have medication accessible to you at all times, you’ll need to hand it to the Visits Processing Officer during your visit. It should be in its original container. Prescribed medication should be in its original package with your name on it. It would be wise to bring the prescription or doctor’s certificate.

**Toilets**
Some centres will only have toilets at the gate, so you won’t be able to use toilets after you enter the visitors waiting area. At some centres, visits will have to end once you leave the room to use the toilet. This may also happen if children need to use the toilet. If you’re allowed to return to the visit, you’ll need to be rescreened before the visit resumes. If you have a medical condition that means you’ll need access to toilets, apply to the General Manager or Manager Security in writing with a copy of a medical certificate before the visit.

**Vending machines**
Some correctional centres have vending machines where you can buy junk food for yourself or your family member during visits. Only you can use the machine – your family member won’t be allowed to handle the money. Check how much change you can bring in, and what kinds of coins are needed. There are no change machines at the correctional centres so make sure you have change with you.
What to wear

Remember you may be scanned by a metal detector. If the metal detector goes off you’ll delay other visitors, so it’s best to avoid metal – e.g. in shoes, buttons, bra underwires, jewellery except for wedding rings, or jewellery – that you are unable to remove.

Corrective Services requires visitors to wear clothing that ‘conforms to family standards’. This means avoiding see-through or revealing clothing. Staff may be very strict about what’s appropriate clothing.

You may not be able to wear sunglasses or sunhats.

Money for prisoners

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

You should be able to deposit money in their account by going to the accounts section of the correctional centre. You’ll need a VIN (Visitor’s Identification Number) before you can deposit money. Ask for a receipt when you deposit money.

You can also post money using a money order (from a post office) or a bank order. Include a letter with your family member’s name and MIN (see p.20). You can only send $100 at a time. If you send more it will be put in a separate account that can’t be accessed until later. Include your full name and address and your VIN if you have one. Ask for a receipt to be sent to you.

Prisoners can use money to order items (‘buy up’) such as toiletries, additional food, clothing, tobacco, papers and personal items. Prisoners are not permitted to have money or other items, such as stamps, that could be used as currency.

Transport

You can ask the correctional centre about transport options and directions. These are also given on the Correctional Services website, www.dcs.nsw.gov.au – look for ‘correctional centres’.

You can ring the Transport Infoline on 131500 or go to www.131500 for information about public transport.

CRC (Community Restorative Centre) provides a bus service from Sydney to Berrima, Goulburn, Lithgow, Kirkconnell, Bathurst, Oberon, Cessnock and St Heliers Correctional Centres. There is a cost for this service. However, a free service is provided to Junee Correctional Centre.

You need to book to use the CRC bus service. For fares, times and bookings ring CRC on 9288 8700.
Mail for prisoners

Prisons encourage the sending of letters between prisoners and their families. Prisoners really value letters, and often keep and reread all that they receive. Be aware that prisoners may find it hard to find much to write about, and so may not respond to every letter they receive. Even if they don’t write back regularly, they usually love to receive letters and like hearing about what’s going on beyond the correctional centre.

Mail is usually opened by correctional centre staff, but may not be read in detail. Prisoners’ letters will be screened for any illegal activity.

If you have legal or other official papers that you urgently need to pass on to a prisoner, check with the correctional centre about the fastest way to do this. You may be able to leave them to be passed on after your visit.

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

Phone calls

You won’t be able to phone your family member in a correctional centre.

Each prisoner receives a phone card with six phone numbers that can be programmed for family or friends.

They can also allocate three numbers for services they may wish to phone. They must have money in their account to make phone calls. Phone calls generally last six minutes.

To use their card, prisoners enter their MIN (see p.20) then a PIN for the card. They can then make the call. You’ll be advised that the call is from a correctional centre.

It can be a good idea to plan ahead, organising times for the prisoner to call so that you’re not waiting around the call. Partners and family may feel anxious if a prisoner doesn’t call when they said they would. Prisoners may have to queue to use one of a limited number of phones, so they may not be able to contact you exactly when you are expecting a call. Professional visits, medical appointments and prisoner lockdowns may also prevent them from calling.

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

In an emergency ...

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

Video visits

What is a video visit?

A video visit links a prisoner in a correctional centre using video conferencing equipment with family who go to a venue where video conferencing is also available. Correctional centres have video conferencing so that prisoners don’t have to be transported for brief court appearances, and to assist in provision of professional services such as access to solicitors. Video visits use this technology for family visits.

Why have a video visit?

A video visit can mean that a prisoner can have contact with family members who have difficulty visiting the correctional centre. Difficulties may arise due to distance or because family members are elderly or have disabilities.

How are video visits organised?

Prisoners can apply for a video visit by filling out an ‘Application for a Video Visit’ form. This form can be obtained from the officer in charge of video conferencing or from the Manager Offender Services and Programs (MOSP). The Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer can also help find and complete this form. If a support agency like SHINE for Kids or Community Restorative Centre (CRC) has been supporting the family, they may be able to provide a supporting letter or, if they’re visiting the prisoner, add their support for the visit on the application form.

It’s best for prisoners to discuss the option of the visit with their family before putting in the application, so the family knows what to expect.

It takes about two weeks for applications to be reviewed and approved. If the video visit is approved, the family will receive a phone call either from a support organisation or from Corrective Services NSW. A time will be set for the visit, and the correctional centre will be advised. The family will be asked to go to a venue where video conferencing is available. This will usually be a government or council building, such as a TAFE, school.
or library. Courts or police stations are rarely used, and only where other options aren’t available. Family may have to travel to a neighbouring suburb or town if video facilities aren’t available locally.

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

The prisoner can nominate up to four adults and four children for their video visit. There are no difficulties if some of the people nominated can’t attend the visit. However, only the people nominated on the form can attend the visit. You can’t bring along other people to take the places of people who were nominated but can’t attend on the day.

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

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

Children will often find it hard to stay engaged with the video, especially at first. It can help to bring toys so they can be occupied during the visit. It may be helpful to reassure the prisoner that if children don’t seem interested, it doesn’t mean the prisoner is not important to them – it’s just that they have a short attention span, especially when they have to watch and listen.
He thought I was coming home to this fabulous life

David had been with his partner, Liam, for four months when Liam was unexpectedly sentenced to a term in a correctional centre.

When Liam and I hooked up I knew he had charges from an accident that had happened a few months before. He’d gone into rehab to sort things out. One day the papers came to say he’d been charged, and that hung over us for six weeks before he went to court. It was in the country and we got a local solicitor. I knew Liam had a few previous drink driving charges but I didn’t know the extent of it until I saw his record. Even then I was so naïve. I thought the worst he could get was community service, and I took the solicitor’s word for it that everything would be okay.

We were staying with Liam’s parents five hours away from the court, and we’d brought Liam’s nephew Harry with us to give his sister a break because it was the school holidays. We thought it would be over quickly and then we could take Harry out for lunch. We’d been waiting since 8.30am, and then at 1.30pm he was sentenced. I wasn’t even in the court because I was outside with Harry. The solicitor came out and said he’d got four months. I could barely string a sentence together, and Harry was saying ‘Where’s Uncle Liam?’

The solicitor said not to apply for bail, because time served would help when he appealed. But the appeal date was weeks away, and we found out later if he had got bail it wouldn’t have made any difference to the appeal.

We were lucky that it was in the country, because they let me into the lock-up to see him. When I saw him it broke my heart, because he was all curled up, sobbing. That was the last contact I had with him for two weeks. The constable was really nice, and she said ‘He’s really worried you’ll leave’. We’d only been together four months. She was driving him to the jail a couple of hours away, and I said ‘If you do anything on the way, convince him that I’m not going anywhere’.

I found out later he tried to call me that night, but I didn’t hear the phone, and the missed call just showed an unknown number. He tried the next day, but I was on the way home. Originally I was going to stay with his family for the rest of the week, but I only got two hours’ sleep that night.
‘I thought the worst he could get was community service, and I took the solicitor’s word for it that everything would be okay.’
because I was worried sick. At 5am I started packing, and drove home. The four-hour trip took seven hours because I kept pulling over in tears.

I rang my mother, and she and my dad met me at home. In the lockup we’d concocted this story about Liam staying on the farm because his father was sick, but soon as I heard Mum’s voice I told her the truth. Dad never hugs me but he threw his arms around me, which was huge.

I went back to work on Monday as planned, which was too soon. I lasted until Thursday, then I had to take time off. I thought I’d be able to call Liam, but of course I couldn’t. I couldn’t see him for two weeks because all the visiting spots were taken. I got hold of the Welfare Officer because I was so worried about him. She said ‘He was just here, I’ll try and grab him’. She couldn’t because he was meeting with other people, but she told me all he’d been talking about was how he loved me.

I couldn’t get any money to him, because I couldn’t get a visitor’s number until I went to visit him at his correctional centre in the country. I got a message from Liam though his cellmate’s girlfriend. She said Liam was in a bad way, and explained about how to do the money. I sent a message back to Liam through her, saying that I would get there as soon as I could get in. Her boyfriend was a sweeper, and he was really good to Liam. I drove to Parramatta and Silverwater to try and get money in his account, but they just laughed at me.

I spent two days on the computer trying to find someone who could help me understand what was happening. I saw two counsellors, who were lovely people, but they didn’t understand what I was going through. Then I found out about CRC. I phoned them and talked to a family worker. He knew what he was talking about, and I wrote pages and pages and notes from what he told me. He gave me the number for Sentence Administration [see p.20] so I could find Liam if he was moved, and he told me about what Liam would be going through. I started to see the family worker regularly so I could work out how to cope.
I saw Liam for the first time on my birthday. He felt awful about that. I took a friend, and she helped me get through. His mother and auntie came as well. When we went in I couldn’t believe it – the searches, and the screening. When we walked into the visitors centre I saw this man sitting with his shaved head in his hands. I thought ‘You poor bugger’, and then he looked up and smiled, and it was Liam. He’d shaved his head and he was wearing the white jumpsuit, and it looked like a straitjacket. He’d got the wrong size, and he’s usually so caught up with how he looks. I was shocked how quickly he took on the posture and language of a prisoner. On the way out, his mother had a go at one of the officers at the counter. I walked out, but then I went back and apologised. The officer was good about it; he said ‘She means well’.

The hardest thing was that I didn’t know what he was going through. He’d been in an abusive relationship and I’d promised him no one would hurt him again. I felt so powerless that I couldn’t protect him. He didn’t know what it was like for me either. He thought I was coming home to this fabulous life, he didn’t see how worried I was. I couldn’t tell him because I didn’t want to make him feel more guilty. I had all these plans about things I was going to do around the house, but I was so busy with work and visiting him, there was no way I could get anything around. I really missed Liam doing things around the house.

One day Liam rang and said ‘If you don’t get me out I’m going to kill myself’. I had no way of knowing whether to believe him. I love him, but he can be a drama queen. I called the Welfare Officer and she found out he was unhappy because he’d been moved and he couldn’t stand his cellmate. I talked to her about what to do. I asked her to tell the head of his unit so they could keep an eye on him. I had an appointment with CRC, and while I was there Liam rang me back. He said ‘Don’t you ever do that again’, meaning that I shouldn’t have got the Welfare Officer to talk to his unit. I said ‘Don’t call me and say you’re going to hurt yourself, and not expect me to do something.’ The CRC worker was great. He told me ‘You needed to say that’.
Guilt by association

Families of prisoners have been called the ‘invisible victims of crime’.

Many families of prisoners experience discrimination, often fuelled by widespread fear of crime, and negative beliefs about prisoners. Family members may find even relatives and friends are judgmental and fearful. Media attention and community reaction can put great pressure on family, who may feel that they, as well as their family member, are on trial. People may give you a hard time about keeping in contact with someone in prison. You may find relationships with family and friends are strained, just when you most need support. This can be especially hard for children who may lose contact with extended family through no choice of their own.

Sometimes families feel so ashamed of their family member that they assume others will judge them. Fear of rejection can lead people to isolate themselves from others. It’s important to give trusted friends and family a chance to support you, although it’s true some may find it hard to do.

Sometimes families may feel relief that their family member has been incarcerated. They may feel their family member will be safer in a correctional centre or have a better chance of getting the help they need. Having a family member incarcerated may also mean life at home is calmer, more predictable and perhaps safer. It may be hard to share this with others, and families may feel guilty that they feel this way.

Contact with a counsellor, social worker or support group can be very helpful at this time. See p.29 for details about services that may be able to assist.

Grief and loss

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

In some ways the grief can be harder to deal with than a death. Unlike a death, the experience of imprisonment seems to drag on indefinitely. When someone dies, friends, neighbours and relatives will usually be very supportive and understanding. Families of prisoners often find people don’t know what to say, or leave them feeling that they too are ‘in disgrace’. While bereaved families have the funeral and other rituals to help them, there are no rituals to help the families of prisoners cope with their loss.

This lack of social support can make it difficult for families to express their
sadness openly. As a result, they often hide their feelings from others and try to ‘soldier on’. Although this may seem to work in the short term, most people do better if they can talk through how they feel. Sometimes it’s easier to talk with a counsellor or support group than with friends or family. See p.29 for information about services that may be able to assist.

CRC works with people in correctional centres and their families. If you feel you have been discriminated against by an employee, landlord or others because a family member has been imprisoned, contact CRC on 9288 8700.

Looking after yourself

It may be hard to focus on your own needs when you’re so worried about your family member’s situation. However, you need to look after your health and wellbeing as well.

It’s easy to overlook signs of stress. Check the following list to identify ways that stress may be affecting you. Everyone feels stress differently, so you will need to develop your own approach to managing it. The self-care suggestions that follow are a guide. If you can’t find strategies that work for you, or you find you’re relying on drugs or alcohol or other unhealthy behaviours to cope, you may find it helpful to talk with your doctor, or look for assistance from a psychologist, social worker or counsellor.

Signs of stress

- Difficulty sleeping
- Undereating or overeating
- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Easily irritated
- Muscle tension, headaches, stomach problems
- Disorientation, confusion and difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home
- Feeling depressed, sad or hopeless
- Mood swings and crying easily
- Feelings of guilt and self-doubt
- Increased use of drugs, alcohol or gambling to escape or ease the pressure.

Ways to ease stress

- Talk with someone about your feelings – anger, sorrow and other emotions – even though it may be difficult. Don’t let shame stop you from seeking support from family and friends, or getting outside help.
- Eat healthy food and eat three meals a day.
- Try to do some regular exercise.
- Take time out to relax.
- Get enough sleep.
Try to keep your worries in perspective and try to not make passing concerns into catastrophes.

Be gentle and patient with yourself; accept that it’s impossible to do everything at once.

Take time for yourself; don’t put off doing things that you enjoy and that bring meaning to your life.

Do something nice for your body, e.g. take a bubble bath, get a massage, have a sauna, ask someone for a hug, or just stand up and stretch.

Write down your thoughts in a journal.

Do things that give your mind a rest, such as reading a novel, taking a walk somewhere with a view, watching a movie, or doing some gardening, cooking or something creative.

Plan to take breaks where you can unwind and rejuvenate. If you get the chance to go away for a holiday, take it.

Try to remain hopeful even if there’s no easy solution to the current situation.

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**Living as the partner of a prisoner**

Partners of prisoners have many adjustments to make. Having a partner in a correctional centre can impact on your financial situation (see p.125), your housing (p.119) and your social networks. If you have children, you’ll have to adjust to being a sole parent (p.109). You’ll also have to adjust to a relationship with your partner through visits, phone calls and letters, instead of being with them day to day.

**Intimacy**

Intimacy is an important part of relationships and can be a difficult issue for prisoners and their partners. Sexual expression is limited by the restrictions of prison visits. However, you can still share intimacy through hugging, kissing, handholding and talking during contact visits. You won’t be permitted to do more than this, because you’ll be expected to respect other people who are also having visits at the same time. Many factors can affect the closeness between you and your partner at visits. You may feel anxious about visiting, or just tired from travelling. Your partner may feel guilty, or be worried about what’s happening to them day to day at the correctional centre. Part of the frustration of being a prisoner’s partner is that visits won’t always live up to your expectations.
Pressure from your partner in prison

Prisoners are cut off from the outside world. They have a lot of time to imagine things, and may become suspicious and fearful about losing their relationship with you. You can reassure them that you love them and value the relationship.

Ultimately it’s up to them to come to terms with the fact that they’re in prison and can’t control what happens on the outside. Partners often experience pressure to visit the prisoner frequently. Comments such as ‘You’re the only one that visits me’ or ‘You’re the only one I’ve got’ can place considerable pressure on partners. Although you may want to visit your partner every weekend, it may not be possible because of the cost, travelling time and the stress visiting places on you. Your partner may not be aware of what it’s like for you ‘on the outside’. Try to talk with them about the pressures on you and arrange a realistic visiting plan together.

Partners often have to work out how much financial support they can give a prisoner. However much you want to support your partner, you also need to take care of your own and your children’s needs. Prisoners receive three meals a day, have shelter and have some options for filling in time. Their basic needs are met.

Relationships can become strained when a prisoner remains dependent on their partner throughout their sentence and expects their partner to focus considerable attention on them. The prisoner’s situation may not change much during that time. You may have to take on new roles and responsibilities as you cope in the community on your own. You may meet new people, take on new work responsibilities or move to a new area. You may develop new skills and confidence and you may have to become more independent because your partner isn’t there. You’ll have to adjust to changes in relationships with friends and family as children grow older and parents age. It can be hard for prisoners to appreciate these changes, and this can put strain on the relationship, both while prisoners are in a correctional centre and after release.

Communication between partners

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

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

You may fear that you’ll make your partner’s life even harder by telling them about the difficulties in your life. Ultimately, honest communication is the best way to help you and your partner feel closer. It will help your partner to feel involved and needed. It will also stop them from feeling angry if they find out that something happened and they were not told about it. It may help to make a list before a phone call or a visit so that you don’t forget important things to discuss.

Good communication involves recognising what your partner may be experiencing and how this may impact on their communication with you. The ways that prisoners cope inside prison (emotional withdrawal, being guarded about personal issues, and not getting involved) are exactly the sort of reactions that can damage relationships with people on the outside. The boredom and routine of prison life may make prisoners silent or uncomfortable during visits with you and the children. They may feel that talking about prison life is boring or frightening and therefore feel they have nothing to say. These may be important factors to keep in mind when you communicate with your partner.

Prisoners have a lot of time to think between visits and little opportunity to resolve issues. As a result, they can sometimes blow minor disagreements out of proportion. Sometimes a small argument on a visit can spiral out of control afterwards, leading them to become suspicious, angry and defensive. Try to resolve minor disputes during visits when possible rather than leaving issues unresolved.

**Dealing with relationship breakdown**

Many couples will find ways of coping with the pressure of imprisonment, but some relationships break down. Often the beginning and the end of a sentence are the times when there’s the most stress on relationships.

Sometimes having a partner in prison gives you time to think about whether you really want the relationship to continue. You may become more aware of aspects of the relationship that haven’t been working for you, such as violence in the home, or controlling tactics by your partner. You may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor to assist you at this time. See p.29 for services that may help.

If you’re not getting along with your partner and don’t want to have contact,
avoid using children to relay messages to your partner. Doing this can lead to children feeling torn between their parents. It’s important that children can still have the opportunity to talk with parents on the phone. Relationships between parents may be strained, but where it’s safe children should still have the chance to sustain a relationship with both parents.

**Parents of prisoners**

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

**Anger**

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

**Worry**

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

**Guilt**

They may feel guilty about negative feelings towards their child. It can be helpful to separate what your child did (their behaviour) from how you feel about them (the person). You can disapprove of someone’s behaviour but still love the person. Parents of prisoners may feel guilty if they don’t want to support their child by putting up bail, paying out their debts or taking them back home when they’re released. Many parents report finding it hard to say no to demands from their child in a correctional centre, and feeling guilty if they do.

**Shame**

Parents often worry about telling others that their child is in a correctional centre. They’re fearful of the stigma associated with imprisonment. Parents may decide not to tell their friends in case they’re judged as bad parents or rejected by their association with a criminal. Secrecy can increase parents’ sense of shame and humiliation.

**Isolation and alienation**

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

**Relief**

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

Self-blame

Parents may feel that they’re in some way responsible for their child’s actions. They may compare themselves to other families who don’t have children in a correctional centre. People commit crimes for all sorts of reasons, such as to support a drug habit, to get out of debt or because of mental health or personality problems. Blaming yourself ignores the reality that your child is an adult and has made their own decisions.

Uncertainty

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

How much support should parents give?

Parents might have to ask themselves the following questions: Should I put up the money for bail? Should I put money into their prison account? How much should I put in? Should I visit them every weekend? Should I let them live with me when they get released? There are really no ‘shoulds’ or ‘musts’. Many parents set limits to the support they’re able to give. For example, they may decide that it’s too hard having their son or daughter living at home with them anymore. It’s important to think about your own needs and limitations, and those of others in the family. It may also be worth considering whether bailing your son or daughter out of trouble (e.g. debts) may allow them to avoid responsibility for their own actions.

There may be differing views in the family regarding the imprisoned person. One may wish to provide support to the prisoner throughout their sentence, while another may consider a prison sentence to be the last straw. Where there’s ongoing conflict in the family, it may be helpful to talk through the issues together with a counsellor or support worker.

Contact CRC on 9288 8700 or see p.29 for services that may be able to help.
**Need help?**

**Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**
Information, advice and support for prisoners, former prisoners and their families.

9288 8700
www.crcnsw.org.au

**Community Health Centres**
Provide counselling and a range of other health-related services. To find your nearest service check under ‘Community Health Centre’ in the White Pages Telephone Directory or phone:
9391 9000

**Family Drug Support**
Information, referral and support groups for families and friends affected by the drug use of someone who’s close to them.

1300 368 186
www.fds.org.au

**FamS (NSW Family Services)**
FamS provides assistance to families with children. Call this number to find a service close to you:
9692 9999

**Relationships Australia**
Provides relationship counselling to couples, individuals and families.
1300 364 277

**SHINE for Kids**
Services include support, advocacy and referral for children of prisoners, inmates and carers. See p.105 for more details.

Sydney 9714 3000
Windsor 4582 2141
Bathurst 6332 5957
www.shineforkids.org.au
Telephone counselling services

**Lifeline**
Free and confidential telephone counselling, 24 hours.
13 11 14

**Lifeline – domestic violence**
Assistance and referral for people affected by domestic violence.
1800 200 526

**Parentline**
Counselling and referral on parenting issues.
13 20 55

**Mensline**
Family counselling, information and referral for men.
1300 789 978

**Salvo Care Line**
Free 24-hour counselling and referral.
1300 36 36 22

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Domestic violence services

**Domestic Violence Advocacy Centre**
A Community Legal Centre specialising in free advice on domestic violence.
8745 6999
1800 810 784

**Domestic Violence Line**
24-hour advice about safety, AVOs and child protection. Run by DoCS (NSW Department of Community Services).
1800 656 463
Prisoners just look like people you’d see every day

‘It’s a new world when you go into prison. You have to get used to seeing prisoners wearing the white or orange overalls for visits, not the greens they wear every day.’
Nina has attended visits at different correctional centres across NSW over the last 12 months.

You have to be prepared for the visit, making sure you’ve got your ID, and you don’t have any items you shouldn’t have. You spend a long time in line waiting to be processed, and if the prisoners are being mustered it can take a long time to get your visit. The way you’re treated, it’s not like you would be treated in a supermarket or a shop. Some of the staff are beautiful, but others treat you like an inmate even though you’ve never committed a crime. I’ve got a temper, and I have to keep my cool, even if people are rude.

I’ve got used to a certain kind of dress for visiting. I wear close to the same clothes each time, so I won’t get caught with the metal detector. You don’t want to set them off because people behind get frustrated. I don’t wear certain shoes because I’d have to take them off and I wouldn’t wear an underwired bra. I’m not a big jewellery wearer because of my kids, but I’ve seen a lot of people with jewellery who have to take it off. My mother has a jacket with metal buttons, so she’s learnt not to wear that. It can make you feel like you’re wearing a prison uniform too.

The first time he was moved we just got a phone call, ‘I’m getting transferred’, and he went straight away. We didn’t realise that once he was sentenced he could be moved to a country jail. I’d go to visit on the CRC bus. At first I found it a bit threatening, because there would be people from any walk of life, like people on drugs, or former inmates, not people I would normally come across. But you get used to it.

It’s a new world when you go into prison. You have to get used to seeing prisoners wearing the white or orange overalls for visits, not the greens they wear every day.

Everyone has watched prison movies, but actually people in correctional centres don’t look like killers. Some people look fantastic. I spoke to someone at a family day who told me he was a bank robber. If he was wearing a suit you’d think he was a company manager. So that’s something I’ve got out of it. Prisoners just look like people you’d see every day.
Chapter 7

Communicating with Corrective Services NSW
Communicating with Corrective Services NSW staff

Like all government departments, Corrective Services NSW has policies and procedures. There are also processes for people to make complaints, and staff within the Department are accountable for their decisions and actions.

Communication when visiting a correctional centre

A visitor customer service charter operates at all correctional centres. Full details of this are available in the booklet ‘Visiting a Correctional Centre’, which is available at www.dcs.nsw.gov.au.

The service charter includes expectations that staff will:

- Treat you with fairness and courtesy, and give reasons for any decisions
- Provide you with helpful information and address your needs within reason.

Visitors are expected to:

- Follow staff advice, directions, advertised laws, rules and guidelines
- Give personal information that is accurate and complete.

If you have a problem with a staff member while visiting a correctional centre, you can ask to speak to the most senior staff member on duty, and discuss your concern with them. You can also call the centre’s General Manager on the next working day.

Advocating for yourself, your family or a prisoner

Advocacy means supporting or arguing for a particular cause on somebody’s behalf. It can involve making requests or complaints, or simply informing the relevant person about a problematic situation.

Here are some tips for effective advocacy within the correctional system:

- Contact the correctional centre and find out who you should approach. Don’t waste time and energy talking to people who have no power to do anything about your situation. Often the General Manager will be the best person to talk to if you haven’t been able to sort out an issue with a staff member directly.
- Rehearse how you’re going to express your concern or request. Show your letter or discussion points to a neutral person who can give you feedback.
- Wait until you’re calm and composed. It’s no use trying to communicate when you’re stressed, tired or upset.
Be assertive, not aggressive. Stick to the facts and avoid abusive language, finger pointing, sarcasm, swearing or threats. It’s more likely that you’ll get a sympathetic hearing if you’re polite.

Don’t make demands. State your request and the reasons why it’s justified.

Keep a record of the people you’ve spoken with and the actions you’ve taken.

Don’t expect an immediate response.

If your request is turned down or your concern is dismissed, accept that you can’t be told why if this information will breach privacy laws or compromise security or good order in the correctional centre. For example, you may be angry that your partner has been transferred to another correctional centre, but your partner may not have told you that they were involved in a disciplinary breach and that’s why they were transferred. Correctional centre staff won’t be able to tell you the reason for the move because they won’t have the prisoner’s consent.

Listen to the response. Don’t react before you’ve had time to consider what the person has said.

Be prepared to compromise.

Making a formal complaint
If you’re not satisfied with the response from the local correctional centre, you may want to write to the Commissioner of Corrective Services or contact the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman receives complaints when people believe they’ve been treated unfairly by government organisations, including Corrective Services NSW. The Ombudsman has the power to investigate conduct that is:

- Illegal
- Unreasonable
- Unjust or oppressive
- Discriminatory
- Based on improper or irrelevant grounds
- Based on a mistake of law or fact
- Otherwise wrong.

If you’re writing to the Ombudsman include information about the steps you’ve already taken to resolve the situation. Make sure that you have detailed and accurate information about the situation that concerns you. It can be helpful to find out about the correctional centre polices and procedures that relate to your complaint.

Talking to CRC staff may be helpful if you decide to take this step. Contact them on 9288 8700.
Options for prisoners
As well as raising problems with correctional centre staff, prisoners have the option of raising complaints with official visitors. Official visitors are community members who regularly visit correctional centres to check on prisoners’ circumstances. Aboriginal official visitors play a particular role in checking out the wellbeing of Aboriginal prisoners.

Official visitors only speak to prisoners. They’re not available to family members outside the correctional centre.

Prisoners can also ask to see a solicitor from the Prisoners Legal Service, which is part of Legal Aid. They can ask their Wing Officer for an appointment the next time the Prisoners Legal Service visits.

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

Some prisoners become very dependent on family, and expect them to take responsibility for situations that they could look after themselves, sometimes much more easily than a family member can from outside the correctional centre.

Complaints can be lodged on the Corrective Services website www.dcs.nsw.gov.au

If you’re not sure if you need to complain, talk to CRC on 9288 8700.
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

NSW Ombudsman
9286 1000
1800 451 524
www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
Karen’s son is a forensic patient and is in a prison psychiatric hospital subject to recommendations of the Mental Health Review Tribunal (see p.34).

*My son is in isolation 24/7 in a prison psychiatric hospital. He is there as a forensic patient, because he was found not guilty of murder because of mental illness. He is able to come out for an hour a day. He’s not a danger to others, but they’re a danger to him.*

You can’t believe that something like this could happen to little quiet families like ours. He’d been unwell for ten years before he went to prison. He believed there was nothing wrong with him, and refused medication. We’d been aware for many years, but the hospitals never kept him long enough to really get an insight into his condition. He’d been on a community treatment order but he hadn’t been followed up. Most families in our position say the same thing.

The doctors thought he had a drug-induced psychosis, but I think he was smoking marijuana to relieve the voices he was hearing in his head. He’d been on the streets many times. People like him are put in the ‘too hard basket’. He was well known to the police, but he’d never been to prison.

He was living away from home, but he was here more than at his place. The police came over and took him to the station. He’d been quiet, but he was often quiet. They interviewed him for two hours. By then I knew what had happened, and on the way home he said ‘Mum, how can anyone do such a terrible thing?’

The police came back with evidence at 2am and took him. They wouldn’t let us go with him, and he was interviewed without a solicitor. They rang four hours later to say he’d committed the crime and had been arrested. I think I was numb. I said ‘No, it’s not right, you’ve got the wrong person.’ They let me see him at the police station. I expected him to say ‘No Mum, it wasn’t me’. Before I got there I had lots of questions, but I only asked him one. I ran out of the room. I don’t remember driving home.
The police suggested we get out of town. It’s all blurry now, but I know I packed every bit of meat out of the freezer. It’s the strangest thing; I don’t know why I did it. I went to my daughter’s place. We had to quickly ring everyone so that they didn’t hear it first on the news. My husband did that – I couldn’t do anything. I rang my boss and asked for time off. I couldn’t tell him what had happened. I just said ‘Listen to the news’. He rang me back and he was just wonderful.

I was away from the house for about three weeks. The neighbours told me later about the media being outside. The neighbours were great – my kids had grown up with their kids. I expected harassment but, even though the crime was so horrific, they seemed to understand. I was terrified to go to the shops, because I thought everyone would know who I was, so my neighbour went shopping for me.

He was in Silverwater first, then at Long Bay. Our first visit was frightening because we were locked in a room, and we could only see him behind glass, we couldn’t touch him. We only stayed a short time. Afterwards I cried and cried, and it hit me that he was in there and not coming home. At this stage I still hadn’t come to terms with what had happened. It took us a long time to believe that he’d done it. When we asked him if he knew why he was there and what he’d done, he said ‘I do what everyone’s told me’. I don’t think he realised what he’d done. He said the voices were yelling at him the whole time, and he lost it.

You have all these thoughts about what’s happening – that he’s being bashed, or abused by the guards, that the medical staff won’t look after him. Would he get worse or better? What would it be like in isolation, without associating with other prisoners? I rang the prison switch and got put through to the nursing staff. They were very informative. I could talk to the doctors too, who were very approachable. In the psychiatric unit there’s a nurse assigned to each inmate, and you can ask to talk to that nurse. They would give me an update when I called – was he taking his medication, how was he feeling? It’s hard for a forensic patient in isolation to ring, because they can only call when there’s no one else around.
So the nursing staff would pass messages on to him if he hadn’t been able to call us on the phone. I don’t think they can do that in other places, but they always do in the psychiatric hospital.

I didn’t know how the legal system worked, or who to speak to. I had a relative who was a lawyer, and he was able to tell us step by step. I rang Legal Aid and got onto his lawyer and barrister. They probably knew already that he was mentally ill, but I had a whole lot of information I could give them. When they can see the family is involved and caring they tend to involve you in the process, and they kept in contact with us all through the legal proceedings. Our son signed an affidavit giving permission for us to be given information, and we had no problems talking with them.

It took 12 months to get to trial. By then he’d been medicated long enough to get some insight, and he understood what had happened. The worst thing was to see his face, and ours, plastered all over the news. The lawyers got the Salvation Army to go with me to court because they thought I would fall apart. It really helped having them there. We received a letter from the victim’s family afterwards. They acknowledged how our son hadn’t got help when he needed it, and that helped with my feelings of guilt. I thought it was wonderful that they would write to us like that.

Now we visit him every three weeks. He rings about once a fortnight. When he rings it makes you feel wonderful, then after six minutes you’re cut off and you feel really empty. We still visit in a locked room, but we can all be together even though you feel like a monkey in a cage. Though he’s in the prison system I know he’s safe and not on the streets, he’s on medication and he’s not getting kicked out of hospital.

The Mental Health Review Tribunal makes recommendations about forensic prisoners, but they can’t make decisions. I think if people know you’ve got family who cares they get that bit more concern. It helps if they know family will stand up for them. If he’s needed things I’ve rung Justice
‘He rings about once a fortnight. When he rings it makes you feel wonderful’
Health or the Tribunal and made sure he gets them. He’s not working, so he can’t earn money. We have to send money in for him to get the smallest pleasure.

I don’t have a lot of hope for the future. Forensic patients generally serve a lot more time than an ordinary prisoner. You could rob a shop and get two years, but if you’re a forensic patient you could end up serving 20. I hope that he might be transferred to an outside psychiatric hospital before he deteriorates. I think about the things we could do when he’s released – taking him shopping or on picnics – but I fear I’ll be dead before that can happen.

When he went to prison there was no one to talk to. I felt distant from my husband. Sometimes it will pull a family apart, sometimes it will bring them together. For a while there was tension between us because we had different ideas about how things should be handled in court. Now we can talk about it. I’ve also been able to help other families in the same straits. I encourage them never to give up on their family member. Send them letters, so they know you haven’t forgotten them. Try to be cheerful when you talk with them. And remember that if you look after yourself, you’re able to help them.
What to tell the children

Most people find it hard to tell children that their parent is in a correctional centre. Sometimes people pretend that their parent has gone overseas, or that they’ve gone away for work. It’s understandable to want to protect children from being teased by others, or from feeling ashamed of a parent. However, not telling the truth can cause serious problems later.

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

If children find out the truth later on, they may lose trust in people who withheld information from them. This can be especially hard if children are told by someone outside the family, like someone at school, or from TV or newspaper reports. Children often have no idea about life in a correctional centre and may find it easier to adapt to the situation than the adults in their life.

Every family’s situation is different, and there may be circumstances in which it’s better not to tell children about their parent’s imprisonment. If you’re unsure about whether or how to talk to your children, it may be helpful to talk to staff from SHINE for Kids on 9714 3000 or to another family service with workers who understand children’s needs.

There is no ‘right time’ to talk to your child. Usually the sooner you talk to them, the better. Putting it off may just make it harder to tell the truth in the end.

Children will want to know where their parent is and why. They need to be reassured that their parent is safe and that they’ll be able to see them or talk to them. Children have vivid imaginations, and what they imagine can be far more frightening than reality. Seeing their parent on a visit can help dispel fears, and help them have a realistic picture of what’s happening to their parent.

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

Young children need simple explanations of why their parent is in prison, such as
‘Dad hurt someone’ or ‘Mum stole something’. Most children can accept the idea that people are punished for bad behaviour. They need to understand that their parent did the wrong thing but it’s still alright for them to love their parent and see them positively. Older children will probably have more questions and need more detail. The questions that children ask often tell you how much they want to know.

Children will usually want to know when their parent is coming home. It may be tempting to comfort children by telling them that their parent will come home ‘very soon’. However, if this is not the case, children can become extremely worried when their parent doesn’t come home. They might also feel betrayed when they discover they were lied to. Be honest with children.

If their mum will be in a correctional centre for four years, tell them that their mum will not be able to come home for a very long time (or in four birthdays/four summer holidays).

It’s best not to tell children to keep their parent’s imprisonment a secret. Secrecy can increase children’s feelings of shame and guilt. It also prevents the child from receiving support from friends. Children can feel very lonely if they can’t share important parts of their life with anyone. On the other hand, some young children may not be able to anticipate the possible consequences of telling other people that they have a parent in a correctional centre. In this case, you may like to encourage your child to tell just specific people who you think they can trust.

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

A good way to talk about emotions with children is in terms of four basic emotions: bad, sad, mad and glad. In explaining these feelings, it can be helpful to let children know that all of these emotions are okay. Everybody has these feelings and it’s okay to talk about them.

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

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

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

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

You can explain that it’s possible to experience a mixture of these feelings at the same time. For example, when seeing Mum or Dad in prison, the child might feel sad to see them in prison, but happy (glad) to be with them. Or a child might feel angry (mad) with their
parent for having gone to prison, and
at the same time guilty (bad) for having
this feeling.
This basic four-word emotional
vocabulary and the message that all
feelings, including mixed feelings, are
okay can be very helpful for children.

**Bringing children to prison for visits**

Families and carers may be unsure
about taking children to visit their
parent in a correctional centre.
Visiting can be hard for children. They
may have to travel long distances and
cope with queues and rigid security
procedures. Often they’ll be expected to
sit in one place and keep quiet. Where
there isn’t play equipment, they won’t
be able to run around or make a noise.
Some people think children should not
visit because ‘it’s no place for a child’ or
‘they’ll think prison is okay and won’t be
afraid to break the law’. Some people
worry that seeing parents in prison is
too upsetting and could be unsafe.
Families and carers need to weigh up
the negatives involved in visiting
against the benefits for children.
Children’s visits often help both parents
and children to deal with the pain of
separation. Visits allow children to
replace their fears and fantasies with a
more realistic understanding of their
parent’s circumstances. Seeing
their parent reassures children that
they’re safe.
Visits allow parents and children to
maintain their relationship. Regular
visits allow imprisoned parents to
maintain a parenting role and a sense
of being needed and valued outside
prison. This can increase their
motivation to get out and stay out
of prison.
Regular contact gives children
some sense of routine in their
communications. It builds a sense of
security and predictability, both of
which can reduce the negative effects
of parental separation. Visiting prison
and seeing other families and children
of prisoners helps children know that
they’re not alone. Keeping in contact
can make it easier for the family to get
back together when the prisoner is
eventually released.
In a small number of situations, visiting
will clearly not be in the child’s best
interests – for example, where the
prisoner has harmed the child previously.
The type of offence committed by the
prisoner can also influence children’s
visits.
Helping the imprisoned parent get ready for visits

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

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

Preparing children for visits

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

- How long it takes to get to the correctional centre
- What the officers will be wearing, what their parent will be wearing, and whether they’ll look the same as they did the last time the child saw them
- Security and search procedures
- The difference between contact and non-contact visits – don’t promise a contact visit as it may not happen
- What the visiting centre looks like
- How long the visit will last.

Hints for positive visits for children

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

It can be helpful to bring someone else along so that they can take the children outside if they become restless.

**Talking to children immediately after visits**

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

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

**Communicating with their parent by phone or letter**

**Telephone calls**

Parents in a correctional centre will usually only be able to make short calls (e.g. six minutes), and the cost of calls and access to phones may prevent them phoning as often as they would like. However, regular short conversations may be more satisfying with young children than longer ones. Prisoners may be able to call children for a couple of minutes just to say goodnight, find out what the child did that day, or tell the child that they’re thinking about them. If the conversation feels strained, you can suggest that the parent play games and tell jokes and riddles with children over the phone to make the conversation flow more naturally.

Sometimes children might not say very much. This is normal for children, and doesn’t mean that the phone call is a waste of time or meaningless. It’s helpful for children to hear their parent’s voice, even for a short time. Teenage children may be unresponsive during a phone call, but don’t assume this means that they don’t want regular contact.

Phone calls can be stressful. The parent often feels pressure to make the conversation enjoyable. They might feel rejected when the child has little to say.
Children with a parent in prison

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

**Letters**

Letters are a great way to maintain communication. Letters can be picked up and read many times, and this gives children the sense of having enduring contact with parents between visits and phone calls. It’s often easier to express certain feelings and thoughts in letters and drawings than it is on the phone or in person.

Posting children’s drawings, copies of school assignments, or photographs can help provide topics for conversation during visits, and can help parents and children to feel more connected.

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

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

- Keep some stamped envelopes addressed to the parent to make it easier to write and send a letter spontaneously.
- Ask children what they wish they could tell their mum or dad. On the fridge, keep a running list of things to write, and then help the child write a letter.
- For children who can’t write, write down the child’s exact words and then let them draw a picture.
- Keeping a box of different coloured paper, pencils and crayons, magazines to cut out pictures, and other creative tools can motivate children to send mail to their parent.
- Letters don’t have to be long. It’s often better to send regular short letters, with pictures or cartoons stuck on, than long letters more rarely.
- Letters can be creative and fun. For example, caregivers can help children start a picture or story and send it to their parent. The parent can then add to the story or picture and send it back, and this cycle can go on and on.
Children can play games with their parent or arrange to have footy tipping or other competitions through the mail.

Keep the parent informed about birthdays, school events and achievements and other events in the child’s life. This can help them communicate in a way that’s relevant and meaningful to the child.

Older children often appreciate letters from their parent that describe their thoughts, feelings and daily life in prison. These letters reassure children that they’re in the parent’s thoughts and that the parent is okay.

**Effects of parental separation and incarceration on children**

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

There are some common feelings that children may experience following the imprisonment of their parent:

**Grief**

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

**Confusion/helplessness**

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

**Worry**

Children who were present when their parent was arrested often feel worried about what’s happening to their parent. This fear may extend to all strangers. Children may worry that their parent will never come home, and may fear that their remaining parent or caregiver will also be taken away. Most children worry about the health and safety of their imprisoned parent. Children may worry that their living and school arrangements will change and that they’ll be taken away from what has come to be familiar. Older children may worry that they’re a burden for their caregiver if their imprisoned parent was the primary caregiver.
Anger
Children may experience a great deal of anger at their parent for abandoning them, at the police or court that locked their parent up, or at their remaining parent or carer. This anger can develop into rebellion against all authority figures as children grow older.

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

Isolation and loneliness
Children may withdraw from their peers because of the shame they feel about their parent. They may begin to feel different to peers and start to believe that no one really knows or understands them and that they’ll be rejected in other relationships.

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

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

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Sleeping problems or nightmares
- Crying a lot, and being difficult to console
- School issues, including difficulty concentrating, lower marks, being disruptive in classes, getting into fights, or attendance issues
- Developmental issues (e.g. delayed language development)
- Temper tantrums (although these are a normal part of young children’s development)
- Bedwetting
- Being clingy.

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

If you find it hard to deal with children’s reactions or if these behaviours persist, seek help from services such as those listed on p.105. Workers at these services can help children talk about their feelings, and can help you find strategies for responding to challenging behaviours. Getting help early can make a big difference.
School issues

Children of prisoners may experience a decline in school performance and a decreased motivation to achieve at school. Children and adolescents can become disruptive in class or engage in attention-seeking behaviour because they’re finding it hard to concentrate on schoolwork.

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

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

In high schools you may find you need to work through the year coordinator rather than accessing teachers directly.

You may also find it helpful to talk to the school counsellor, or ask if the school counsellor can provide support to the child.

Teenagers

During the teenage years, children are developing their own sense of identity (separate from their parents/caregivers) and becoming more independent. It’s normal for teenagers to withdraw from their parents to some extent, but this can be especially hard for an imprisoned parent to understand. They may take the child’s changed behaviour as a personal rejection, rather than seeing it as a predictable stage in their development. Especially where contact is irregular, parents may have an outdated image of their child, and will find it hard to adjust their expectations. This can exacerbate issues in the relationship, and may further discourage children from wanting to have contact. Caregivers may be able to help by gently reminding prisoner parents that their child is growing up, and by keeping the prisoner up to date with what their child is doing.
What can you do to help?

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

Stability

Children need predictability and routine in their lives. Like anyone else, they like to know what to expect each day. Of course, the imprisonment of a parent may bring changes, such as a change of living arrangements.

Try to keep routines stable, or create predictable routines such as bedtime, homework time and mealtime if children haven’t had these before.

Having clear ‘house rules’ is one positive strategy for encouraging stability even where children sometimes challenge these rules. It’s also good for children to maintain their hobbies, sports and other activities, when possible. SHINE for Kids have funds that can help meet costs involved with this (see p.105).

Care

Children need to feel loved, cared for and supported. Tell children regularly that they’re loved and worthwhile, and reassure them that they’re not to blame for their parent’s imprisonment. Give children lots of positive feedback and encouragement.

Extended family, friends and teachers can also provide emotional support. Sometimes children may not feel that they can talk to their carer about what they’re feeling. It can be helpful for children to know that there’s someone else they can talk to, such as an auntie or teacher.

Difficult behaviour may be a sign of distress or of a need for attention. It’s not always easy to respond with understanding when children are being a ‘nuisance’ or ‘acting up’. However, getting angry can lead to a vicious circle which only ends up making the behaviours worse. Of course, it’s still appropriate and important to set boundaries on children and have reasonable consequences for unacceptable behaviour.
Open communication
Talking openly and honestly to your children about their parent, and talking to them about how they’re feeling, helps children to cope better with the situation. Let children know that there’s nothing so bad that they can’t talk about it with someone. Allow time to ask questions, and answer them as honestly as you can, given their age and level of understanding. You don’t need to feel that you have to make everything better; listening is more important than giving advice. Encourage children to feel they can talk, but remember that some children will talk more than others, and that as children adjust to having a parent in a correctional centre they’ll also want to talk about other things, like their friends and their day’s activities.
While children need to feel they can talk, they may not benefit from other adults’ free expression of feelings and opinions about their parent in a correctional centre. Their carers, or other relatives, may need to express their anger or frustration about their imprisoned family member, but they should avoid involving children, who may not have the maturity to cope with the feelings of others.

Parents’ involvement in discipline
Although imprisoned parents can participate in the disciplining of their children, it’s important that this doesn’t dominate their contact with children. Children may lose interest in talking to their parent in prison if they just expect to be told off for something. If discipline is a concern, contact SHINE for Kids, or one of the family services listed opposite, and discuss your concerns with them. If you’re concerned about how the child’s parent is coping, it may be helpful to talk to the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer at the correctional centre.

Need help?

Community Health Centres
Community Health Centres provide a range of services, including child and family counselling. To find your nearest centre, phone NSW Health. 9391 9000

DoCS Helpline
For reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. 132 111
**Kids Help Line**

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

**1800 55 1800**

**SHINE for Kids**

SHINE for Kids is a community group that supports children with a parent in a correctional centre. SHINE for Kids services include:

- Individual children and family support
- Supported children’s transport service (to help children visit a family in a correctional centre when there’s no one else to take them)
- Activity and drop-in centres for children and young people at Silverwater, John Morony and Bathurst Correctional Centres. These may soon be extended to other centres
- Groups for children and young people
- Preparation for visiting a correctional centre
- Help with schoolwork
- Video visits with inmates and children (see p.65)
- Pen pal program

- Financial and educational help
- Mentoring
- Day trips
- Pre-release preparation and post-release support
- Child and parent activity days within correctional centres
- Community education and advocacy
- Volunteers program.

**Sydney 9714 3000**

**Windsor 4582 2141**

**Bathurst 6332 5957**

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

**Parentline**

Advice, counselling and referrals for parents and carers of children under 18 years. Open Monday to Saturday, 9am–4.30pm.

**13 20 55**

**FamS (NSW Family Services)**

Contact FamS to find the nearest family service. Family services are non-government organisations whose support workers can help with parenting and other family matters through home visiting, counselling and groups.

**9692 9999**

[www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au](http://www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au)
Louisa’s brother was sentenced to seven years several years ago. She recalls what it was like in the period after his sentence, and how things have changed since then. Louisa has three young children.

I was at court with my father for my brother’s sentencing. It was too hard for Mum to come because she doesn’t speak English very well. I was in shock when he was sentenced, and I couldn’t follow what was said because it was very complicated. I had to tell my father, and explain it to another family whose son had been sentenced at the same time. They hadn’t been able to follow it either. Even the barrister didn’t get the details right.

When I spoke to my brother on the phone from Silverwater he was suicidal, and I knew I had to see him. I got to Silverwater on the second or third day after he was incarcerated. I went with my husband, which was good because he was very calm. But when I saw my brother I burst out crying. They had him in a dry cell, and they were watching him on camera. When I got home I was so worried about him, I just went home and kept ringing people trying to find out what to do.

They tried him on lots of different medications. I rang the Justice Health Hotline at times when I was concerned about the side effects of the medication he was taking, and they were very helpful. It was hard feeling I was always having to push things on, to get him seen by a psychiatrist. But the Hotline was good – you feel like they will do something. It’s hard trying to work out the system. You feel like someone’s drowning but you’re so far away you can’t get to them.

My parents were wrecks. There were rumours going around – you know how people like to talk about other people’s lives when things aren’t going well. I couldn’t talk to them about how I felt – only to my husband.

It was a relief to be able to just do things, and not just focus on the negatives. My brother was in a Housing Department place, so I had to tell the Department what had happened. The man there was fantastic – he just told us what to do, and when we’d cleaned everything up and got my brother’s stuff there was money left off the bond. My brother was behind with his electricity and telephone bills. I sold some jewellery to settle his debts. I just didn’t want them hanging around.
‘It was a relief to be able to just do things, and not just focus on the negatives.’
To get my brother’s mail redirected I was supposed to get his signature, and the first person I spoke to at the post office wouldn’t accept the application without it. But then I spoke to someone else, and showed that I had my brother’s passport and ID, and he said it was okay. My brother also had court fines that he couldn’t pay. I got him to talk to the Welfare Officer about writing to the State Debt Recovery Office about that. He had to go and see her and it took a while to get that done. In the end my brother claimed bankruptcy. I helped him with that because he just had too many bills to pay and no assets. But that doesn’t help with the court fines; they still need to be paid.

For a while my concerns about my brother consumed me. When you’re the main one doing everything, you feel really alone, even if there are other people around you. Now I’ve had to step back and get my parents more involved. I don’t do the visiting any more, they do. I’ve had to realise that I can’t fix all his problems. My kids are my priority for now.

Before we talked about him all the time. My parents’ only outlet was me. They would tell me about everything that happened, on the bus and while they were at the correctional centre. I wanted my children to just be able to go to their grandparents and have their attention like other children do, and not for us to be talking about my brother all the time. Now I’ve stepped back, and I want to be the person to help my brother when he gets out. The children will be older then.

My hope is that he will get parole and that he can live independently and get a job. How hard that’s going to be I have no idea. He doesn’t need medication now but I worry sometimes that maybe his mental illness hasn’t been properly treated. I also feel worried about how he will integrate back into the family. My children know about him, but they don’t know where he is. My daughter has been to the family days. She thinks of the correctional centre as a playland. I never told her it was a jail. She asked afterwards if she could go and see her uncle again at the party. I would get Coke and chips from the machines, and my brother would give them to her. It’s a fine line – what do you tell a five year old?
Caring for children with a parent in a correctional centre

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

- Having to cope with children’s distress and confusion
- Struggling to answer children’s questions
- Feeling tired by the demands of parenting
- Financial pressure
- Uncertainty about your role and legal position
- Difficulties getting a break
- Feeling frustrated and angry because you haven’t had a choice about being a carer
- Resentment from other family, especially if you’re no longer so available to them or to their children
- Isolation from friends who may not understand why you’ve taken on parenting responsibilities.

If, as often happens, you’re the child’s grandparent, you may experience loss of freedom and financial security, inability to follow through on retirement plans, and difficulty keeping in touch with your adult friends, who may have little understanding of the pressure you face.

Support for carers

If you haven’t recently been caring for children, you may feel overwhelmed by the demands of parenting. You may feel out of touch about parenting practices and expectations of schools and others.

If the children in your care have experienced disruption or neglect, they may have additional needs, and you may feel unprepared for these. If you’re a grandparent, you may also feel your confidence in parenting has been harmed by having a child in a correctional centre.

Family services often have experience supporting kinship carers, and may also run parenting courses especially for grandparents. Family workers can also help families with practical issues such as finding childcare and budgeting. You can find your nearest family service by contacting FamS on 9692 9999. SHINE for Kids provides a range of services for children with parents in a correctional centre and their parents or carers. For more details of their services see p.105.

Grandparent carers may find it helpful to make contact with other grandparents who are also caring for grandchildren. Most often grandparent
carers are involved because of their child’s drug use or mental illness. While not all grandparent carers will have children in a correctional centre, generally they’ll understand the challenges you’re facing. To find a grandparent support group phone Raising Grandchildren on 9286 3860 or 1800 449 102, or go to www.raisinggrandchildren.com.au.

Some carers find good support from foster carer support groups. Find out where your nearest group is by contacting the NSW Foster Care Association (see below).

The Mirabel Foundation has published a helpful book called *When the Children Come* for carers of children whose parents are affected by drug and alcohol use (see www.mirabel.org.au).

**Need help?**

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

**FamS (NSW Family Services)**

Contact FamS to find the nearest family service. Family services are non-government organisations whose support workers can help with parenting and other family matters through home visiting, counselling and groups.

9692 9999
www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au

**NSW Foster Care Association**

Support and information for foster carers. Can provide information about foster carer support groups.

9633 5816
1800 783 663 (24-hour carer support line)
www.fcansw.org.au

**Parentline**

Advice, counselling and referrals for parents and carers of children under 18 years. Open Monday to Saturday, 9am—4.30pm.

13 20 55

**Raising Grandchildren NSW**

Information for grandparents and other kinship carers.

9286 3860 or
1800 449 102 (outside Sydney)
(Council on the Ageing NSW)
www.raisinggrandchildren.com.au

**SHINE for Kids**

See p.105 for further details of SHINE for Kids services.

Sydney 9714 3000
Windsor 4582 2141
Bathurst 6332 5957
www.shineforkids.org.au
Self-care tips for carers

- Routines can help children settle, although you may need to keep some flexibility to deal with unplanned changes, e.g. to visiting arrangements.
- Keep contact with friends, even if they don’t really understand what it’s like.
- Try to get some time for yourself regularly.
- Don’t try to do too much at once.
- Plan outings or treats where you can all have some fun.
- Tell people what you need if they offer to help. In the beginning the best help may be practical (e.g. ironing, cooking, shopping) so you can spend time with the children or get some rest.

See p.73 for general self-care strategies.

Managing visits

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

If you aren’t getting along with the parent, you may be able to ask another family member or trusted family friend who knows the children well to take them to visit their parent. SHINE for Kids may be able to arrange visits for children if no one else can take them. Video visits can also be an option where distance or other issues make face-to-face visiting difficult. See p.65 for more information.

Need help?

SHINE for Kids

See p.105 for further details of SHINE for Kids services.

Sydney 9714 3000
Windsor 4582 2141
Bathurst 6332 5957
www.shineforkids.org.au
Legal issues when caring for a child with a parent in a correctional centre

Kinship care

In NSW a parent can arrange for immediate family to care for their child without having to involve DoCS or a court order. If there’s no court order, the parent keeps their legal rights and can take back the child’s care as soon as they’re released.

It’s a good idea to get the parent to sign a statement saying they’ve placed the child in the family’s care, and to get the child’s Medicare number. This will help when dealing with schools and doctors. If a child needs surgery or applies for a passport, you’ll usually still need the parent’s consent.

Caring for an unrelated child

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

Children’s Court

DoCS may get involved if concerns are raised about possible harm to a child. This can include concerns about children being moved around a lot or not having a stable parent figure, especially when they’re very young. DoCS is also called when police arrest a parent and there’s no one to look after the children.

Most of the time DoCS staff prefer children to remain with immediate family. Sometimes this can be arranged informally, without needing to go to court. But if there are big concerns about the children, or issues about the children going back home after the parent is released, the matter may go before the Children’s Court. Sometimes children will be placed in the care of family, but the Court may allocate parental (i.e. legal) responsibility to the Minister for Community Services, or may order that this be shared between DoCS and a relative. This means DoCS may be involved in decisions like where the child lives, visiting arrangements to see parents, and decisions about their education or medical care.

If the Court is involved and you want to be considered as a carer for the children, contact DoCS as soon as possible. If you are considered, DoCS will need to visit your home and prepare a report. You may also be able
to be a party to the court case. If you want to do this, you’ll need a solicitor. Depending on your income, you may be able to get Legal Aid for this. Check with Legal Aid on 9219 5000.

If you’re concerned that children will be at risk of harm if they return to a parent on their release from a correctional centre, phone DoCS helpline on 132 111.

**Family Court**

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

**Care of Aboriginal children**

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

Link-Up NSW may be able to help families to get care of the children while a parent is in a correctional centre. Contact Link-Up on 4759 1911.
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

**Community Legal Centres**
Contact this number to find the centre nearest you. Community Legal Centres offer free legal advice.
9212 7333
www.nswclc.org.au

**DoCS Helpline**
Contact DoCS if you’re concerned that a child is at risk of harm, or to request assistance.
132 111
www.community.nsw.gov.au

**Family Court**
The Family Court can make legal orders about children where there are no child protection concerns.
9217 7111

**Legal Aid Commission of NSW**
Legal Aid provides free legal representation to disadvantaged people. See them when they visit your prison or call the NSW LawAccess line:
1300 888 529
9219 5000
www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

**Link-Up NSW**
The Family Link Worker provides support for parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
4759 1911
www.linkupnsw.org.au

**Raising Grandchildren NSW**
Information for grandparents and other kinship carers.
9286 3860 or 1800 449 102 (Council on the Ageing NSW)
www.raisinggrandchildren.com.au
Financial support if you’re caring for a child with a parent in a correctional centre

Getting financial support will depend on your circumstances and the child’s situation. Caring for a child can place financial pressure on extended family, especially where grandparents or other carers are themselves relying on pension payments or retirement income. Some kinship carers feel uncomfortable about claiming benefits to care for grandchildren or other related children, but these payments are the community’s recognition that you’re doing an important job.

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

Centrelink

Depending on your income, you may be able to get parenting payment and Family Tax Benefit from Centrelink. Check with the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150. Depending on your age, and the children’s age, you may be expected to look for work or do training for work once the youngest child is at school. If you’re concerned about your ability to care for the child and meet work or training requirements, make sure Centrelink is aware of your circumstances as a carer.

If the child in your care has one parent in a correctional centre with a sentence of ten years or more, and the other parent is dead or you don’t know where they are, you may also be able to claim a Double Orphan’s Pension.

If you’re caring for a child with significant health or developmental problems, you may be able to get a Carer Payment or Carer Allowance, or a Health Care Card, from Centrelink. (There’s no means test for Carer Allowance.)
Child Care Benefit

Grandparent carers with full-time responsibility for grandchildren may be eligible for up to 50 hours per week of Child Care Benefit without having to meet work or study requirements. If grandparent carers receive Centrelink payments (e.g. a pension) they may be covered for the full cost of childcare. Other carers may be eligible for short-term assistance with childcare fees if they’re experiencing short-term financial hardship.

Contact the Family Assistance Office for information about Child Care Benefit on 13 6150.

Carer Allowance

If DoCS asks you to look after your grandchildren, you may receive a Carer Allowance. This is a fortnightly payment for the care of the children and is tax free. DoCS may also pay for some other expenses, such as travel to see parents, if they’re written into the child’s plan.

DoCS may pay a Statutory Care Allowance where the court has granted parental responsibility for the child to the Minister, the Director General or a non-relative. A Supported Care Allowance may be paid where a relative has parental responsibility, either through a court order or where there’s no court order. Both kinds of allowances provide the same level of financial support.

When approached by DoCS to consider caring for children, many relatives are so anxious to ensure the child stays with the family that they don’t feel comfortable talking about money. Carer allowances are not paid automatically, even where there’s a court order. DoCS would prefer children to stay with family if possible. If you’re concerned about your financial capacity to meet the needs of children DoCS wants to place with you, start asking about possible financial support sooner rather than later. Once the placement is established it can be much more difficult to access Carer Allowance.
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

**Centrelink:**
To apply for a payment: 13 1021
Employment Services: 13 2850
Disability, Sickness & Carers: 13 2717
Family Assistance Office: 13 6150
Youth & Student Services: 13 2490
Multilingual Call: 13 1202
TTY: 1800 810 586
www.centrelink.gov.au

**Raising Grandchildren NSW**
Information for grandparents and other kinship carers.
9286 3860 or 1800 449 102 (Council on the Ageing NSW)
www.raisinggrandchildren.com.au

**Welfare Rights Centre**
If you have problems dealing with Centrelink, they can help you.
9211 5300
1800 226 028
www.welfarerights.org.au

**DoCS Helpline**
Contact DoCS if you’re concerned that a child is at risk of harm or to request assistance.
132 111
www.community.nsw.gov.au
Chapter 10

Housing issues for families of prisoners
Housing NSW (Department of Housing)

Housing NSW provides cheap housing for people who have a low income and additional needs, such as health issues or a disability, that make it hard for them to get other housing. Any tenants who have started in Housing NSW accommodation from July 2006 will be reviewed regularly, and may be expected to move out of their housing if their circumstances improve, e.g. if they get work and increase their income. Leases vary from 18 months to ten years, depending on the tenant’s circumstances. You need to apply to Housing NSW to be on the Housing Register, and you may have a long wait. You can contact Housing NSW on 1300 468 746. Ask for the booklet that Housing NSW has produced for the families of prisoners.

What if the lease was in the prisoner’s name?

If the lease is in the prisoner’s name, contact Housing NSW to explain that the tenant is in prison. Housing NSW may let people keep their tenancy for up to three months if they only stay in a correctional centre for a short time, and if they pay a nominal rent. The Department may also allow friends or family of the prisoner to stay in the property during their incarceration, to safeguard the prisoner’s belongings and maintain the property. They’ll need to pay rent as if they were a Housing NSW tenant during that time.

If the tenant is incarcerated for a longer period, they’ll need to give up their tenancy and reapply for Housing NSW accommodation when they’re released. Generally, tenants will be rehoused unless they have major rent arrears or have a history of serious tenancy issues, such as damaging property. This means it’s important to tell Housing NSW what’s happening when someone is imprisoned so that they don’t get into debt. Family members can often negotiate with Housing NSW to clean out and store the prisoner’s belongings and return keys.

If the tenant’s partner and/or children remain in the house after the tenant has gone into a correctional centre, and the tenancy was not shared, contact Housing NSW so that it can review the situation. It may be possible to negotiate for the tenancy to be transferred. Contact the Tenants’ Union on 9251 6590 if you need advice.
**Private rental**

If you need to move into private rental accommodation, you may be able to get Rentstart Help towards the bond of a new property, or Rentstart Plus to pay the full bond and two weeks’ rent. You must be eligible for public housing, have less than $1,000 savings, and be able to stay at the address for at least 12 months. You can only get Rentstart Help once a year.

You can also apply for Rentstart to pay rent if you’re behind. You can only get this help once a year.

If you have difficulty finding a private property to rent, you might try to get into community housing, where rents are subsidised. Ask Housing NSW if there’s a community housing service in your area.

**Difficulties meeting mortgage payments**

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

You may also be eligible for an interest-free loan through the Mortgage Assistance Scheme. Contact Housing NSW for more information.

**Housing options for Aboriginal people**

The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) provides housing for Aboriginal people on low incomes. You can apply for this as well as applying to Housing NSW. Contact the AHO on 8836 9444.

**Moving to be close to your family member’s correctional centre**

Some families move closer to the correctional centre so they can visit their family member more often. Bear in mind that if your family member has a lengthy sentence they can expect to be transferred to various correctional centres. It can be expensive to try to follow them around to different correctional centres across the state. It can also be very disruptive, especially for children. Also think about what it will mean to leave your support networks behind, and where you will want to live once your family member leaves the correctional centre.
Need help?

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

**Housing**

**Housing NSW (Department of Housing)**
Contact for information about public housing, community housing, Rentstart and the Mortgage Assistance Scheme.
1300 468 746
Aboriginal Enquiry Line: 1800 355 740 (8.30am–4.30pm weekdays)
www.housing.nsw.gov.au

**Aboriginal Housing Office**
8836 9444
www.aho.nsw.gov.au

**Crisis accommodation**

**Aboriginal Homeless Persons**
Helpline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless.
9799 8446

**Homeless Persons Information Service**
Information about refuges across NSW.
9265 9081
1800 234 566

**Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line (Housing NSW)**
May be able to help in a crisis. Open 4.30pm–10pm weekdays and 10am–10pm weekends and public holidays.
1800 152 152

**Youth Emergency Accommodation Line**
Recorded message, with vacancies in refuges updated each morning.
1800 424 830

**Women’s Information and Referral Service**
Housing and other support services for women.
1800 817 227

**Tenancy advice**

**Tenants’ Union Hotline**
Advice and information about renting, tenants’ rights, etc.
9251 6590
### Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service

Phone your nearest office for assistance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>4353 5515</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Suburbs</td>
<td>9386 9147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter Area</td>
<td>1800 654 504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illawarra</td>
<td>1800 807 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Sydney (Mon, Wed, Fri)</td>
<td>9698 5975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner Western Sydney</td>
<td>9559 2899</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid North Coast</td>
<td>1800 777 722</td>
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<tr>
<td>New England and Western NSW</td>
<td>1800 836 268</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Rivers</td>
<td>1800 649 135</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Sydney</td>
<td>9884 9605</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Sydney</td>
<td>9787 4679</td>
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<tr>
<td>South West NSW</td>
<td>1800 642 609</td>
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<tr>
<td>South West Sydney</td>
<td>1800 631 993</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Sydney</td>
<td>1800 625 956</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parks and Villages (Caravan parks, residential villages, etc)</td>
<td>9566 1010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older Persons Tenants’ Advice (55+)</td>
<td>9566 1120 or 1800 13 13 10</td>
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For more tenants information, visit [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au)

### Aboriginal Tenancy Advice

Assists with public and private tenancies, including bond, temporary accommodation and tenants’ rights.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Sydney</td>
<td>1800 772 721</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern NSW</td>
<td>1800 248 913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western NSW</td>
<td>1800 810 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern NSW</td>
<td>1800 672 185</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Centrelink

If your family member was receiving Centrelink payments (e.g. Newstart or Disability Support Pension), they won’t be eligible for payments while they’re in the correctional centre. They’ll be able to ask the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer to notify Centrelink about their situation. If your partner has been incarcerated and you’re receiving Centrelink payments, you also need to advise Centrelink so your payments can be adjusted.

Centrelink obtains the dates people enter custody directly from Corrective Services NSW, so eligibility for Centrelink payment ceases once your family member enters custody, even if you don’t tell Centrelink straightaway. It’s best to inform Centrelink as soon as possible to avoid overpayments that you or your family member will have to repay later.

If your partner was previously employed, you may need to apply for Centrelink payments, or you may need to ask Centrelink to reassess your eligibility for payments. Centrelink has a special rate of parenting payment where couples are unable to live together. If you advise Centrelink that your partner has entered a correctional centre but you’re still a couple, you’ll be paid at this special partnered rate. If you’ve decided to separate from your partner, your separation would need to be verified before Parenting Payment is paid at the single rate. Your ex-partner may then have obligations for child support that may continue at a minimal rate while they’re in a correctional centre.

Centrelink expectations about parenting and employment have changed recently. Parents of school-age children are now expected to look for work or participate in employment training or preparation activities. This may feel daunting if you haven’t been in the paid workforce for a long time. You may be asked to attend a Job Capacity assessment, which will help identify your skills and support needs to help you get a job.

If Centrelink staff believe that you have personal issues that will make it hard for you to get or keep a job, they may refer you to a Personal Support Program. This provides intensive support for people who have barriers to employment, such as family issues, drug and alcohol or gambling issues, or homelessness.

You may feel uncomfortable if you have to tell Centrelink that a close family member is in a correctional centre. It may help to remember that Centrelink and Job Search staff hear many
different people’s stories, and they’re expected to treat all customers in a respectful way. Generally, staff in these agencies will be better able to assist you if they know about the pressures you may be under because your family member has been incarcerated. Centrelink employs social workers who can provide counselling and referral for families under pressure. If you’re finding it difficult to deal with Centrelink issues, the social worker can be a good person to talk to. Contact Centrelink on 13 1021. If you have problems dealing with Centrelink, the Welfare Rights Centre may be able to help you with appeals or checking your eligibility. Phone them on 1800 226 028.

**Need help?**

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

**Centrelink**

To apply for a payment:

13 1021

Employment Services:

13 2850

Disability, Sickness & Carers:

13 2717

Family Assistance Office:

13 6150

Youth & Student Services:

13 2490

Multilingual Call:

13 1202

TTY:

1800 810 586

www.centrelink.gov.au

**Welfare Rights Centre**

Can help with information about entitlements and appeals.

9211 5300

1800 226 028

www.welfarerights.org.au
**Child support**

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

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

**Debts**

Many prisoners have debts when they go into a correctional centre. These may include unpaid fines, bills for electricity or phone services, child support payments, credit cards or loans. If your partner has been imprisoned, you may have difficulty meeting payments for joint debts as well.

Money worries can really add to the stress you’re experiencing. This can be even worse if you have pressure from debt collectors or court notices. You may also have to cope with repossession of the family car or household appliances if repayments fall behind.

If you’re concerned about outstanding debts once your family member is in a correctional centre, here are some things you can do:

- You may want to check out if you’re personally responsible for a debt. Sometimes people feel pressure, or may even be hassled by debt collectors, over debts that don’t belong to them. Check with the Credit and Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 if you’re not sure if a debt is your responsibility. You can also check your credit file with Veda Advantage on 9464 6000.

**Need help?**

**Child Support Agency**

131 272

If you want to assist a family member to sort out their debts, you’ll usually need their written authority to negotiate with organisations like electricity or phone companies. They may need to post this authority to you, see the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer, who may be able to assist them to get the authority to you or to the relevant organisation.

Many organisations will negotiate about repayments of debts. They may feel they’ll be better off to allow you to make smaller repayments so they’ll still get their money back eventually. Check with the Credit and Debt Hotline for advice about how to approach this.

You may be able to apply for a hardship variation from the Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal. Contact your local Community Legal Centre for advice.

If your financial situation is complicated, talk to a financial counsellor. To locate a financial counsellor phone 1800 808 488.

You may be able to consolidate your debts into one combined debt, with one repayment. Beware of private debt consolidation schemes which may charge you high fees for something that you could do through a financial counsellor or bank without additional charges.

If you have children and are struggling with financial issues, you may be able to get help with budgeting from a Family Support Service. Contact FamS on 9692 9999 to find out where your nearest Family Support Service is located.

Sometimes family members in correctional centres will owe money to drug suppliers, or for other illegal reasons. Often families will feel pressure to repay these debts because of concerns about retaliation if the debts aren’t paid. If you need to talk to someone about a situation like this, contact CRC on 9288 8700 for confidential support.
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

**Community Legal Centres**
For free legal advice.
9212 7333
[www.nswclc.org.au](http://www.nswclc.org.au)

**Credit and Debt Hotline**
Provides general advice about credit and debt issues, legal advice and assistance, and referrals to financial counselling.
1800 808 488
[www.cclcnsw.org.au](http://www.cclcnsw.org.au)

**Energy and Water Ombudsman**
Assistance with problems with gas, electricity and water providers.
1800 246 545

**State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO)**
Information about parking fines, etc. Will renegotiate debts where people are in a correctional centre.
1300 655 805

**Telephone Industry Ombudsman**
Assistance with problems with telephone services.
1800 062 058

**Veda Advantage**
Get a copy of your credit file and check any outstanding debts.
9464 6000
Travel assistance for visiting the correctional centre

If you can’t afford to visit your family member because of the cost of fares or accommodation, the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer at the correctional centre may be able to help you. Contact them and ask about Travel Assistance, or ask your family member in the correctional centre to do this.

CRC runs a subsidised bus service from Sydney to Berrima, Goulburn, Lithgow, Kirkconnell, Bathurst, Oberon, Junee, Cessnock and St Heliers (Muswellbrook) Correctional Centres. There is a small cost for this service except the run to Junee, where passengers need to pay for overnight accommodation.

You need to book to use the CRC bus service. For fares, times and bookings, ring CRC on 9288 8700.

Paying bills

If you’re having trouble managing, you may be able to get help with food vouchers or power bills from non-government agencies. Some of the large ones are listed on the next page, but Centrelink, local community centres or family agencies can usually refer you to local services.
Need help?

**Anglicare**
Check if they have a service near you.
9895 8000
www.anglicare.org.au

**Prisoners Aid**
Can provide limited financial assistance and referral for former prisoners and their families.
9281 8863

**Salvation Army**
Check if they have a service near you.
137 258
www.salvos.org.au

**St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies)**
Check if they have a service near you.
9560 8666
www.vinnies.org.au

**SHINE for Kids**
SHINE for Kids can organise financial support for children’s education and recreation needs if they have a parent in a correctional centre. This can include camps, tutoring, football and dance classes.
Sydney 9714 3000
Windsor 4582 2141
Bathurst 6332 5957
www.shineforkids.org.au
Chapter 12

Families from diverse backgrounds
Families from culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds

Having a family member in a correctional centre is tough for all families. But for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds there can be extra pressures.

Understanding the court and correctional centre system is especially difficult where family members have limited English. Families may find the Australian correctional system is very different from what they expect. On the positive side, this may mean it’s less harsh or dangerous than their experience from other countries. It can also be confusing because family members can’t do things like bring in food, clothing or medicine, which might be expected of them in other countries.

Families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities may also fear or experience shame and rejection because they have a family member in a correctional centre. While this is true for many families, it can hit hardest where family members are part of small communities where it’s hard to be anonymous.

Translation and interpreter services

Any prisoner or a member of their family who is observed to have difficulty communicating in English, or asks for help because of communication difficulties, will be given appropriate language assistance.

Language assistance is used if staff think there’s a possibility that a prisoner or their family member can’t use English well enough to make use of Corrective Services programs and services in the same way other prisoners and families do. Language assistance provided by Corrective Services can be used only within Corrective Services programs and services. For example, it doesn’t extend to assistance in court.

Language assistance means:

- Using accredited Corrective Services NSW staff who speak community languages (i.e. Community Language Allowance Scheme – CLAS – officers who are listed on the Department’s website)
- Using the Telephone Interpreter Service
- Using TTY services for people with hearing impairment
- Using external face-to-face interpreters.
The kind of language assistance given depends on the situation. Corrective Services CLAS officers can assist with on-the-spot, simple assistance with interpreting or translation. Corrective Services staff are responsible for accessing and using the language services needed as situations arise, and can make the decision to use language services without getting additional approval.

**Deportation: When is a person removed from Australia for committing a crime?**

Permanent residents who are not Australian citizens may be deported (ordered to return to their country of citizenship) if, within 10 years of entry into Australia, they’ve been convicted of a crime for which they’ve been sentenced to imprisonment for one year or longer. In some circumstances the Department of Immigration and Citizenship may also cancel the residence visa of a permanent resident who has been convicted of serious offences and has served a custodial sentence, even if they’ve lived in Australia for much longer than 10 years.

Usually prisoners aren’t advised of plans for deportation until shortly before their release. Generally, only those who have been convicted of serious offences are deported. Serious offences include crimes of violence, offences involving injury or corruption of young people, sex offences, and trafficking in or distribution of drugs. If a permanent resident in Australia is deported because of committing a crime, they’ll probably be permanently banned from returning to Australia.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship considers the following matters before making the decision to deport someone:

- Details of the offence/s
- Extent of rehabilitation of the offender
- Prospect of repeated criminal offences (recidivism)
- Risk to the community if the person reoffends in Australia
- Previous criminal history of the offender
- Family ties, and/or
- Obligations of the Australian Government under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

When a person is given a deportation order they can appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). The Tribunal can, if it believes that a wrong decision has been made, reverse the deportation order.
Getting support

It’s hard to support your family member in a correctional centre on your own. Most families have questions about the kind of help their family member can get, and about how they can support them. They may also have needs because their family member is no longer there, such as how to cope financially.

You may have difficult issues to address, like whether to tell family overseas about your family member being in a correctional centre. You may be used to coping with things alone, but now you have a lot to deal with. It can really help to find people who can listen and who you can trust to keep your concerns private. A professional counsellor, social worker, psychologist or doctor is obliged to keep confidentiality, so you can talk to them without feeling concerned that they’ll tell other people that your family member is in a correctional centre.

Isolation

Many families from small culturally diverse communities describe how isolated they feel having a family member in a correctional centre. It’s easy to feel that you’re the only family this has happened to, even though most often this is not the case. CRC has workers who can support families who are feeling isolated. Call on 9288 8700.

Calling CRC or other services via interpreter

Families can access services such as CRC or other government or not-for-profit services using the Telephone Interpreter Service. If you want to call CRC and you don’t speak English, call 131 450.

Need help?

The Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
A Community Legal Centre specialising in immigration law. Provides free information and advice. Check their website for a factsheet on prisoner deportation.
9262 3833 (Tuesday and Thursday, 2pm–4pm)
www.iarc.asn.au
Sofia comes from a small ethnic community where there’s huge shame associated with imprisonment. She has had to keep secret the fact that her son is now serving his second prison term.

*When my son pleaded guilty the first time he went to court, he was sentenced the following week. It was so hard, it was like a death. We are from a small community, and to have a family member in prison is not an accepted thing, it’s an absolute taboo. My community don’t know, I could never, ever tell them because people are very judgmental. I say my son is working interstate. I haven’t even told his grandparents, they just think he is working away from home. They ask after him, and I have to make up things to tell them.*

*My son appealed and I discovered that everything about his case was on the internet. That was horrible. Especially because we are from an ethnic minority and it’s not like having hundreds or thousands of Smiths. If you google our name there’s only four or five, and my son’s case comes up at the top. I was shocked because of my husband. He’s got quite a profile in the community with the church and everything else, and sometimes when I’m talking on the phone to people and I’m discussing my son’s situation he gets quite upset. He says ‘Why are you talking about it?’ He prefers it to be absolutely secret. When my son went to prison the second time my husband was there for the hearing, but he hasn’t been to visit him. He can’t do it. The second time it really broke his heart.*

*My daughter was really affected when her brother went to prison. She really loves her brother and she didn’t do very well in her exams. In the first few months after he went it was all I talked about with her. She never said ‘I’ve had enough’, but after a while I noticed how she reacted. In the beginning she would join in, then she would listen and walk away.*

*I find that with my friends that are Aussies I am able to tell them. I had to tell them. You need support, a couple of really good friends who give you that positive feedback. That is very important. After my son was sentenced I went through depression, I was suicidal really, and I went to see this Australian girlfriend of mine and it just all came out. She said ‘Well at*
least he’s not dead, he’s alive’, and that helped. The way I look at it, I felt that maybe him getting caught was a saving grace because he would have been involved in more criminal activity if he hadn’t. A couple of my work colleagues know. It was more difficult for me to talk about it the second time. The first time I felt he’s made a mistake and he’s learnt from it. When I talked to my friends and my colleagues we’d say ‘He’s young, he’s made a mistake’. The second it was much more difficult because I kept on asking myself ‘Why, why?’

My son got out and did the same thing a couple of days before his parole was finished. I can’t help thinking that if he had received some kind of support, some kind of therapy, things might have been different. He told the psychologist who wrote a report for his trial that he feels more human in prison because he doesn’t have to struggle like he does on the outside. He doesn’t have to go out to work and face his manager or supervisor and face his anxiety. He isn’t even smoking marijuana now. I know he doesn’t because I know what he’s like. He goes to the gym, he looks healthy, his body is muscly, he has his work, basically it’s because that anxiety is taken away from him inside. When I talked to the psychologist at the prison he said ‘He needs to come and say “I need help”’ – but which person with depression or a mental illness comes knocking?

Once I got a taxi to the prison and the driver asked ‘Are you a doctor or a social worker? Do you work there?’ He didn’t think I looked like someone with a family member in prison. But in the end I told him why I was going there. We didn’t choose this. I feel like we families are victims too.
'We are from a small community, and to have a family member in prison is not an accepted thing, it’s an absolute taboo.'
What is parole?
Parole is when an offender serves some of their sentence in a correctional centre (non-parole period) and the rest in the community. About six out of every ten prisoners will get parole.

For sentences under three years, parole is usually granted automatically. Decisions about granting parole for longer sentences are made by the State Parole Authority. The Authority is made up of public servants and representatives of the community, including an Aboriginal representative.

If people have a good record in the correctional centre, and have done programs to address their offending behaviour, there’s a good chance they’ll get parole when they apply. If parole is not granted, the offender can appeal to a hearing of the Authority. This may be in person or by video link. Their family can come and support their appeal, especially if they’re offering accommodation and support.

To get parole, offenders need to have a stable place to live. A parole officer will need to visit and check this before the person’s parole is approved. If the offender plans to live with family, the parole officer will make sure that members of the household support this plan.

Offenders on parole have to keep to set conditions. This includes contact with a parole officer. Parole officers work from a Community Offender Services office. Parole officers can help with referrals to community agencies, help finding study or employment, and help with programs designed to keep offenders from going back to a correctional centre. Parole officers generally have a good understanding of the pressures newly released prisoners face, and can provide both practical and emotional support.

Parole officers will visit the home from time to time and talk to the family. Although their main focus is on the person on parole, their knowledge and support can be helpful for the rest of the family too. Parole officers may report breaches of parole conditions to the State Parole Authority. Not all breaches result in a return to the correctional centre. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, depending on the severity of the breach.

The more your family member on parole puts into the relationship with the parole officer, the more they’re likely to get out of it. However, while you can encourage your family member to make the most of contact with their parole officer, you can’t do the work for them.
**Will my family member get day leave before release?**

Prisoners can apply for day or weekend leave if they’re classified minimum security C3 (men) or Category 1 (women). They must:

- Be serving a sentence of six months or more
- Be a month or less away from having served half their sentence
- Be within 18 months of release
- Be free of dirty urines (tests in which drugs are detected) for six months.

Women prisoners have no time constraints, but must be free of dirty urines for six months.

Some other people can get day leave if they’re seen as having special needs.

Once approved, day or weekend leave can be taken every 28 days, or every 14 days from some isolated centres. To get day or weekend leave, prisoners need a sponsor. The sponsor must be with them the whole time they’re out of the correctional centre.

Being a sponsor is a big responsibility. It’s often best if there’s more than one sponsor to share the load. Sponsors must:

- Be over 18 years of age, with ID
- Have known the prisoner for more than 12 months before they entered the correctional centre
- Have no outstanding criminal charges
- Have not been imprisoned during the last three years
- Have had no periodic detention over the last two years
- Have had no convictions for drug trafficking commercially for the last 10 years.

Sometimes exceptions can be made for a partner who’s facing criminal charges or has been in a correctional centre in the last three years if the General Manager of the correctional centre interviews them and gives approval.

Your family member in the correctional centre must make the application for day or weekend leave. If they ask for you to be a sponsor, you’ll then be contacted by staff from the correctional centre.
**Planning for release**

Prisoners are encouraged to start planning for their release three to six months before they leave the correctional centre, especially if they’ve been inside for a long time. Prisoners may do the NEXUS program, which helps them get ready.

Some families regret having taken a family member back after being pressured to do so. If you don’t feel able to have your family member home with you, tell them well beforehand rather than just before release. This will give them time to get used to the idea and make other plans. Don’t tell their parole officer that you can have them home unless you mean it. You could end up making things worse for your family member if they don’t have stable accommodation in the first few months after they’re released.

There are a limited number of places at supported accommodation services that cater especially for people leaving a correctional centre. Some of these services have special expertise in working with people with drug or mental health issues. Your family member will need to apply for these programs before they leave the correctional centre. They can talk to the Services and Programs Officer, Welfare Officer or Parole Officer about these options. You may be able to encourage them to consider them, but you can’t make the arrangements for them. If you’re concerned about your family member’s ability to make these plans, you can contact the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer to alert them to your concerns.

For more information see the ‘Getting Out and How to Survive It’ guide book (see p.146).

**Exit Checklist**

Inside the correctional centre, prisoners should be given a copy of the Planning Your Release NSW Exit Checklist. This is a booklet prepared by CRC for Corrective Services NSW. It guides prisoners through the main things they need to do to get ready for release, and gives useful tips and contact numbers. Important tasks include:

- Getting ID (e.g. birth certificate, Medicare card)
- Finding accommodation
- Dealing with debts – even if these can’t be paid off, making arrangements beforehand will make life easier
- Arranging follow-up medical care, including methadone or bupe (bupranorphine)
- Planning for more study or work
- Finding support so people aren’t on their own.
If you’ve been holding ID for a family member, you may need to send it back to them during this time as they’ll need it straightaway when they’re released. You may be able to help your family member by getting information about local TAFE options or employment services, or other agencies that may offer them support. Sometimes prisoners try to rely on the correctional centre ‘grapevine’, but this may not provide accurate or up-to-date information. Remember that you can provide options but you can’t make your family member follow them up.

**Release day**

Prisoners will be expected to organise their own transport back home. It’s a big encouragement to them if they have someone to meet them at the gate when they’re released. However, if you want to set limits about the support you can give your family member, meeting them at the gate may give the wrong message. Correctional centre staff can organise travel vouchers for prisoners who don’t have any other transport options.

In the first couple of days after release prisoners usually have a lot of practical things to do. These include:

- Opening a bank account
- Going to Centrelink
- Attending Job Search or other employment interviews
- Meeting with their parole officer if they’re on parole
- Buying essentials such as food and toiletries
- Connecting with health care or pharmacotherapy (e.g. methadone) providers.

Be aware that after the initial excitement things can often feel flat. The released prisoner may be the centre of attention in the beginning, but soon other people have to get back to their normal lives. Prisoners may find it overwhelming having to deal with people and may withdraw a bit. Try not to expect too much in the early days.
Post-release programs can help prisoners make the transition back into the community. Here are some options. Parole officers can provide more information.

**PEET (Pathways to Employment Education and Training)**

TAFE runs PEET through Community Offender Services (Parole) offices in different parts of NSW. Sessions run for four hours each week, over nine weeks. The course helps people who have had drug or alcohol issues to set goals for education and work. It’s a good place to start for people who aren’t sure about their options for work or study.

**Community Offender Services Programs**

Parole officers provide group programs that may include Drug and Alcohol Addiction, Relapse Prevention or Anger Management. Programs for Aboriginal participants may include involvement from local Elders. Phone 9288 8700.

**Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**

CRC runs the BASE (Balancing Addictions, Strengthening Energies) program, which can teach strategies to deal with anxiety and anger. CRC also provides support services and referrals. Phone 9288 8700.

**The Getting Out and How to Survive It Book**

CRC has developed a guidebook for prisoners to help in the days and months after release. It has lots of tips on coping on the outside, contact details for services that can help, and stories from people who have survived the experience. It may also help families understand what their family member is going through.

The book includes information about transitional accommodation and rehab services that can accommodate prisoners on release. To get a copy, phone CRC on 9288 8700, or go to www.crcnsw.org.au or www.dcs.nsw.gov.au.
When a family member comes home from a correctional centre

Returning home to family from a correctional centre can be challenging for everyone. Family roles and relationships have often changed while the family member has been away, and it can be hard to adjust. Former prisoners may find it tough to step back into community life. Finding work and coping without the structure and routine of the correctional centre may be difficult. Often there are high expectations by at least one party which can’t be met.

Do you want your family member to return to your home?

Families often face a lot of pressure to take in a family member who’s leaving a correctional centre. This pressure may come directly from your family member, or from others, sometimes including service providers working with your family member. Think carefully about whether you want to do this. You need to weigh up the needs of all the family, including children, before making this decision. If in the past you’ve experienced violence or abuse from your family member, or have been affected by their use of drugs or alcohol, don’t assume that just being away in a correctional centre has changed things. Remember that once your family member is released and living with you, it’s often very hard to get them to leave.

If you’re feeling guilty about not wanting your family member back, don’t let your feelings push you into a decision that may be bad for you and for others at home. It’s okay to care about someone but still not want to live with them. Your family member will have to take responsibility for their future if they’re to successfully adjust to life ‘outside’. You can’t rescue them, or take on their responsibilities for them.

Need help?

CRC (Community Restorative Centre)
Can provide support for families of prisoners and former prisoners.
9288 8700
Changing roles

Former prisoners
A prisoner returning to their family has to make many difficult changes as they readjust to family life. This is true for parents, sons, daughters or partners. Life in a correctional centre is highly structured. There are few decisions to make and little need to deal with other people’s feelings and choices. Prisoners have described life in a correctional centre as being quite ‘black and white’. Family life is much more complex. It isn’t possible just to focus on yourself. Although prisoners are usually keen to leave the correctional centre, they may find it very hard to settle back into the family.

Partners
Partners often have to take on more responsibility for financial and other matters while their partner is in custody. They may feel surprised or even uncomfortable about how well they’ve coped during that time. Some may not love their partner any less, but they’ve been able to get on with life without them. Others may question whether they want to continue the relationship after release. This independence can create difficulties for the former prisoner as well. They may assume that everything will just be the way it was before they were incarcerated. Men in particular may be used to being in charge, and may have mixed feelings when they realise that their partner doesn’t depend on them the way they did before. Prisoners who have had a lengthy sentence may also find it hard when they’re dependent on their partner to help them cope with things that have changed while they were inside, like using a mobile phone or the internet.

Children
Children respond in different ways when a parent comes home from a correctional centre. This partly depends on the child’s age and partly on how long their parent has been away. Younger children may feel insecure. They’ll need reassurance that the parent is not going to leave again. Children may be clingy, and get worried even when the returned parent leaves the house or even the room. Some children withdraw from the parent, or avoid them. They may feel they can’t rely on them, in case they leave again. Some children ignore the parent or treat them like a stranger in the house. Older children may feel upset about the changing roles in the family. They may ‘test the limits’ by acting up or resenting the attention that the returned parent is receiving. There can often be competition between an older child and a returned parent. Older
children have often taken on extra responsibilities while their parent was away. They may react badly when the returned parent tries to discipline them. Their attitude may be ‘Who are you to tell me what to do? You’ve been in prison.’

Some older children feel protective of the other parent and angry with the returned parent because their actions have hurt or stressed other people in the family. If they’ve faced teasing or rejection from peers, they may be angry with the parent whose actions have led to this.

It’s really important to talk to children about what’s happening. They need you to listen hard and let them say what they think. Let them know that it’s normal to have a mixture of feelings, some good and some bad, towards the returned parent. If children feel safe to talk about how they feel, they’re less likely to withdraw or behave aggressively.

If you find it hard to talk with your children, another trusted adult may be able to help. Some children find it hard to talk to parents because they’re trying to protect them. A family friend, school counsellor, teacher or youth worker may sometimes be an easier person for them to talk to. You could also give them the number of Kids Help Line – 1800 551 800. You can help by letting them know you understand they may need to talk with someone outside the family, and by respecting their privacy. Avoid trying to get them to tell you what they’ve said. If you keep communication open, they’ll tell you when they’re ready.

**Carers**

Resuming care of children after time in a correctional centre can be challenging for the parent, the carer and sometimes the children. It can be hard for carers to let go, especially if they’re not confident about the former prisoner’s ability to look after the children, or have different priorities in parenting. Carers often form close bonds with children in their care, and it can be hard for both children and carers if this relationship is suddenly disrupted.

Try to talk about the children’s care in the visits before the parent is released, rather than leaving everything until they get out. This can clarify whether everyone has the same needs and expectations, or whether there are issues to be resolved. Some carers may be quite happy to let go of their role once the parent returns, especially if they’ve only been caring for the children for a short time. In other situations it may work better for the parent to gradually take over responsibilities. This will work better if the parent is confident that the carer...
will support them and isn’t trying to prevent the children from going home. It may work well for everyone if the carer can have an ongoing role in the children’s lives and can provide back-up for the parent.

Parents may find it harder than they expect to resume parenting responsibilities. They may benefit from a family service that can assist them with strategies and support as they adjust to their role.

If carers have real doubts about the parent’s ability to cope with the children on release and feel they can’t address these issues directly with the parent, they may need to seek legal advice or talk to the Department of Community Services (DoCS).
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

Community Legal Centres
Community Legal Centres offer free legal advice. Contact them to find the centre nearest you.
9212 7333
www.nswclc.org.au

CRC (Community Restorative Centre)
Provides support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families.
9288 8700
www.crcnsw.org.au

DoCS Helpline
Contact DoCS if you’re concerned that a child is at risk of harm or to request assistance.
13 2111
www.community.nsw.gov.au

FamS (NSW Family Services)
Contact FamS to find the nearest family service. Family services are non-government organisations whose support workers can help with parenting and other family matters through home visiting, counselling and groups.
9692 9999
www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au

Parentline
Advice, counselling and referrals for parents of children under 18 years. Open Monday to Saturday, 9am–4.30pm.
13 20 55

SHINE for Kids
Support for children with a parent in a correctional centre. Services include groups, advocacy and referral. See also p.105.
Sydney 9714 3000
Windsor 4582 2141
Bathurst 6332 5957
www.shineforkids.org.au

Kids Helpline
24-hour telephone counselling service for children and young people.
1800 551 800
Parents

Parents with a son or daughter in a correctional centre may have conflicting feelings about their child’s release. They may be relieved that they’ll no longer have to visit the correctional centre. If their family member has had a long sentence, they may feel anticipation and anxiety about this next stage. Some parents may have had a more peaceful life while their family member was in a correctional centre than when they were outside. They may be worried about what it will be like to have them back home again.

Many parents worry that their family member may reoffend or use drugs once they’re released. They may try to monitor or control their family member’s behaviour to prevent this. Unfortunately this can backfire, with the family member offending or using drugs as a way of ‘breaking out’ of their parents’ control and asserting their own will. If your son or daughter is going to live with you when they’re released, try to talk about how they would like you to support them, rather than monitoring them behind their back.

At the same time, remember it’s your home and you have the right to set house rules for the people who live there. Reasonable house rules include expectations about paying board, having visitors, doing washing, tidying up, and not using drugs or doing other illegal activities on the premises. If there’s an unresolvable conflict about what’s acceptable behaviour, it may be better for your son or daughter to find somewhere else to live (see ‘Planning for release’ on p.144). You’ll need to think about this if your family member will be on parole and living at your place will be a condition or their parole order. Parole officers prepare a release plan that includes where the former prisoner will live. This happens about six months before a release date.

Need help?

CRC (Community Restorative Centre)
Provides support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families.
9288 8700
www.crcnsw.org.au

Lifeline
24-hour telephone counselling and referral.
13 11 14
Readjusting to life outside

If your family member has been away for a long time, they’ll have lost touch with many day-to-day things. For example, they may not know how much things cost, or how to use public transport. The names and expectations of government and community agencies may have changed significantly while they were away.

Many former prisoners suspect that other people can tell they’ve been in a correctional centre, even if they don’t tell them directly. Fear and insecurity can lead some former prisoners to withdraw from the world altogether, locking themselves in a room much as they were when in the correctional centre. They may experience severe mood swings and become emotionally unpredictable.

In a correctional centre your family member might have had to use threats, violence or withdrawal to try to deal with conflicts. These strategies won’t work well on the outside. Try not to take negative reactions personally. Seeing these behaviours as coping strategies that your family member needed in the correctional centre can help you find the patience you’ll need. This doesn’t mean you have to accept their negative behaviour. Let them know how you feel. For example, ‘I feel hurt when you don’t respond to me when I talk you’.

For your own safety and that of your children, don’t tolerate violent, controlling or abusive behaviour. If your family member tries to deal with situations in this way, get outside help fast. Excusing violence because your family member has been inside means they don’t have to take responsibility for learning to deal with situations differently. If this behaviour escalates, it can be dangerous for everyone.
Need help?
Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

CRC (Community Restorative Centre)
Provides support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families.
9288 8700

Lifeline
24-hour telephone. counselling and referral.
13 11 14

Lifeline – Domestic Violence Helpline
Assistance and referral for people affected by domestic violence.
1800 200 526
Expectations of partners

Because of the limitations placed on a relationship when a partner is in a correctional centre, both prisoners and their partners outside can have quite unrealistic expectations about what the relationship will be like after prison. Prisoners have a lot of time to daydream about how things will be, with little opportunity for ‘reality testing’ these fantasies. Prison relationships can sometimes seem ‘perfect’ away from the real world. Once the prisoner is back home, both partners have to face reality.

Sometimes partners have put up with the offender’s abusive behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse, or criminal lifestyle, for years. It can be tempting to believe that a partner has ‘learnt their lesson’. They may have made promises that things will be different, and you may want to give them the benefit of the doubt. For your own sake, be realistic. You need to talk about issues and expectations clearly before your partner leaves the correctional centre, or as soon as possible after release. If you can’t talk about these things, ask yourself whether things have really changed.

Some tips for getting back together:

- Take it slow to allow time to get reacquainted.
- Be prepared for your partner to have difficulties adjusting.
- Be honest about the problems you had before your partner went into the correctional centre – time alone won’t have changed them.
- Allow for privacy and personal space.
- Make time for your own needs, including relaxation and recreation.
- Be honest and open about your feelings.
- Negotiate your expectations of each other and the roles each of you will take on.
- Spend time talking to the children, before your partner is released, about what will happen.
- Get support, either separately or together, from family, friends and professionals.
Need help?

Restorative Justice Unit
8346 1054
The Restorative Justice Unit is part of Corrective Services NSW.

CRC (Community Restorative Centre)
Provides support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families.
9288 8700
www.crcnsw.org.au

Lifeline
24-hour telephone counselling and referral.
13 11 14

Rape Crisis Service
24-hour counselling and support for women affected by sexual assault, with phone and online services.
1800 424 017
www.nswrapecrisis.com.au

Lifeline – Domestic Violence Helpline
1800 200 526

Addressing family issues before release

A prisoner’s actions may have had a big impact on family members. Family may have been victims of crimes committed by the prisoner, or may have suffered because of other people’s reactions to what the prisoner has done.

Family Group Conferencing can provide an opportunity for the prisoner to meet with their family and for the family to acknowledge the hurt they’ve suffered as a result of what the prisoner has done. The presence of an independent facilitator ensures that the meeting stays safe and focused. Conferencing can prepare everyone for when the prisoner is released, and can help people decide what future involvement they may have, or choose not to have, with them.

Family Group Conferences can be arranged through the Services and Programs Officer or Welfare Officer at the correctional centre, or through the Restorative Justice Unit.
Concerns about your family member using drugs after release

If your family member has a history of drug use, you may be understandably concerned for them once they leave the correctional centre. While you can provide support, you can’t stop them from using drugs if they decide to do so.

If your family member uses drugs like heroin when they get back outside, there’s a real risk they could overdose, especially when they first start using again. The first 72 hours is the period where they’ll be at most risk of overdosing, although there’s a risk in injecting drug use at any time.

If you’re worried about your family member using safely, you may want to make sure they know about the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC). The MSIC operates at 66 Darlington Rd, Kings Cross, seven hours a day, five days a week – phone 9360 1191. Clients must be over 18 years old.

The centre is totally confidential and non-judgmental. It has booths where people can inject themselves, waste bins for used syringes, a fully equipped resuscitation room to manage drug overdoses, and a counselling room. There are two trained staff, including a registered nurse permanently on duty.

If you’re worried about the possibility of your family member overdosing, consider doing the Red Cross HOPE (Heroin Overdose Prevention Education) course. This six-hour course covers first aid and resuscitation, effects of drugs, and overdose risk factors. Or you can ask for the workbook, which contains all the material presented in the course. Contact Red Cross on 9229 4142.
**Need help?**

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

**Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**
Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program (see p.166).
- 9361 8000
- 1800 422 599

**Family Drug Support**
Family Drug Support offers information and referral, family support groups and courses for families affected by a family member’s drug use.
- 1300 368 186
- www.fds.org.au

**HOPE (Heroin Overdose Prevention Education)**
Course and workbook covering overdose emergency first aid and background information.
- 9229 4142

**NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)**
Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.
- 8354 7300
- 1800 644 413
- www.nuua.org.au
David wasn’t prepared for how much his partner Liam had been affected by his time in prison.

When we got to Liam’s appeal, he was moved to Dubbo so they could set a date. The solicitor said it would only take 10 minutes, so there was no point in me going. He explained that to Liam. We could have applied for bail, but his family wouldn’t help and I didn’t have access to the money, so we couldn’t do it. Then they moved him again until the appeal, when he went back to the holding cells at Dubbo. Liam couldn’t call me, but I got a call from the girlfriend of his cellmate. I’d got to know her because I sometimes gave her a lift to visit. She told me Liam was freaking out. Her boyfriend was going to ring her back, and I asked her to get him to reassure Liam that I’d be there for the hearing and that he should just breathe and settle.

I got to the holding cells to pass on his suit. I thought maybe because it was the country they would take pity on me and let me see him, but it didn’t happen. They’d started hearing cases early and his solicitor was running late. I was chain-smoking outside when he arrived. I gave evidence about our relationship and about the support I’d got from CRC. They asked me if I was aware that Liam had lost his licence. I couldn’t help laughing – by that stage Liam’s driving was so non issue. I explained that I’d got a new job close to home which was flexible so I could be there for Liam. The Judge summed things up, and I heard him saying he was quashing Liam’s conviction. I knew enough to know that was good. He got a good behaviour bond, and had to report to Probation and Parole and go to counselling.

They took him back to the lock-up. The solicitor explained that he’d come out after they’d done the paperwork. Then the prosecutor came out to me to make sure I knew he’d be coming out soon. Then the court reporter came up to me and explained the process, followed by the Corrective Services officer. It was the last thing I expected, that everyone would be so nice to a gay man. After an hour I went looking for him. I could see him still handcuffed, and he was worried, saying ‘You can’t touch me!’ I said ‘I know’ and went back to wait. Then he was there, it was brilliant.
‘The first two weeks after he got out were the hardest. They shut off emotionally to cope in prison, and that was what he was like when he came home.’
When we left Dubbo I said ‘Where do you want to go?’ He just wanted to get home and see his dogs. I’d just bought him two dogs before he was sentenced, and they’d grown so much. I was worried that they’d back off when he got there and he’d be really hurt, but they came straight to him.

On the way home he was looking around saying ‘I can see things’. He’d been driven between the different jails, but he couldn’t see anything then. It was overwhelming how he’d become institutionalised even though he hadn’t been in prison for a long time. The first night he wanted to go back because he felt like he couldn’t cope. That was the hardest thing for me. He didn’t sleep properly at first. I don’t want to know everything that’s happened to him, just what he wants to tell me. He is telling me more, just different anecdotes that come up.

The first two weeks after he got out were the hardest. They shut off emotionally to cope in prison, and that was what he was like when he came home. It took weeks for him to come back. Now he’s obsessed with the garden and the house. Inside he spent hours doing a landscape plan for the garden. We want to get married in the backyard once it’s done.

We’ve had some bad times since he got home. It’s like anything bad is magnified because of what we’ve been through. The best thing has been waking up with him in bed every morning. It’s over, and he’s home.
Health issues after a family member has been in a correctional centre

People who have been in a correctional centre have higher rates of blood-borne diseases than the general community. Injecting drug users are especially at risk of contracting these diseases.

If you have a family member in a correctional centre, make sure you know the facts about Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS. With the facts you can make sure everyone in your family looks after their health.

Hepatitis

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver and can be caused by a virus. The most common types of virus are Hepatitis A, B and C. You can get vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B, but there’s no vaccine for Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C (Hep C)

What is Hep C?

Hep C is passed on through blood-to-blood contact. The most common way to get Hep C is through sharing needles (fits) and other injecting equipment such as swabs, spoons and filters. It can

Need help?

Justice Health Family-Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS) and the NSW Family & Carer Mental Health Program give help to families who are carers of a family member with mental illness. Families and carers can get support to keep going in their important caring role in a sustainable and satisfying way. This in turn supports longer term gains to patients’ health, recovery and quality of life. The JH Family & Carer Consultant has developed a resource package to assist carers and Client Liaison Officers are contacts for concerns or enquiries about patient care and feedback on Justice Health Services.

Call to get a resource package and further assistance.

Family & Carer Consultant
PO Box 150
Matraville
NSW 2035
9700 3000

Client Liaison Services
PO Box 150
Matraville
NSW 2035
9700 3000

Mental Health Help Line
(available 24 hours a day):
1800 222 472
also be passed on through unsterile tattooing and body piercing. It’s rare for Hep C to be passed on through sex, but this can occur if there’s blood-to-blood contact (e.g. via menstrual blood).

It can take 10 to 15 years for symptoms to start developing, and they will affect people in different ways. They can include pains in the liver area (the upper right side of the abdomen), tiredness, nausea and flu-like symptoms. Some people may develop serious liver problems later in life. A healthy lifestyle, avoiding alcohol, eating a balanced diet and doing exercise can improve wellbeing and prevent liver damage later on.

**Will my partner, family or friends catch it?**

Hep C can’t be passed on to others through everyday social contact. Hep C can’t be passed on by hugging, or by sharing plates, cutlery, cups, toilets, baths or laundries. Although it’s extremely unlikely to be passed on through sex, there’s a small risk if there could be blood-to-blood contact. It’s important to use condoms or avoid sex at times when there could be blood present from either person. Mothers with Hep C are encouraged, as are all mothers, to breastfeed their babies. It’s unlikely that the virus can be passed on through breastfeeding unless nipples are cracked or bleeding. If they are, mothers need to express and discard the milk until nipples are healed. If unsure see your doctor.

Avoid direct contact with blood, for example don’t share personal items such as toothbrushes and razors which may have blood on them. Other personal care items such as hair and nail clippers may also pose a risk if they haven’t been cleaned between uses. Don’t reuse syringes or share any drug using equipment.

**Living with Hep C**

If you know you have Hep C, there are things you can do to look after yourself. A well-balanced and healthy diet (low in animal fat) may help to relieve symptoms and reduce damage to the liver. Drinking less or giving up alcohol (and other drugs, including cigarettes) is recommended for someone with Hep C as these can be hard on your liver.

Resting when tired helps combat fatigue. Mild exercise and maintaining a healthy weight is also important. Regular check-ups with your GP or health clinic are recommended.

There is a 6–12 month course of treatment available for Hep C that gives a permanent cure for 50–80% of people. For more information about treatment, speak with your GP or health clinic, or phone the Hep C Helpline on 1800 803 990.
If you’ve never had Hep A or B, then a vaccination is recommended to prevent infection. There is no vaccination for Hep C. Even if you already have Hep C, stay clear of blood-to-blood contact to avoid getting another strain (genotype) of Hep C. Having two types of Hep C can make it more difficult to treat.

**HIV/AIDS**

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It’s passed on through sexual fluids and blood-to-blood contact. Unsafe sex and sharing of injecting equipment are the most common means of transmission.

You can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by practising safer sex, and by not reusing syringes or sharing drug use equipment.

Safer sex means correct use of a condom and water-based lubricant during penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex, using condoms or dental dams during oral sex, and wearing latex gloves when penetration with the hands or fingers occurs.

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) provide new syringes and injecting equipment either free or at low cost. To find your nearest program contact ADIS on 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599.

**Pregnancy and HIV/AIDS**

If you’re pregnant or wish to have a baby, it’s important to know if you have HIV, because if you’re HIV positive you may pass it on to your baby. If you’re HIV positive, getting the right medical care early in pregnancy can greatly reduce the chance of passing HIV on to your baby.

Talk to your partner, doctor or counsellor about what being infected with HIV means for you and your baby.

**Getting tested**

Your family member may have been tested for Hep C or HIV/AIDS while they were in a correctional centre. It’s their decision what to tell you about the tests or results. You can encourage open discussion of these issues by showing you understand the facts about these diseases, and won’t panic or over-react.

If you’ve been sexually active or have been involved in high-risk activities such as injecting drugs while your partner was in a correctional centre, you should also consider being tested before your partner is released.

**Testing for Hep C**

You can’t tell if someone has Hep C unless they have a blood test. You can look really healthy but still have Hep C.

One in four people will clear the virus from their system within the first 12 months of being infected. A standard Hep C test will show they’ve been exposed to the virus and have antibodies. A PCR test will check to see if the virus has been cleared from the body or is still active. If a
person has cleared the virus, they can’t pass it on to others. Even if a person has cleared the virus, there’s no protection from getting reinfected with Hep C. The only way to avoid reinfection is avoiding contact with other people’s blood.

**Testing for HIV/AIDS**
Testing for HIV/AIDS involves a blood test. Although there’s no vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS, there are medications that are very effective in treating the effects of the virus. Early identification of HIV and regular health checks are important for the best outcome.

**Where to go for testing**
You may feel comfortable discussing these issues with your doctor. But if you don’t, there are information services you can contact for confidential information and advice. If you’re not sure about being tested, contact the Hep C Helpline on 9332 1599 or 1800 803 990, or the Sexual Health Infoline on 1800 451 624. You can get free testing for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases at a Sexual Health Centre.

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

**Aboriginal Medical Services**
Health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This number can help find the service nearest to you.

9212 4777

**Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**
Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program.

9361 8000
1800 422 599

**AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)**
ACON is a health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, with a focus on HIV/AIDS.

9206 2000
1800 063 060
www.acon.org.au
**Hep C Helpline**  
Provides information, support and referrals about Hep C.  
9332 1599  
1800 803 990  
www.hepatitis.org.au

**Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service (MHAHS)**  
Bilingual services for people with HIV/AIDS or Hep C. The website provides information in community languages.  
9515 5030  
1800 108 098  
www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

**NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)**  
Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.  
8354 7300  
1800 644 413  
www.nuaa.org.au

**Sexual Health Infoline**  
Information on sexual health and to find your nearest services.  
1800 451 624

**Sydney Sexual Health Centre**  
Free testing for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, counselling and treatment services.  
Level 3, Nightingale Wing, Sydney Hospital  
Macquarie Street, Sydney  
9382 7440  
1800 451 624

**Women’s Information and Referral Service**  
Ring this service to find your nearest Women’s Health Centre.  
1800 817 227
When my son was arrested I had to go down to the police station. My mother came with me. When we finally came back to her home she said to me ‘I’d better ring the family’. But then she couldn’t do it and I had to. I just said it the same way each time: ‘Something dreadful has happened – my son has been charged with murder. I’m at Mum’s place.’ I didn’t deviate.

They didn’t want to talk about it. I wasn’t allowed to mention him. My mother sold her house and changed her name. She hadn’t been with my father for 20 years, and although nothing was said I suspect she did it to distance herself from my son.

My family pretended nothing had happened. It was like he’d never existed. I wasn’t allowed to talk about him. When my son was coming up to being sentenced, my mother told me that my eldest brother had decided he was going to come with me – after attending the Supreme Court three times on my own and not being able to talk about it for almost two and a half years, all of a sudden he wants to babysit me. I said ‘There’s no point. He should have been there from the beginning.’

I used to get really upset with my daughter. The last time she saw her brother was at a family day and I think she’s spoken to him once on the phone. Now if I get a call and she’s with me I say do you want to speak to your brother and she says no, I accept it. My grandson sees photos around of my son and asks ‘Who’s he?’ and I say ‘That’s my son’. He asks ‘Where does he live?’ and I say ‘He lives a long way away’. ‘Who does he live with?’, ‘Oh, lots of other people’, I say. You’re not telling lies; you’re just not telling him everything.

I met new friends about two years ago through another brother who’s staying with me. He goes up to the local pub and met this couple. He never said anything and I never said anything for about 18 months. When I told them they were fine. You’ve got to be able to trust people before you tell them. It’s very hard making new friends – very difficult to tell them why I disappear every fortnight while visiting my son.

One thing I did decide on early in the piece was that I was not going to become bitter and twisted. I get annoyed now and again, but I don’t get upset.

I’ve already cried rivers. I came to the conclusion that crying makes you look and feel worn out and exhausted. What I realised I had to do with all of my family was to forgive them. I still have to be a daughter, a mother, a grandmother, an auntie, a sister and a friend.
‘You’ve got to be able to trust people before you tell them. It’s very hard making new friends – very difficult to tell them why I disappear every fortnight while visiting my son.’
Community Offender Support Program (COSPs) in NSW

Community Offender Support Program Centres (COSPs) provide short-term interim and crisis accommodation for men and women, supervised by Community Offender Services. This accommodation may be provided to assist offenders during transition into the community from custody, or to prevent them from returning to custody. Referrals can only be made by Probation and Parole Officers. The following COSPs were operational mid-2009, with more centres to open across NSW.

**Nunyara COSP**
Malabar
Phone 9289 2951/2952

**Boronia COSP**
Emu Plains
Phone 47 35 1022

**Bundaleer COSP**
Berkshire Park
Phone 45 82 2348

**Swanson Lodge COSP**
Aldavilla
Phone 65 622230

**Campbelltown COSP**
Campbelltown
Phone 46 284966
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Correctional centres in NSW


Bathurst
6338 3282

Berrima
4860 2555

Brewarrina
(Yetta Dhinnakkal)
6874 4715

Broken Hill
(08) 8087 3025

Cessnock
4993 2333

Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre
9678 4283

Cooma
6455 0333

Dawn De-Loas (Silverwater)
9289 5330

Dillwynia (Windsor)
4582 2222

Emu Plains
4735 0200

Glen Innes
6733 5766

Goulburn
4827 2222

Grafton
6642 0300

Ivanhoe (Warikirri)
6995 1403

John Morony (Windsor)
4582 2222

Junee
6924 3222

Karioing Juvenile (Gosford)
4340 3400

Kirkconnell (Bathurst)
6337 5219

Lithgow
6350 2222

Long Bay Hospital
8304 2000

Mannus (Tumbarumba)
6941 0333

Metropolitan Remand & Reception Centre (MRRC)
9289 5600

Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (MSPC)
(Long Bay)
8304 2000

Mid North Coast (Kempsey)
6560 2700

South Coast (Nowra)
(under construction)

Oberon
6335 5248

Outer Metropolitan Multi Purpose Centre
45822 2304

Parklea
9678 4888

Parramatta
9683 0300

Silverwater
9289 5100

Silverwater Women’s (formerly Mulawa)
9289 5100

St Heliers (Muswellbrook)
6543 1166

Tamworth
6766 4977

Wellington
6840 2800

**Transitional Centres**

Bolwara (Emu Plains)
4735 7098

Parramatta Transitional Centre
989 01389
Important phone numbers

- Alcohol and Drug Information Service 361 800 or 1800 422 599
- Centrelink 131 021
- Community Restorative Centre (CRC) 9288 8700
- Community legal centres 9212 7333
- Credit and Debt Hotline 1800 808 488
- Housing NSW 1300 468 746
- Homeless Persons Info Centre 9265 9081 or 1800 234 566
- LawAccess 1300 888 529
- Lifeline 131 114
- State Parole Authority 8346 1780

1800 numbers are a free call from anywhere in Australia. 13 numbers cost the same as a local call. 1800 numbers can’t be called from some correctional centres. All other numbers listed in this book don’t require the 02 prefix unless calling from outside NSW.