

# What is the Journey of the Prisoner's Family?

A parent's prison sentence affects the lives of many people. It can be a great shock and burden everyday life. Sometimes, it can bring a much-needed relief in a chaotic family life.

Children, in particular, often have no-one to talk to about the situation. Sometimes, the topic is so challenging even for a parent or an employee that it feels easier to skip it than to address it. Sometimes, parents tell their children not to talk about the matter with anyone.

*Journey of the Prisoner's Family* is a tool for addressing the topic of a prison sentence. In this tool, the criminal sanctions process is divided into five stages, each of which is introduced with a picture.

These stages are called:

1. Crime
2. Investigation
3. Prison sentence
4. Probationary freedom/Release
5. New life

The tool makes it easier for a parent or child to share their own experiences, emotions and changes in everyday life during the stages of the process.

Telling their own story emphasizes the individual's expertise and highlights both their resources and needs

for support. At the same time, they can ask and get answers to any questions in their mind.

The tool is also helpful in multi-professional cooperation when making client plans. A discussion with a child or a parent can similarly bring out their needs in an environment where things are usually addressed from an adult perspective only. The child and family services can also utilize the tool more comprehensively in their activities and it can be used at the various operations of the Criminal Sanctions Agency.

## *The Journey of the Prisoner's Family tool package includes the following elements:*

1. Pictures of the five stages of the criminal sanctions process of the Journey of the Prisoner's Family
2. Picture cards of each stage, with questions to support the discussion
3. Picture card visualising different emotions
4. Instructions for the use of the tool for:
  - employees
  - children
  - parents
5. Glossary of the criminal sanctions process for conversations with a child

*It is estimated that there are up to 10,000 children in Finland who are affected by a parent's prison sentence.*

*Research shows that a parent's imprisonment increases the risk of social exclusion and depression. In order to combat these risks, it is important to make the experiences of children heard when adults are facing challenges. Parenting work on both sides of the prison wall increases a child's involvement.*

# As an employee on the Journey of the Prisoner's Family

A parent's prison sentence is an enormous thing for a child, and often one that is very hard to understand. You can become a child's "one safe adult" with whom they can talk and who can help them in a difficult situation. You can offer the child the opportunity to talk about "the thing" of which most people keep quiet about. The topic is probably on their mind, and they are worried and upset because of it. It can be hard for the child to concentrate on anything else.

The Journey of the Prisoner's Family features pictures that explain the situations and events that the child has already faced, or will face, because of the prison sentence. These pictures will help the child to filter the events and situations through their own experiences. The pictures can help the child to grasp their memories, events and wishes and to talk about them.

The Journey of the Prisoner's Family can also be used with the parents of the family. The perpetrator, their partner and other people close to them can also find it beneficial when they get to build their own story. How has the offence and serving the sentence affected their life and being a parent? What has changed or will change? When you listen to the story of the parent and/or child, you will get a full picture of the experience that the criminal sanction has been for them.

## ***When you start using the Journey of the Prisoner's Family tool:***

1. Study the materials in advance.
2. At the meeting, ask the child/adult to explain what happened during the various stages and what it was like for them at the time.
3. The smaller cards include additional questions for each stage.
4. In addition to what happened, ask questions about their emotions (use the pictures of faces) and thoughts and the changes in their day-to-day lives.
5. In addition to the different stages, you can ask the following questions, for example:
  - What kind of consequences has the prison sentence had?
  - What kind of questions do they have and what type of information would they need?
  - What kind of support do they need?

## ***Here are some ways to use the Journey of the Prisoner's Family:***

### ***With children***

- When you want to hear about the child's family situation and experiences.
- When a child's parent is going to prison, is serving a prison sentence or will be released from prison soon.  
(also for finding out a child's feelings before probationary freedom or a monitoring sentence).

### ***With parents***

- In connection to providing support and making assessments of parenting capacity during the sentence or in civilian life.
- When establishing the service needs of family members outside prison.
- When making a sentence plan or family work plan and setting the goals for these plans.
- In meetings with several family members (e.g. preparation of probationary freedom).
- Before the Speaking about Children discussion to form understanding of the realization of parenting.
- When thinking of family life through the eyes of a child with a parent: what has the child possibly gone through?
- In network meetings and client transfer meetings and adjusting client plans.

