



WP2: Interview Guide for Parents/Carers

Version 1.0 – October 2010

This interview should be conducted with the parent or carer looking after the child completing the child-centred interview. The parent / carer may be a grandparent or other relative; a step-parent; or any other person with full-time responsibility for the child, for example a foster-parent or a Children's Home worker.

The purpose of the interview with the caring parent is to explore the impact of the imprisonment of the parent in prison on the children, and on the caring parent and the family.

One child will complete the child-centred interview in each family. The interview with the caring parent will explore the impact of imprisonment on this child; and also on other children in the family.

It is probable that some children, including some younger children, will have limited understanding about the facts of imprisonment of their parent in prison. If the child (or children) has limited information about the imprisonment, or if this is regarded as a "secret", this will obviously affect the caring parent's interview. If there are background issues involving violence, or assault, or abuse, which may have already had a severe impact on the family, these are also likely to affect the interview.

The intention is for the interview to cover all the issues included in this Guide. Some interviews may focus on more specific areas, and cover these in greater depth. These interviews can make an important contribution to the research.

Parents may wish to be accompanied during the interview by a person of their choice, to provide support. This is acceptable. It is not expected that this person would be a child.

Parents should be provided with a copy of the Interview Guide if they would find this helpful.

Where consent is provided, interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. If a parent requests a copy, this should 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. Interviewer explains the purpose of the interview (as stated above) to the parent/carer. Interviewer explains that the interview will include questions about family life before and after the imprisoned parent was sent to prison; including questions about health; questions about how the imprisonment has impacted on the children (both the child completing the child-centred interview and other 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 about how life could be improved for the children and the family.

2. Interviewer asks the caring parent if they are happy to go ahead with the interview. The parent can be asked to sign her/his consent at this stage, if they have not done so previously.
3. Interviewer asks the parent if she/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 will have a strong 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 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. Interviewer explains that the research project also includes interviewing the parent in prison, if possible. The interview with the parent in prison will focus on the impact of having a parent in prison on the child / children, and on the family. The caring parent will be asked for their view on interviewing the imprisoned parent at this point.
9. The interviewer then asks the parent if there is anything about the interview which they would like to be clarified.
10. Interviewer now proceeds to the main part of the interview.

Interview

Questions about the family, the children, and health

- Q1 Please can you say what your relationship to the child / children is? Please can you say what your relationship to the imprisoned parent is? Please can you say for how long you have looked after the children, have you ever been away from your children for extended periods?
- Q2 Please can you tell me your age?
- Q3 Please can you say who else is living with you, including children, with ages; and other members of the household?
- Q4 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 the imprisoned parent, 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?

- Q5 Have the children had to move between different homes? If so, how many times has this happened since they were born?
- Q6 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?
- Q7 Are there other aspects of family life which have not been enjoyable? (Prompts: e.g. times when money was short; or 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).
- Q8. Please can you describe your health? (Please tick) *(Interviewer to record this)*

very poor	poor	average	good	very good

- Q8.1 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).
- Q8.2 Please can you say whether or not your health / mental health has changed or been affected by your partner’s imprisonment? Please can you also say whether you are currently receiving medical treatment? *(n.b. The respondent can refuse to answer any question, including the last one)*
- Q8.3 Please can you describe your sleep pattern (prompts: sleep well/sleep fitfully/often awake)? Did your sleep pattern stay the same or change after your partner was sent to prison? If so, how did it change?
- Q9 Please can you describe your children’s progress at school? Please can you say how the imprisonment of your partner (or of the child’s imprisoned parent) has impacted on their schooling, with regard to *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*).

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

- Q10 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?

Q11 Please can you comment on your child/children's general wellbeing?

Position of Child in Family with Gender and Age *	Very Unhappy	Unhappy	Average	Happy	Very Happy
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 partner's imprisonment has impacted on your child/children's happiness/unhappiness.

Q12 Please can you say a bit more about yourself? For example, your education, training, occupation, and hobbies/sports/activities/enthusiasms? Can you tell me about your achievements? What other things would you like to do (including further training/education)?

Questions about changes since your partner (or the imprisoned parent) has been in prison

Q13 Please can you describe the time when your partner was arrested and then taken to Court? Can you say how this impacted on you, and on your children?

Q14 Please can you tell me about your partner's prison sentence and how long this is likely to be for? *Note to interviewer: please record information about reasons for imprisonment/offenses committed if this information is volunteered, or comes up during the interview.*

Q15 How has your role changed since your partner (the imprisoned parent) was sent to prison? (Prompts: increased responsibility/looking after the children on their own/role of grandparent's/relatives, or other adults in looking after the children).

Q16 Please can you say how your partner's imprisonment impacted on your children (Prompts: children stayed the same/children mainly resilient/children more anxious)? Please can you describe your children's sleep pattern (Prompts: children sleep well/calmly/children sleep fitfully/children sleep disturbed by dream/nightmares)? Did the children's sleep pattern stay the same or change when their father/mother went to prison? How did it change?

Q17 How have things changed for you and your children since your partner (the imprisoned parent) has been in prison? How have you shared out roles/responsibilities with your children?

(Important to check impact on each family member). Prompts: has there been more responsibility for running the home e.g. bills, debts or shopping; or more work to do generally, e.g. housework, cleaning, making meals, needing more help with the children, issues about managing visits to prison, needing more help at home?

- Q18 Can I ask what you have told your children about where their imprisoned parent is, and why he/she is there? What do you think is the best thing to do about telling children about their parent being in prison? Can I ask why you have decided this?
- Q19 Can I ask who else in your family knows why your partner (or the imprisoned parent) is in prison? (Prompts: everyone; own parents grandparents; all the children; some of the children?)
- Q20 Can I ask who knows about the imprisonment outside your family? Do other relatives, or your friends, or the children's school know about this?
- Q21 Could you tell me how life has been for you since your partner (the imprisoned parent) went to prison?

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

Please could you say why you felt like that?

- Q22 Can you say how life has been for your (the) children since your partner (imprisoned parent) has been in prison?

1	2	3	4	5
<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?

- Q23 Do you think it is useful/valuable, or not useful/valuable to talk to other people about your partner's imprisonment? If "yes" whom do you think it is most useful to talk to?

Have you been able to talk to anyone about your partner (imprisoned parent) being in prison? (Prompts: own parents; other relatives; friends; a teacher; children; other adults e.g. youth leader; social worker; probation officer; or someone else?).

How much has this helped?

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

- Q24 How have you and your family talked about your partner (the imprisoned parent) being in prison? Has this been?

Openly discussed	Mentioned when necessary	Not mentioned much	Kept a "secret"
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Please can you say how this has worked out?

- Q25 How has your partner (imprisoned parent) being in prison changed things at home, for example with regard to your social life, or how much you go out?

Visiting Prison

Q26 Please can you tell me about visiting your partner (imprisoned parent) in prison? How often do you go? Who usually goes with you? (Prompts: does this include the children; if so, which ones?)

Q27 How has travelling to the prison worked out for you? When do you usually go? (weekdays, weekends, family visit days).

Q28 How do you find visiting the prison? (Prompts: coping with the children; travelling arrangements; actually being in prison; meeting your partner (imprisoned parent) in prison).

Q29 How do you feel travelling to the prison?

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

How do you feel on the journey back?

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

Please can you comment further on how you feel about visiting the prison?

Q30 How do your child/children find visiting the prison? How are the children on the journey to the prison? How are they usually on the way home?

Q31 How would you describe the children when visiting the prison?

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

Can you describe how the children are differently affected by visiting prison?

Q32 Do your children's schools know about visiting the prison? Have the children had to take time off to visit the prison? How have their schools been about this?

Q33 Have you been able to talk to anyone about visiting the prison (e.g. own parents/relatives/friends/teacher/youth leader/social worker/probation officer/other adults)?

Q34 Have you had any opportunities to attend Family Days while your partner has been in prison? (Yes/No)

If "yes", how have you found these?

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

Please can you say more about these "Family Days?"

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 ways of keeping in touch

Q36 Do you use other ways to keep in contact with your partner in prison 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)?

Have you been to the POPS Office (or other NGO) in Manchester?

Have you been able to talk to other parents with a partner in prison? How have you found this?

Not very helpful	Helpful	Very helpful
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Can you comment further about this?

Q38 Please can you say how you have found POPS (or other NGO in Germany, Romania and Sweden)?

1	2	3	4	5
<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/unhelpful at POPS?

Q39 Has any other organisation or individual been able to help you (or have you asked for help and not received it), for example teacher/youth leader/social worker/probation officer/other adults/faith organisation/or other?

Q40 Please can you say what would make things better for you while your partner (the imprisoned parent) is in prison? (Prompts: more help at home / more opportunities to meet parents in same situation/help with the children help from school/help with prison visits/emotional support/family support)

Q41 Please can you say what would make things better for your child / children while your partner (imprisoned parent) is in prison? (Prompts: more help from school/emotional support/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).

General Question

Q42 Overall, how have you been affected by your partner (imprisoned parent) being in prison?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>No difference at all</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>A fair amount</i>	<i>Quite a lot</i>	<i>A great deal</i>

Please can you say more about this?

Looking to the Future

Q43 Please can you say when you think your partner (imprisoned parent) may be coming out of prison?

Q44 When your partner (imprisoned parent) comes out of prison, do you think they will come home?

Yes	Not sure	No
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Q45 How will you feel about your partner (imprisoned parent) coming back home?

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

Q46 How would you like things to be for yourself when your partner (imprisoned parent) comes out of prison?

1	2	3	4
<i>Family back together again</i>	<i>Parents living separately</i>	<i>Prefer things as they are now</i>	<i>Other, please say</i>

Q47 How would you like things to be for your children when their imprisoned parent comes out of prison?

1	2	3	4
<i>Family back together again</i>	<i>Parents living separately</i>	<i>Prefer things as they are now</i>	<i>Other, please say</i>

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?

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

Interviewer advises the parent / carer about whom they can talk to about any issues they have found difficult in the interview. In the UK, Child Line cards can be made available for children. Help could also be provided by POPS. Children's Services or Probation may be able to help.

Interviewer asks if there is anything else the parent would like to say about any of the questions s/he has answered. Interviewer reminds the parent/carer that the interview is confidential.

Interviewer provides contact details for themselves for the parent/carers; and contact details for professionals/organisations available to help the parent/carer if they have any concerns arising from the interview.

Parent/carer to be advised about the eligibility of the child taking part in the interviews for gift vouchers (value £25), on completion of the interview.

Martin Manby
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