

My Loved One Is In Prison.

Goal

To help parents of prisoners come to terms with and cope with their child's/loved one's crime and their subsequent imprisonment.

Opening activity

Introductions – introduce each member then set/outline the terms/parameters of the group (e.g. Chatham House Rules apply where participants should not talk about or disclose anything discussed in the group, or identity the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant in the group), which can be agreed upon by the group at the start of the session. These rules will govern the group moving forwards.

Talking, thinking, or doing activity

Work through the questions/areas on the activity sheet to talk about the impact having a child/loved one in prison has had on them and their family. Common areas can be used to structure future sessions. For example, some of the common feelings/emotions that might be brought up:

- ashamed, stigmatised or embarrassed
- responsible and/or blameworthy
- like you miss them and want them back
- confused, shocked or angry
- betrayed and unsure if you can forgive them
- lonely, upset or depressed
- worried about money/children/impact their imprisonment is having on you
- impact/burden it has on you and/or the rest of the family
- support (lack of, whether emotional or financial)
- visiting them in prison
- worried about them coming back or about the future

These themes can be used to structure future sessions (10 weeks), with a week being devoted to each/combinations of each, which will be up to the group to decide on.

Debrief or closing activity

Suggestions could be made to help identify and manage emotions moving forward that underpin each of the above sessions, like keeping a mood journal as the group identify and discuss some key issues that the group identify (e.g. coming to terms with and/or forgiving your child).

Activity sheet to guide the session

- Agree on rules of the group (e.g. confidentiality)
- Go around the room and ask each member to share some of their story/background.
- Coming to terms with the crime committed by their child/loved one – acceptance, forgiveness.
- Ask them how it feels to have a child in prison – guilt, self-blame, stigma – how their community, church group and/or other members of the family have reacted.
- Other issues that they are facing (see above list).
- Feelings the above have induced. How they cope/deal with it; support available?
- Issues they find difficult to deal with (e.g. judgement from community/church).
- Any positive points about their child/loved one being in prison (e.g. they know where they are).
- Impact/burden on them (e.g. financial, childcare, visiting prison).
- You do not feel like you can tell anyone/friends/family – how having nobody to talk to can leave you feeling frustrated, anxious and lonely; how they cope/deal with that.
- Worries and concerns both now and in the future – why you might want them released, or why you might want them to stay in prison.