i-HOP: Assisting Schools to support children of offenders

‘My dad can’t make parents’ evening. He’s working away’

‘7% of children experience the imprisonment of a father during their time at school.’

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families’

www.i-hop.org.uk

Ring our professionals’ helpline FREE on 0808 802 2013

Barnardo’s
In Partnership with
Funded by

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POPS Registered Charity No. 1048152
Who are we?

i-HOP is a new service for professionals who support offenders’ families with children, which collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo’s in partnership with POPS have been commissioned by the Department for Education to deliver this service as an online information hub with a focus England (www.i-hop.org.uk). The service will be targeted at professionals who work with offenders’ children and their families from numerous spheres, including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

It is estimated that there are 200,000 children a year that experience the imprisonment of a parent. Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation, health and financial difficulties. Currently there is no routine identification of who these children are and therefore no way of ensuring their needs are met.

Children of offenders and schools

“Usually when I go out to playtime I thinks about my dad.” 7 year old girl

- Seven percent of children will see their father go to prison during their school years
- Parental imprisonment is also associated specifically with negative school experiences, such as truanting, bullying and failure to achieve in education
- Children of prisoners are twice as likely to suffer from mental health problems and have an increased likelihood of experiencing poverty compared to their peers

Due the stigma and bullying that these children often experience, there can be a reluctance for families to talk about and seek help when a parent is in prison. And given that there is no systematic identification of these children and families by local authorities, prisons, police or children’s services, they can often be left feeling isolated and with a lack of support.

“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that. School might think they are the same as their father.”
Mother

Schools, with their central role in the community and as the most universal service provision for children, can be well placed to both provide support to these children, and be a non-judgmental, confidential place for families to disclose information. Because of the sensitive nature of the issue, children and families may wish to inform only a single staff member, or they might be happy for this information to be shared appropriately with all relevant school staff. In their role to safeguard the pupils in their care, schools play an integral part in ensuring that the needs of these children are recognised and acted upon.

How can i-HOP support schools?

“I would imagine there are some very specific things that could be done to help children understand their circumstances.”  Headteacher

The Department for Education have recognised the needs of this group of children and for them to be given appropriate support, through the funding of i-HOP. Furthermore, Ofsted in April 2013 identified children of offenders as a target group for Children’s Centres with needs requiring additional support. The findings of COPING, a recent large-scale European study looking at the vulnerabilities and resilience of children with a parent in prison, emphasised the role that schools can play in supporting these children. Recommendations include recognising children with a parent in prison as a vulnerable group and reducing stigma by promoting a positive school environment.

“The school has been absolutely fantastic.”
Mother

i-HOP is a national one stop information and advice service and free helpline for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information that can support school staff in working with children affected by parental offending:

- resources that teachers and other school staff can use directly with children
- existing strategies for whole school working that are being used by local authorities
- details of local and national services that work specifically with children and families of offenders, to signpost pupils and their families to...
- guidelines and toolkits to support both school staff in their practice and the development of a whole-school approach
- details of local multi-agency training for professionals
- research into the impact of imprisonment on children and families

i-HOP recognises that teachers and school staff work in a busy environment with demands on their time. i-HOP puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when it’s needed.

### Examples of existing practice

**Gloucestershire County Council** have produced “Education of Children with a Parent or Close relative in Prison or at Risk of a Custodial Sentence”, guidance for schools on how to provide support for children affected by imprisonment. The guidelines suggest schools have a named person who leads on this area of work, and include advice for teachers working with children of offenders. Issues such as information sharing and identification of these children and families, are discussed.

**Barnardo’s** have produced “Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member: A handbook for schools developing good practice”. This is a practical resource to support schools to better address the needs of this group of children. It contains information about the effects of imprisonment, and strategies that can be used by the whole school and individual staff to effectively provide support to these children.

### Please contact us directly if you would like i-HOP to support you in developing your school’s practice: i-hopschools@barnardos.org.uk

**Note:**
Children’s and parents’ quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in a Barnardo’s report: Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo’s, 2009


### References:

5. Ofsted, *Children’s centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013

### Visit i-HOP

Visit [www.i-hop.org.uk](http://www.i-hop.org.uk) to discover resources to support your school and find out more. Sign up to become a member to receive free monthly i-HOP e-news and view case studies.

### Pick up the phone

If you are working in a school and require support or information about supporting children of offenders, contact our helpline on: **0808 802 2013** (Monday to Fridays, 9am – 5pm).