



STEP Academy Trust

Policy for the Education of Children with a Parent in Prison

Date of Policy: July 2015

Introduction

The STEP Academy Trust Board of Directors has agreed this Policy and, as such, it applies to all Academies within The STEP Academy Trust (“the Trust”).

A Government review (2007) found that there is an estimated 160,000 children with a parent in prison in any year. This figure is around two and a half times the number of Looked After Children and over six times the number of children subject to child protection measures. During their time at school 7% of children experience their father’s imprisonment. In 2006 more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family.

Children with a parent in prison are at the very heart of our Safeguarding agenda as they are true victims of their parents’ crimes. They often achieve poor outcomes, with a high probability of them growing up in poverty and disadvantage; some of them have complex needs and are from socially excluded families. Research (The Bromley Briefings, published by The Prison Reform Trust December 2011) identifies these children and their families as a group having high level risks of vulnerability and safeguarding including increased financial, housing, emotional and health problems during a sentence. Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems and approximately three times the risk for antisocial-delinquent behaviour with the potential for exclusion from school, poor attendance and poor academic achievement.

For the purpose of this policy the term ‘parent’ will refer to parent, carer, partner, sibling, significant adult or family member.

AIM

The Trust is committed to support the children and young people who are part of our Academy community who have a parent or close relative in prison.

The aims of this policy are:

1. To raise awareness of the needs of the pupils of our Academies with a parent or close relative in prison.
2. To secure the educational achievement and attendance of those pupils during their time in our Academies.

3. To promote their social inclusion and equal opportunities within our Academy community.

We will achieve these aims by:

1. All staff will be informed of this policy and the Trust's commitment to support children with a parent/close relative in prison.
2. Parents will be informed of this policy and the Trust's commitment to support children with a parent in prison through school documentation and website.
3. All staff, governors and Directors will be provided with a copy of the 'Risks to Children of Prisoners' information (Appendix 1).
4. All staff, governors and Directors will be provided with a copy of the guidance on 'Information Sharing and the Seven Golden Rules (Appendix 2).
5. A member of Academy staff will be appointed as 'Designated Person for Children of Prisoners' and their role will include:
 - keeping the Headteacher fully informed of pupils or students with a parent in prison;
 - liaise with other relevant Academy staff on a 'need to know' basis;
 - provide a point of contact in the Academy for external agencies in order to share information;
 - liaise with the family and seek their consent to provide additional support for the child as necessary;
 - liaise with other statutory and voluntary agencies as appropriate;
 - promote the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)/Early Help referral to identify the needs of the child unless a Core Assessment has been completed;
 - consider calling a multi-agency meeting to address the needs of the child and to identify a key worker for that child following the completion of an initial assessment through Early Help;
 - consider the use of an individual education plan for children with SEND or behaviour needs;
 - putting in a support plan/package;
 - arrange for copies of reports and other information for parents to be sent to the parent in prison if the Academy has been informed that a child has a parent in prison;
 - monitor the achievement, attendance and behaviour of the child with a parent in prison;
 - act as an advocate for children with a parent in prison, particularly if the child is a Looked After Child (LAC) as LAC have poor levels of visiting a parent in prison;
 - consider purchase of books and resources on the subject of prisons and prisoners for the Academy library;
 - keep appropriate and current records with reference to information sharing guidance.
6. The Strategic Governing Body will appoint a governor to monitor this policy and to review its effectiveness every 2 years.

7. If a parent informs the Academy that the parent or other close relative of one of its pupils is in prison, we will provide information on the support available to them (Appendix 3).
8. The Academy will include the parent who is in prison, in the education of their child by making and maintaining contact with that parent. This will be done by forwarding copies of any school report or newsletter, supplying photographs of examples of work and encouraging the pupil to suggest other ways that contact may be maintained.

GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF ON PRACTICAL MEASURES TO SUPPORT

All staff have a vital role to play in ensuring that a child affected by imprisonment is supported within the Trust. The secure, stable and consistent routines of school can provide reassurance for a child who is experiencing difficulties in their personal life and an awareness of the emotional health and well-being of our pupils will enable all pupils to feel valued and safe, including those with a parent in prison.

'Knowing' that a child is affected by imprisonment may be a question of educated guesswork or hearsay from other staff, pupils or parents. In some situations, everyone in the Academy and community will know that a child's parent is in prison if the court case received a high profile in the local media. In other cases a pupil may confide in a member of staff or drop hints and clues through school work or in conversation. In many cases, a teachers or support staff may not know that they are working with the child of a prisoner at the time.

'Knowing' does not necessarily mean that the teacher or other member of staff needs to let the child know that he or she knows that their parent is in prison as the pupil may be unwilling to discuss the issue with anyone in the Academy. It may be that the family of the child merely wish the child's performance and behaviour be monitored for any change.

CONFIDING

For a younger child, the teacher or other member of staff is often the most important person in their life outside the family, and children will often confide sensitive, personal details about their family life to this person. For older pupils, they are more likely to confide in a member of staff that they know and trust. If a pupil raises issues concerning the imprisonment of a parent during school time, the following responses may be helpful:

- allow the pupil to express him or herself;
- listen carefully;
- acknowledge what is said;
- reassure the pupil;
- agree future action with the pupil.

Basic principles of responding to disclosure:

- See the child as an individual with their own specific needs.
- Be non-judgmental - the child has not committed a crime.
- Don't ask about the crime.
- Acknowledge the child's preferences.
- Follow safeguarding principles if appropriate.

Who to inform - Need to know

If a child does disclose sensitive information about a parent in prison, it is important to acknowledge their situation and be clear with them about who needs to be told in order to support them. It may be useful to explain the role of the designated/named person in the Academy, and to negotiate and agree with the child what steps need to be taken.

Recognising the Signs - Changes in Behaviour and Performance

Children of prisoners may exhibit changes in behaviour and performance that can be likened to a child's emotional response as in divorce or bereavement. Clearly, the experience of having a parent in prison is about 'loss.' The child's and the family's resilience to this loss will determine how it impacts on the child in their behaviour and performance at school. There are certain events that can make these changes in a child more apparent and these can include:

- the arrest of parent, carer or sibling;
- finding out about the imprisonment;
- a visit to a parent in prison;
- a home visit by a parent from prison;
- the release of a parent from prison.

The following are possible changes in pupils with a parent in prison:

- moodiness;
- chattering;
- bullying;
- difficulty with peers;
- appearing upset;
- appearing withdrawn;
- showing a lack of concentration;
- showing a lack of interest;
- antagonism towards authority
- tiredness.

However, for some children, the removal of a parent to prison may be beneficial to the child and behaviour and performance in the classroom may improve.

Bullying

Many children of prisoners report being teased or bullied at school. This is concern that parents in prison speak of. Any form of bullying needs to be dealt with in accordance with the Trust's Anti-Bullying Policy.

Attendance issues

The STEP Academy Trust takes attendance very seriously and will always promote the importance of attendance. However, we will be considerate of the difficulties that a child with a parent in prison, or at risk of imprisonment may face, eg:

- the child is in court with, or visiting the prisoner some distance from home;
- the child is providing support for the remaining parent or siblings, as a young carer;
- the child is having difficulty coping with school or is being teased or bullied about having a parent in prison and is becoming disaffected.

Attendance will be monitored and if it becomes a concern the school will refer to appropriate agencies for support.

Particular problems

Prison visits

It has been recognised that performance and behaviour of children of prisoners can become more erratic at the time of a prison visit.

If teachers or other members of staff have good relationships with pupils who are happy to confide in them, there may be opportunities to allow pupils to take samples of work to show parents when visiting. However, reports or written work, drawings or artwork can be sent by post or email. Although prisoners do not have open access to email, it may be possible for the pupil to send email from school to a prison email address for the information of their parent. Photographic attachments or school work or events may also be sent in this way.

Financial implications

A family may experience significant loss in income with a parent in prison and face severe hardship. Staff should be aware of the potential difficulties for children of prisoners finding the money for school trips and Academy resources. An Early Help Assessment may have identified these issues and support already put into place.

Children of prisoners held overseas

This is a relatively rare occurrence for our communities, but can be all the more distressing with a lack of access, distance and unanswered concerns about a prisoner's welfare.

Organisations and individuals that can provide support in these circumstances include:

- Amnesty International;
- Local Councillors and Members of Parliament;
- Prisoners Abroad.

APPENDIX 1

WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO CHILDREN OF PRISONERS ACHIEVING THE BEST POSSIBLE LIFE CHANCES/OUTCOMES?

Be Healthy

- Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems.
- Compared to their peers.
- The sudden removal of a parent from the family creates feelings of separation and loss and may affect the emotional health of the child.

Stay Safe

- Parental imprisonment can lead children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing.
- Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment, and children are often subject to unstable care arrangements.
- During consultation with parents in prison, bullying of their children was the greatest concern. Several parents also voiced their concerns that their own children had bullied other children.
- Discrimination from members of the local community can have major implications for the children of parents in prison.
- Children of parents in prison may be exposed to substance misuse by family members and their peers.

Enjoy and Achieve

- Children of prisoners may experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers.
- Some families choose not to inform schools that a pupil has a parent in prison. Yet, having a parent in prison can lead to poor attendance, lack of support and isolation for the young person.
- Children of prisoners may have to take on more responsibility in the household or take on a caring role.
- Children of prisoners may have higher levels of anxiety or worry that prevent them from participating fully in learning.

Make a Positive Contribution

- Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers.
- Sixty-five per cent of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend.

Achieve Economic Wellbeing

- Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption.
- Seventy-two per cent of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison.
- Costs of visiting the parent in prison may prevent the child from visiting their parent.

APPENDIX 2

INFORMATION SHARING

DCSF and Communities and Local Government have produced information sharing guidance that can be accessed via their website.

This guidance states that information sharing is the key to meeting the Government's goal of delivering better, more efficient public services that are coordinated around the needs of the individual. It is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare for wider public protection. Information sharing is a vital element in improving outcomes for all.

The Government understands that it is important that people remain confident that their personal information is kept safe and secure and that practitioners maintain the privacy rights of the individual, whilst sharing information to deliver better services. It is therefore important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice and do so confidently. It is important to remember there can be significant consequences to not sharing information as there can be to sharing information. You must use your professional judgement to decide whether to share or not, and what information is appropriate to share.

Seven Golden Rules for Information Sharing

1. **Remember that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing information** but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.
2. **Be open and honest** with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. **Seek advice** if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.
4. **Share with consent where appropriate** and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.
5. **Consider safety and well-being:** Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. **Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure:** Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.
7. **Keep a record** of your decision and the reasons for it - whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

APPENDIX 3

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The Impact on a Child if their Parent or Relative is sent to Prison

You may be reading this because you are caring for a child whose parent or relative has been sent to prison. Initially, the whole family has to cope with many changes to their lives and learn to manage a new range of feelings when a parent or relative goes to prison. It may be several days before you know which prison they have been sent to, and longer before you can talk to the person in prison by telephone or arrange a visit.

All children respond to changes in different ways but it is possible that during these early stages, their sense of confusion and loss could be difficult for them to manage and this could affect their ability to learn and their behaviour at school and at home. They are however, innocent victims of their parent's offences.

One of the most important issues that families face is what to say to the children to explain the absence of their parent or relative. Some families decide to hide the truth from children as they want to protect them from the distress of having a parent in prison to keep them happy. To do this they may create a story, eg that the parent is working away, but this could be difficult to continue, especially if they wish the children to visit the parent in prison. To inform the children of the fact that their mum or dad are in prison is a very difficult thing to do. However, children are naturally curious and will ask questions and there is no guarantee that they will not learn the truth from someone else in the local community or members of the family.

The decision of what to say to the children and when to tell them is the right of a parent or carer. Action for Prisoners' Families recommends that the key question parents should ask themselves is, 'When and what shall I tell the children?' rather than, 'Shall I tell the children?' Although difficult, the advice from groups who work with families of prisoners is to be truthful but to be prepared for questions. Action for Children's Families have produced a useful guide 'Telling the Children - a guide for the partners and families of prisoners' that gives practical advice on how to tell children.

Research and experience tells us that children who are worried, upset or anxious can find it very difficult to concentrate and learn in the classroom. They may be embarrassed or angry about having a parent in prison and this may affect the way that they behave in school. Living arrangements and financial circumstances may also change leading to money difficulties in the payment for equipment or school trips and events. This may lead to new emotions and feelings for the child concerned and could have a negative impact on their education and attendance at school.

Who can help?

The STEP Academy Trust prides itself on the care and guidance that they give to their pupils and is committed to supporting children with a parent in prison so that they can continue and succeed with their education.

There are a number of other national charities and organisations that can offer advice and support for children and families of someone in prison. Names of these organisations and the support they offer are provided in this document.

How do I get help for my children?

There is no system that informs schools or other organisations automatically if the parent or relative of a school pupil is sent to prison. This is because of the Data Protection Act and the need to protect the confidentiality of families.

The STEP Academy Trust can offer children of prisoners a stable environment where routines and staff generally remain the same at a time when their personal life could be one of change and uncertainty. All Academy staff are experienced in keeping confidential information about their pupils and will support children in order for them to achieve the best that they can at during their time at our Academies.

Therefore, it is advisable to inform the Headteacher or other member of staff that you know, if a parent or relative of one of our pupils is in prison. It may be that you can arrange a meeting to discuss ways that your child can be supported. This support could range from staff monitoring your child who may not wish for anyone else to know the circumstances of their parent in prison to offering more individual support with open discussion and support about their parent or relative in prison.

Once you have informed a member of staff, we may suggest additional support that can be obtained through a common assessment process. This is commonly known as 'CAF' which stands for 'Common Assessment Framework' (now known as the Early Help referral and Assessment). If you agree to this assessment being completed you can state which agencies you are prepared to share the assessment information with, so you are in control of who has access to the information. This assessment may identify additional support for you or your family.

Most prisons in England have visitor's centres to make the visit to a parent or relative in prison a more pleasant experience whilst maintaining the security of the prisoners and restricting the access to gifts and money.

As a Trust we have to monitor the attendance and punctuality of all pupils. Please inform your child's Academy of the absence in advance so that consideration may be given to classifying the absence as an 'authorised absence.' Working with the Academy on attendance may avoid the risk of incurring any fixed penalty fines for your child's absence from school.

In summary

- The education of a child with a parent or relative in prison can be disrupted.
- Advice from experts is for families to tell the children the truth about their parent or relative being in prison.
- Life for the children and family following the parent being sent to prison could change radically.
- All staff, governors and Directors of The STEP Academy Trust are committed to supporting children with a parent or relative in prison.
- Informing a member of staff at any of our Academies that you have a relative in prison will help the child as we will be able to offer appropriate support and monitor your child's education and attendance.
- We will treat this information in confidence.
- Staff of our Academies will work with you to find the best ways to support your child.
- A 'CAF' /Early Help Assessment may be suggested as a way to get extra support tailored for your family's needs. You control who shares in this information.
- It could also be that the child(ren) is referred to our Learning Mentor for nurture provision.
- We will work together as an Academy to ensure the best possible life chances and outcomes for the child(ren) and families.