

STAYING CONNECTED PROJECT

Care-experienced children and young people with a
sibling in prison or secure accommodation



What is the Staying Connected project?

The Staying Connected Project is a joint project between Families Outside and The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

This project sets out to explore the experiences of siblings when one is in care, and the other is either in prison, on remand, or in secure accommodation.



“**Sibling**” can mean full, half or step-siblings. “**Sibling-like**” relationships are also included in this, and can be anyone that the child or young person considers a sibling - whether through adoption, foster or residential care.

The Staying Connected Project looked to find out what it feels like when brothers and sisters are separated:



- Do they want to keep in touch? If they do, are they able to do this, and how?
- Are there things that make this easier or more difficult?
- Does anyone ever ask children or young people whether they want to see their brother or sister who is in prison or in secure care?

What did we find out?

Lots of barriers to maintaining sibling relationships were found, including:

The distance of the prison or secure accommodation from family.



The costs of travelling to visit siblings in prison or secure care.

A lack of privacy during visits made time with siblings feel a bit unnatural.



Sometimes parents stopped children from visiting their siblings.

Complicated relationships with parents and siblings could also impact relationships between siblings.



Trouble accessing technology could make keeping in touch hard.

What did we find out?

On the other hand, we found that there are things that can help maintain sibling relationships, such as:

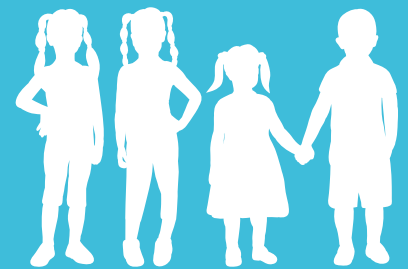
Both siblings could benefit from support by an independent worker.



Social workers need resources and information to support with building and maintaining these relationships.

“Everybody knows your best bonding moments with the family cannae exactly be done when you are sitting in a visiting room with 16 other prisoners, and 5 officers. You cannae really talk about anything... It doesn't feel private...” (Joseph)

Bonding visits are important. Young people feel they should be open to everyone and not just for people visiting their parents.



Video calls help young people to spend time with their family in normal ways like watching TV together or helping a sibling with homework.

What did we find out?



More must be done to look into this issue and to support sibling relationships...

Visits between siblings where one is in prison and another is in secure care only take place in 'exceptional circumstances'. This is the same when both siblings are in prison.



The changes in laws for supporting sibling relationships are not always being upheld in practice.

There is a lack of data showing the size of this issue. Out of 200 case files, only 4.5% had a sibling who is or was in prison - although, this is likely to be an underestimate.



Helping to maintain and rebuild sibling relationships can help young people feel supported and promote resettlement.

What did we find out?

Although The Promise has had a positive impact, it hasn't always translated into consistent changes in practice...



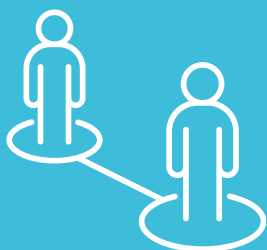
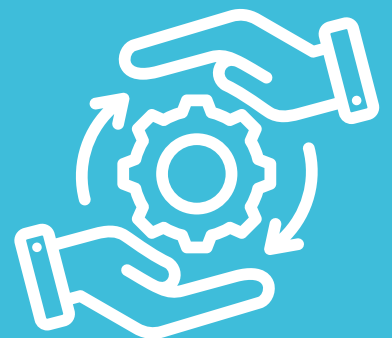
What is The Promise?

The Promise exists to improve the care system in Scotland, so that all children and young people can grow up feeling loved, safe, and respected.



Although more conversations are happening between children and young people, social workers, and Children's Hearings, young people's opinions need to be better represented in paperwork and assessments.

Despite clear laws in place - and more laws being passed - which uphold the importance of sibling contact, young people still feel unheard. This needs to change.



Services don't always share information, which can impact sibling relationships.

What needs to be done

When siblings are separated in different care placements for a long time without much contact, it can be important to focus on rebuilding relationships, as well as maintaining them.



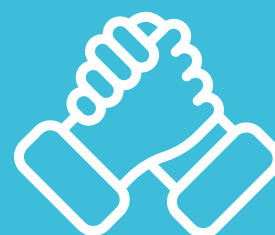
Services need to work together and listen to siblings, so that they get the support they need.

Services need to talk to people and find solutions that work for them to maintain their relationships.



Visits should be more family-friendly and accessible.

A key person should be chosen to help support relationships.



If possible, siblings could meet in a different setting or do things together as a family.

What needs to be done

Families of young people in care and custody should be provided with information and help to access financial support for visits.



We must ensure children and young people in care and custody are able to keep in touch with their loved ones in secure care and custody in a meaningful way.

It is important to ensure that children and young people stay near their families and homes.



Social workers must use child-friendly language when talking about decisions that affect children and young people.

More understanding and support is needed to make sure siblings who are separated have their needs met, especially when one of them has been sent to prison or secure care.



What needs to be done

The adults involved in the child or young person's care can support them to maintain and rebuild their sibling relationships by using **The 5 I's**:

1

IDENTIFY...

which care-experienced children and young people have a sibling in prison or secure care.



2

INFORM...

all children and young people about their rights to a relationship with their sibling(s).



3

INQUIRE...

whether the young person wants to keep in touch with their siblings.



4

INPUT...

the young person's choice about whether they want to keep in touch with their sibling(s).



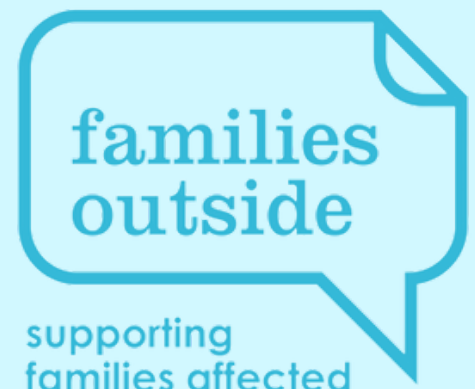
5

IMPLEMENT

Where the young person does want to keep in touch with their sibling(s), identify ways to IMPLEMENT this.



familiesoutside.org.uk



supporting
families affected
by imprisonment

Families Outside is the only national charity in Scotland that works solely to support children and families affected by imprisonment.

Get in touch with our Helpline



Call: 0800 254 0088

Email: support@familiesoutside.org.uk

Text: FAMOUT followed by your message to 60777

Visit: www.familiesoutside.org.uk

Our Webchat Service can translate most modern languages.