

CRIME & PRISON



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Crime and substance use have long been linked. Criminal acts can range from driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, to assaults, robberies, domestic violence, selling or storing drugs and prostitution. It is important to note that the majority of users will manage their drug use and not resort to crime and many will “grow out” of harmful alcohol or drug use. Some individuals, however, will become involved in criminality for various reasons; committing a crime while under the influence (assaults, drink driving), others will commit crimes in order to fund their drug use (burglaries, shop-lifting), and some will become involved in transportation, storage or selling of drugs, or prostitution to reduce debts and/or earn an income.

Imprisonment of a family member has a significant impact on those left outside. It is often said that families serve a parallel sentence. Even though they have not committed a crime, family members can feel stigmatised and shamed and carry huge emotional and health costs. In many cases, families experience a considerable loss and are extremely worried and stressed about their loved one’s safety in prison, how to manage finances, how to look after children alone, what to tell people, how to arrange prison visits and so on.

It can sometimes be difficult to decide what to tell children if their parent is in prison. Decisions have to be made about whether to actually disclose to children that their parent is in prison, whether to explain the crime to children, and whether to bring children on visits. Children of prisoners can experience confusion, stigma, mental health issues, loss associated with separation from a parent, problems with learning in school, and behavioural problems. These factors can depend on their age, relationship to

the person imprisoned and the level of social support available.

It is worth mentioning that some family members experience some relief when their loved one is in prison, as one family member commented “I know where he is every night and I can sleep now knowing he is not on the street”.

There are a small number of dedicated services who offer support to families of prisoners. These can be useful as they understand the challenges and difficulties that many families experience. They can offer advice and support in both a safe and child friendly space. This advice includes information on prison visits, access to the prison and local amenities in the area as well as counselling and education programmes.

Prison visiting hours, types of visits and frequency of visits vary between prisons, however, all visits must be booked in advance. See www.irishprisons.ie for further details.

Useful numbers/websites:

- Castlerea Prison Family Resource Centre
094-96-20404
- Castlerea Prison
094 96 24962
- Irish Prison Service
043 333 5100 <http://irishprisons.ie>
- Bedford Row Family Project (Limerick)
061 315332 www.bedfordrow.ie

Refer to Information on Support Services section or www.supportme.ie for details on supports available