

Text: **Famout** then your message to **60777**
E-mail: support@familiesoutside.org.uk
www.familiesoutside.org.uk

Worried about Self Harm or Suicide

A person you care about in prison may be struggling to cope or even feeling suicidal. Families Outside run a Support and Information Helpline for families affected by imprisonment and can help guide you through some of your concerns about a loved one in prison. The Helpline is a free and confidential service and will not pass on any details of the caller unless agreed beforehand.

Worried that someone in prison may be suicidal?

If you are concerned that somebody you care about in prison is thinking about suicide or harming themselves, the most important thing you can do is ask them specifically about thoughts of suicide. Find out if they have a plan and when they have thought about doing it.

Listen carefully to what they have to say, how they are feeling and why. Stay calm and show you understand. Try not to judge them, argue with them, or play down their feelings.

What about self-harm?

This should not be dismissed as being manipulative, but rather taken seriously and the prisoner given every available support and understanding. Do inform the prison if you know that your loved one is harming themselves.

Who may be particularly vulnerable?

- First time and remand prisoners
- Anyone who has suffered a recent bereavement
- Those who have recently suffered a broken relationship
- Someone who has made a previous suicide attempt
- Substance misusers
- Victims of violence or sexual abuse.

Signs they may need some support:

- The person expresses a wish to die
- They are quiet, listless and withdrawn

- They take no trouble with their appearance, looking dirty and unkempt
- The person has no friends
- They are finding it very difficult to come to terms with their situation.

What can trigger suicidal feelings?

- Anger
- Despair
- Hopelessness
- Isolation and loneliness
- Helplessness
- Victimisation
- Change in status, e.g. remand to convicted
- Transfer

"I went to visit my son yesterday and he wasn't himself. He doesn't think his life is worth living and says he doesn't want us visiting anymore."

"My husband always said he would kill himself if he got convicted. He was sentenced yesterday and I haven't heard from him. I just want to know he is OK."

What can you do to help?

Listen to them. You might feel like you don't know how to help someone you care about because you don't know what to tell them, or how to make them feel better. But you shouldn't tell them anything. It's not your responsibility to make everything better. The best way to help them is to listen actively and ask open questions.

Check they know where to get help. Each prisoner has a Personal Officer assigned to them who they can talk with. If the prisoner prefers to talk to another prisoner, almost all Scottish prisons have Listeners – prisoners trained and supported by the Samaritans – who will listen to their fellow prisoners in confidence and are available 24 hours a day.

Your relative can also ask to speak with one of the prison chaplains. This is a service provided by the Scottish Prison Service and the chaplains. They are able to offer support and provide a link to others in the prison or in the community.

Seek help on their behalf. The prison service has made it a priority to reduce self-harm and suicide in prisons. If the prisoner is felt to be at risk of suicide or self-harm, the prison will ensure that they are correctly supported and monitored until such time that they are no longer considered to be at risk.

If you have serious concerns about the welfare of a relative or friend in prison or they have expressed suicidal feelings or threatened to harm themselves in any way, please voice your concerns immediately to the Duty Manager or the person in charge at the prison.

In an agreement with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), staff at the Helpline can intervene and speak with the prison on the family's behalf, with the family member's permission. If the caller does not want the Helpline to contact the prison but has already given details of the person they think may be in danger, it should be explained that Helpline staff are duty bound to forward the information to the appropriate person at the prison but will not pass personal details of the caller on when doing this. **The Support & Information Helpline can be contacted on 0500 839383.**

What will happen if I express my concern to Families Outside or to the prison?

If you express your concerns to Families Outside and give them a prisoner's personal details, they have a duty of care to contact the prison or support you to contact the prison with your concerns.

If you or Families Outside contact the prison, the information provided will be treated sensitively and in confidence, and will at all times be used to help and support the person you are concerned about. *The Residential Manager will speak to the prisoner to advise that they will be contacting the caller to inform them that their telephone call has been responded to. The prisoner should be asked*

what information they wish shared with the caller and the Residential Manager will phone the caller back.

The prison may hold a case conference within 24 hours if they feel it is necessary. Those attending a case conference can include: the prisoner, the prisoner's Personal Officer, a member of the Health Team, usually the Mental Health Nurse, a residential manager and, if invited, a member of the prisoner's family.

The team will assess the level of risk and decide what support and help the prisoner may need. An individual care plan will be drawn up and will show the prisoner's needs and level of risk. Individuals who are deemed at risk will be cared for in a safe environment and any decisions taken will be agreed by the whole team, including the prisoner.

I want to express my concern but I do not want the prisoner to know I called the prison or spoke to Families Outside about them. You do not have to give your own name to the prison or to Families Outside. However, your confidentiality will be respected if you ask the people you speak to, not to divulge your name.

Look after yourself and talk to someone. Hearing someone you care about talking about suicide can affect you too. Find someone you can confide in and talk to honestly about how you are feeling.

The importance of family ties. Visits and contacts with the family are of paramount importance to all prisoners, particularly those who may be feeling vulnerable. Your intervention may be crucial in alerting the prison, so please do tell someone.

Who else can I talk to in confidence?

Families Outside Support & Information Helpline

Support for families affected by imprisonment

Helpline: 0500 83 93 83

Text **FAMOUT** then your message to **60777**

E-mail: support@familiesoutside.org.uk

www.familiesoutside.org.uk

The Samaritans:

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Email: jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk