i-HOP: Assisting Schools to support children of offenders

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

Visit our professionals’ website

www.i-hop.org.uk

‘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.
Who are we?

i-HOP is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders’ children and families. I-HOP collates and promote examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo’s was commissioned by the Department for Education to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.i-hop.org.uk). The service is targeted at any professionals who come into contact with offenders’ children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

You’re not in the right frame of mind. Like if you’re sat in school and that’s just happened”
Young Person

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 truantaing, bullying and failure to achieve in education
- Children of prisoners are at a higher risk of mental ill health 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.

Furthermore, there can be great benefits to the parent in prison having a hand in their child’s education via the sharing of school reports or helping out with homework for example.

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 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 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
Examples of existing strategies

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.

Visit i-HOP

Visit 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 i-HOP e-newsletters.