



## **WP2: Interview Guide for Imprisoned Parent**

**Version 1.0 – October 2010**

*Interviews with imprisoned parents will have an important place in the COPING research. These interviews may be the only point in COPING where imprisoned parents have a voice.*

*It is proposed that the definition of an imprisoned parent for the research is a parent or step-parent or other person who has acted as a parent to a child or children taking part in the COPING research. This could include another relative, or a foster parent, or the partner of a parent/carer, as long as the person has fulfilled the parenting role.*

*The imprisoned parent can be shown or have their own copy of the interview guide.*

*It is proposed that the purpose of the interview of the imprisoned parent is to find out his/her view about the impact of their imprisonment on his/her children. Interviews will highlight the responsibility of the imprisoned parent for addressing issues/problems caused by their incarceration. These will include the impact of the imprisonment on the family, and the consequent loss of their role as a partner/husband/father, or partner/wife/mother on the family. Loss of income will also be considered, as will the impact of imprisonment on children's education and wellbeing; and issues of stigma arising from imprisonment. Interviews will include exploration of the effectiveness of prison visits; and other means of contact engaging the imprisoned parent in thinking about life following their release, including their future role as a parent.*

*It is proposed that the intention to interview the imprisoned parent should be discussed with the caring parent and with the child/young person involved in the research, beforehand. Any reservations they may have should be taken into account in deciding whether to go ahead.*

*Interviews should take place while the imprisoned parent is in prison. Negotiations with the prison about access to the prisoner, and where the interview will take place, will be needed. In the UK it is anticipated that these interviews will have a similar format to legal visits.*

*As for the interviews with Parents/Carers, where children, including some younger children, have limited understanding about the facts of imprisonment of their parent in prison, or where the child/children has/have limited information about the imprisonment, or where this is regarded as a "secret", these factors will obviously impact on the interview with the imprisoned parent. If there are background issues involving violence, or assault, or abuse, which may already have had a severe impact on the family, these are also likely to affect the interview. If the researcher assesses that the interview could conceivably harm the child/children or the family, then the interview should not go ahead.*

*From the above it is logical that the interview with the imprisoned parent should take place following the WP2 interview with the child in the family, and with the caring parent.*

*Where consent is provided, interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. If the imprisoned parent requests a copy, this would need to be discussed with the prison authorities. The request would need to be considered carefully to make sure that the risk of adverse repercussions, for example if another person saw the transcript, is minimised. The transcript would need to be delivered to the parent securely and safely.*

## ***Introduction***

1. Interviewer introduces herself/himself and says where they work. The interviewer describes the COPING project, referring to WP1 and WP2 and to previous interviews with family members, if they have taken place. The fact that shopping vouchers will have been provided can be briefly mentioned. Interviewer explains that the interview will include questions about family life before the imprisoned parent was sent to prison; including questions about health; questions about how the imprisonment has impacted on the children, and on other members of the family; questions about the children's school and social life; questions about contact and visits to the imprisoned parent, and possible improvements; and questions about plans following the imprisoned parent's release.
2. Interviewer asks the caring parent if they are happy to go ahead with the interview. The parent can be asked to sign his/her consent at this stage, if they have not done so previously.
3. Interviewer asks the parent if s/he is happy for the interview to be tape-recorded. Interviewer explains that this is so that there is a full record of what the parent has said.
4. Interviewer explains that the tape-recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be seen only by members of the research team. The interviews will be analysed and will form a main part of the research report. The views of parents/carers, including the views of imprisoned parents, will have an important place in the research.
5. All names, addresses and identifying details will be anonymised.
6. Interviewer explains that everything the parent says will be kept confidential. The only exception is if the parent provides information about a child or an adult being harmed, in which case the researcher has a duty to notify the police or social services.
7. Interviewer explains that the parent has a right not to answer any question if they prefer not to do so. The parent also has a right to stop the interview at any point, without giving reasons.
8. The interviewer then asks the parent if there is anything about the interview which they would like to be clarified.
9. Interviewer now proceeds to the main part of the interview.

## ***Interview***

### *Questions about imprisonment*

- Q1 Please can you say what the length of your sentence is?
- Q2 Please can you say which prisons you have served your sentence in, with dates?
- Q3 Can you say if you expect to be moved to another prison, and if so when is this likely to be?

- Q4 Please can you say what is the likely date of your release from prison, if you know this?
- Q5 *Note to interviewer: please record information about reasons for imprisonment/offences committed if this information is volunteered, or comes up during the interview.*
- Q6 Please can you say what your relationship to the child/children is? Please can you say for how long you have looked after the children, including any interruptions to this?
- Q7 Please can you tell me your age?
- Q8 Please can you say who else was living with you, including children, with ages, and other members of the household, before you went to prison?
- Q9 Please can you describe which adults have been mainly involved in looking after, and bringing up, the children? These include your own role, and that of your partner, and the roles played by other relatives, for example grandparents, or other significant adults. Please can you include periods of separation between parents? Has either parent been away for periods of imprisonment before the current period of imprisonment?
- Q10 Have the children had to move between different homes? If so, how many times has this happened?
- Q11 Please can you talk about positive (happy) aspects of family life, for yourself, your partner and the children? (Prompts: having good times together, with the children; having meals together, with the children; being involved in games, or sports or other activities together, with the children; going on trips/outings; going on holidays). Please can you highlight how the children were involved?
- Q12 Are there other aspects of family life which have not been enjoyable? (Prompts: e.g. times when you or someone in the family was ill; times when you or your partner, other care-giver was away from home; times when members of the family did not get on well together, including arguments or violence).
- Q13 Please can you describe your health? (Please tick) *(Interviewer to record this)*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>

Please can you describe positive aspects of your health, and your family's health? (e.g. involvement in sports or exercise; experience of positive health and healthy lifestyles). Please can you also describe less positive or negative aspects of family health? (Prompts: disabilities; long-term health problems; dependency on alcohol or harmful substances; mental illness issues).

Please can you say whether or not your health / mental health have changed or been affected by your imprisonment. Are you able to say whether you are currently receiving medical treatment? *(n.b. the parent is not required to answer any question, including the last one).*

Q14 Please can you describe your children's progress at school, including how far your imprisonment has impacted on their attainment, attendance and behaviour? Please can you fill in this grid? (1 = *very poor*; 2 = *fairly poor*; 3 = *average*; 4 = *fairly good*; 5 = *very good*). (Interviewer to record this with parent's help)

Position of Child in Family with Gender and Age *	Attainment	Attendance	Behaviour
Child 1 (child undertaken child-centred interview), gender / age			
Other child			

\*e.g. girl aged 7 = F7; boy aged 5 = M5

Q15 Please can you say how confident you are about your child/children's progress at school and about your hopes for their future?

Have you had concerns about the children being bullied; and if so, has this been related to imprisonment issues?

Q16 Please can you comment on your child/children's general wellbeing?

Position of Child in Family with Gender and Age *	Poor	Less good	Average	Good	Very Good
Child 1 (child undertaken child-centred interview), gender / age					
Other child					
Other child					
Other child					
Other child					

\* e.g. girl aged 7 = F7; boy aged 5 = M5

Please can you comment on each child and whether your imprisonment has impacted on your child/children's happiness/unhappiness.

Q17 Please can you say a bit more about yourself? For example, your education, training, occupation, and hobbies/sports/activities/enthusiasms? Please can you tell me about things you are proud of, including family achievements?

*Questions about what has happened since your arrest*

Q18 Please can you describe the time when you were arrested and then taken to Court? Can you say how this impacted on you, your partner, your children and your family?

Q19 How have things changed for your family since you were sent to prison? (Prompts: family looking after the children on their own; role and contribution of grandparents/relatives, or other adults, in looking after the children/impact on partner's and children's social life).

Q20 How have things changed for your children since you have been in prison?

(Important to check impact on each family member). Prompts: how has the family coped with the responsibility for running the home e.g. bills, debts, shopping; or more work to do generally, e.g. housework, cleaning, making meals, or needing more help

with the children; issues about managing visits to prison; or about needing more help at home?

Q21 Do you know what your children have been told about where you are and why you are there? What do you think is the best thing to do about telling children about prison? Can I ask what has influenced your view about this?

Q22 Can I ask who else in your family knows why you are in prison? (Prompts: everyone; own parents/grandparents; all the children/some of the children?)

Q23 Can I ask who knows about your imprisonment outside your family? Do other relatives, or your friends, or the children's school, know about this?

Q24 Could you tell me how life has been for you since you have been in prison?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Not too bad</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Positive</i>

Please could you say why you feel like that?

Q25 Can you say how life has been for your (the) children since you have been in prison?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>A lot worse</i>	<i>Worse</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>Better</i>	<i>Much better</i>

Please can you comment on why this is so?

Q26 Have you been able to talk to anyone about your partner / children / family situation since you have been in prison? (Prompts: own parents; other relatives; friends; social worker; probation officer; prison welfare officer; other prison staff or someone else?).

How much has this helped?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>Average amount</i>	<i>A lot</i>	<i>A great deal</i>

### *Visiting Prison*

Q27 Please can you tell me about visits from your partner/children/other relatives/ friends since you have been in prison? How often are these visits? Who usually comes? (Prompt: do visits include the children; if so, which ones?)

Q28 How has travelling to the prison worked out for your family/children? When do they usually visit? (e.g. weekdays, weekends, family visit days?).

Q29 How do you find these visits? (Prompts: enjoy or not enjoy seeing the children, and opportunities to spend time with them; meeting your partner/spending time with your partner; how do you find the arrangements in the visits area?).

Q30 How do you feel before a family visit? (Prompts: depressed/nervous/apprehensive/relaxed/excited/same as usual)

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very apprehensive</i>	<i>Fairly apprehensive</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly pleased</i>	<i>Very pleased</i>

How do you feel after the visit is over?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very deflated</i>	<i>Deflated</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Pleased</i>	<i>Very pleased</i>

Please can you comment further on how you feel about the visits?

Q31 How do your child/children find visiting the prison?

Q32 How would you describe the children when visiting the prison?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very apprehensive/ nervous</i>	<i>Fairly apprehensive/ nervous</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly confident/ pleased</i>	<i>Very confident/ pleased</i>

Please can you say more about this?

Q33 Do you know whether your children's schools know about their visiting the prison? Have the children had to take time off school or college or work to visit the prison? Do you know how their schools/teachers/employers have been about this?

Q34 Have you been able to talk to anyone about prison visits (e.g own parents/relatives/social worker/probation officer/prison welfare staff/other prison staff/anyone else?)

Q35 Please can you say what you think could be done to improve visits to the prison? (Prompts: travelling arrangements; role of prison staff; arrangements for visits e.g. privacy; support for children; other suggestions).

*Other ways of keeping in touch*

Q36 Do you use other ways to keep in contact with your partner and children e.g. phone/text/letters? How frequently do you use these (Prompts: daily/twice or more weekly/weekly/fortnightly/less often)? How important are these ways of keeping in contact for you (Prompts: very important /fairly important /not very important)?

Are there any barriers for you in using these kinds of contact?

*POPS and Other Help Available*

Q37 Please can you say if you have had any contact with POPS (Partners of Prisoners and Families' Support Group) (or other NGO in Germany, Romania and Sweden).

Please can you say how you have found POPS (or other NGO)?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very unhelpful</i>	<i>Not very helpful</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very helpful</i>

Please can you say in what way? What has been helpful at POPS (or other NGO)? What has been unhelpful?

Q38 Have you been able to talk to other prisoners about family issues and about the the impact of imprisonment? How have you found this?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Not very helpful</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very helpful</i>

Can you comment further about this?

Q39 Has any other organisation or individual been able to help you, for example social worker/probation officer/other adults/faith organisation/prison welfare office/prison visitor or prison staff or anyone else?

Q40 Please can you say what would make things better for your partner/child/children while you are prison? (Prompts: more help from school/more opportunities to meet other children with a parent in prison/more support from children’s counsellors or therapists more support from youth leaders/social workers; more help from family/grandparents/relatives; more family support; help with money problems; other suggestions).

*General Question*

Q41 Overall, how have you found your prison sentence?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Not too difficult</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Positive</i>

Please can you say more about this?

*Looking to the Future*

Q42 When you are released from prison, where do you think you will go? (Prompts: home to partner and children; to other relatives (please say which); to own accommodation; hostel; other)

Q43 How will you feel about being released?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Not happy at all</i>	<i>Not very happy</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly happy</i>	<i>Very happy</i>

Q44 How would you like things to be for yourself when you are released?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Family back together again</i>	<i>Parents living separately but in contact</i>	<i>Live separately</i>	<i>Other, please say</i>

Q45 How would you like things to be for your children when you are released from prison?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Family back together again</i>	<i>Parents living separately but in contact with children</i>	<i>Live separately – no contact</i>	<i>Other, please say</i>

Please can you say more about when you are released from prison?

Q46 How do you feel about starting again to be a parent, following your release from prison?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very apprehensive</i>	<i>Fairly apprehensive</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly confident</i>	<i>Very confident</i>

Please can you say more about this?

Q47 Please can you say whether you have had any opportunity to attend parenting classes while you have been in prison? If so, how have you found these?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very unhelpful</i>	<i>Fairly unhelpful</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Fairly helpful</i>	<i>Very helpful</i>

Please can you say more about the parenting classes you have attended?

Q48 If you have not attended parenting classes in prison, would you have liked the opportunity to do so?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>No</i>

Q49 Have you had any opportunities to take part in family days (longer opportunities to spend time with partner, children and relatives) while you have been in prison? If so, how have you found these?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very unhelpful</i>	<i>Fairly unhelpful</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very helpful</i>

Q50 Can you think of any other ways in which you could have been helped in your role as a parent while you have been in prison?

*End of interview*

Thank you very much indeed. That covers all the questions I wanted to ask. Can I ask how you found the interview?

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Quite difficult</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly straightforward</i>	<i>Straightforward</i>

Interviewer advises the imprisoned parent about whom they can talk to about any issues they have found difficult in the interview. Help could be provided by probation, prison welfare or other prison staff.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about any of the questions you've answered?

Interviewer reminds the parent/carer that the interview is confidential.

Interviewer provides contact details for themselves if appropriate and agreed by the prison.

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