

As a parent on the Journey of the Prisoner's Family

When a parent is sent to prison, it affects the lives of many people. A sentence can be a source of confusion or uncertainty and there can be many questions and emotions involved. You are going through this phase in your life right now. You are in prison yourself, or you partner or someone else important to you is. Perhaps you have already moved on to the stage of being released from prison.

- What kind of questions and wishes do you have now?
- What are your child's thoughts on the situation?

The Journey of the Prisoner's Family tool helps you to discuss these topics with an employee. You can go over the various phases of the criminal sanctions process that you are faced with right now, have been in the past or will face in the future. The Journey of the Prisoner's Family divides the criminal sanctions process into five stages:

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

When you stop for a minute and think of your family's life as a path, it is easier for you to understand:

- How our family life was/is/will be in each stage of the process?
- How did you end up where you are today?
- What is important for you right now?
- Does your family or child need support and where could you get it?

A child in the Journey of the Prisoner's Family

A parent's imprisonment is a confusing experience for a child. It is hard for a child to understand what it exactly means and what kind of a place a prison is. Or why their father or mother ended up there

To better understand what the child is going through, you can go over the journey from your child's perspective. What has their life been like during the various stages of the Journey of the Prisoner's Family?

How should you tell the child about the sentence?

You might hesitate whether you should tell your child about the sentence. Telling about the crime and related events can seem hard. There are often emotions like shame and guilt involved which you might rather avoid than face. The concept of protecting your child is another factor in this. A common notion is that it is better if the child does not know about the sentence so that others will not learn about it either. You might worry that your child will be bullied or isolated from their friends.

Sometimes, however, a child learns about what happened from other children or adults, in the news or on the internet. If this happens, the child is much more confused than when their parent has explained the matter to them. By telling the truth, you can avoid misinterpretations and coloured stories.

Your child will appreciate your honesty and that you think they are trustworthy.

As a child on the Journey of the Prisoner's Family

Your father or mother is in prison and you might be wondering why. Maybe you wonder what it is like there or when (s)he will get out. Your mind might be swarming with questions and maybe you are wondering who to ask. Maybe your mother or father are unable to answer all your questions. A lot of children are in the same situation with you. There are at least 8,000 children in Finland with one or both parents in prison.

The good thing is that there are people with whom you can go through these things and ask them questions. If you have questions that are complex, you can look for answers together. People like this can be working at your school, the family clinic, social services, prison or community sanctions office.

While talking to the employee, you can look at the pictures on the Journey of the Prisoner's Family. You can tell the employee what happened in each stage and how you felt or think you will feel.

The Journey of the Prisoner's Family has five pictures.

1. With the first picture, you can explain what it was like at home before you found out that your father or mother had committed a crime.
2. The second picture helps you to discuss what happened when your father or mother was arrested. Did it take place at home and were you there?
3. With the third picture, you can explain what it is like when your father or mother is in prison. Have you been on a visit or talked with your parent on the phone? If you have not visited your father/mother yet, you can talk about what you think it will be like or how to keep contact with them.
4. The fourth picture shows how your father or mother will be released from prison or when they were released. What will change or has changed and how does it make you feel?
5. In the fifth picture, the prison sentence has become a thing of the past and life is full of other things to think about. You can think ahead and talk about the things you are waiting for/expecting from this period of time.

You can discuss these topics with an employee when:

- Your parent is in prison
- Your parent is going to prison
- Your parent will be released on probationary freedom
- You want to talk about how it felt when your parent was in prison.

Although you love your parent and (s)he is important to you, you can still sometimes get very mad at them. Or you can be sad that they have done something for which they had to go to prison. It is a good idea to talk about these emotions with someone. You and the employee can look at a picture with nine different emotions. These include emotions such as happy, sad and relieved. You can choose an emotion that corresponds to each stage and tell more about it. If you cannot find the right emotion, you can come up with it yourself.

It might feel hard to talk about your father or mother being in prison. However, children often say that after talking about it and finding out that there are other children facing the same situation, they have felt better.

In the words of an 8-year-old child: *"It helps me when I can talk about my father being in prison."* You should try it – maybe it will help you too!

