

## 5. Keeping in contact

Families benefit from maintaining ties with a family member in prison, even if its hard to find time for visiting or staying in contact. Fares, petrol and other costs can make visiting expensive, and dealing with prison security can be frustrating. However, inmates who stay in close contact with their families are less likely to reoffend when they're released. They do better on parole, have better mental health and have better relationships with their families when they return home, so its worth the effort to stay in touch.

It's easy for inmates to become institutionalised, meaning that they can't cope without the structure of a prison. Keeping in contact with families helps maintain an identity as a partner, friend, brother, sister, sibling or parent. Family ties remind the inmate that they're more than just an 'inmate' and help them stay focused on the roles they can play beyond the prison. Away from home and loved ones, it's easy for inmates to believe that people

will stop caring about them. This can produce feelings of isolation, hopelessness and despair.

Regular visits and letters from family are important reminders to inmates that there are people on the outside who love and care for them. Keeping in contact also means family can assist inmates in planning for the future, and supporting them after release. **See p.107** for more information about planning for release.



Visits area at Dillwynia

## Should you visit?

If a family member has been violent or threatening towards you or someone else, you may be feeling greatly relieved that they're in prison. Families of inmates with violent or abusive behaviour often feel pressured to support their family member while they're in prison, and feel guilty if they don't. Think about your safety and that of your children in deciding whether you or your children should visit them.

As well as physical violence, think about other ways in which you may be at risk of abuse or controlling tactics. Imprisoned partners can feel jealous about your real or imagined relationships with other people and react with threats, coercion, manipulation, emotional blackmail, intimidation or angry outbursts. They may also attempt to control your activities and movements, for example by asking friends or family to monitor what you do. Now that your family member is away from home, you may have the time and space to think about whether to stay with them. You may find yourself paying more attention to people in your life who have questioned whether your relationship is safe and healthy. You may find it helpful to talk about this with a counsellor or support worker. **See p.30** for contact details about services.

You may not want to take children to visit their parent in prison if

you're questioning whether you want to continue a relationship with that person. You may be able to ask a trusted relation or friend to take the child when they visit the prison. If you don't know someone who can do this, you may be able to arrange for a worker from SHINE for Kids to take the child on visits (**see p.75** for SHINE details and contact numbers).

## Visiting and AVOs (apprehended violence orders)

If you have a current apprehended domestic violence order (ADVO) or apprehended personal violence order (APVO), you can't visit a prison if this will contravene the conditions of the order. For example, if the order says that the inmate can't come within a certain distance, you won't be able to visit them. Prison staff are able to check whether there's a relevant AVO. If there's an order, but you believe that you can still visit, you should take a copy of the order with you to the prison. For example, the inmate may be able to have contact with you, but only if they stick to conditions about their behaviour.

## Visiting a prison

### Who can visit?

Family and friends are encouraged to visit. Up to four adults can visit an inmate at any one time. Check with the prison if you want to bring

more than four children.

Inmates can decide they don't want to attend a visit. If an inmate has many people who are likely to visit, they should check with each other beforehand to avoid too many people attending at the same time. If you let the inmate know in advance that you're visiting, this will help them be prepared for the visit. You can do this by writing to them, or by telling them when they phone you.

But remember that once you've told them you're visiting, they'll be counting on you coming. If you have to change your plans on the day, you won't be able to contact the inmate to let them know.

### **Booking visits**

Most prisons require you to book visits in advance.

Contact the prison by phone and ask to book a visit. You'll need the person's birth date and/or their MIN. If you don't know which prison your family member is in, contact:



### **Sentence Administration**

**(02) 8346 1000**

between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekdays excluding public holidays, or

### **State-wide Sentence**

**Administration (02) 9289 5258**

between 4.30pm - 8.30pm, weekdays, or between 8.30am - 4.30pm, weekends and public holidays.

Booking a visit doesn't guarantee that it will take place. Inmates may be moved at short notice, and they (not the staff) are responsible for telling you their new location. Ring the day before you leave to check that your family member is still in the same prison. If you have to travel a long distance to get to the prison, ring and check along the way.

Arrive before your visit is due to start. In some centres you'll need to queue in order of arrival, while other centres will give you a specific time to arrive. You may have to wait if your family member is working or needs to be located to come to the visit.

### **How often can I visit?**

Visiting arrangements vary between prisons, so contact the centre to check visiting times and how often you can visit. See the inside back cover for a list of NSW prisons and their phone numbers.

MRRC (Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre) at Silverwater and Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre have visiting six days a week, but many centres will only be open for visits on weekends and public holidays. Remand centres may have different times, and different procedures to other centres, which may make visiting more difficult and

time-consuming. They also have limits on the number of visitors an inmate may see. Visitors to remand centres may need to have an eye scan (see below) or be fingerprinted upon entry.

### **VIN (Visitor's Identification Number) and ID for visits**

The first time you visit a prison you'll be given a VIN (Visitor's Identification Number).

This will be your VIN each time you visit the prison. Allow extra time for the issue of a VIN on your first visit. You'll also need to fill out a visitor's form. This form will be different at different centres. Some centres conduct eye scans (biometric scans). To have a biometric scan you're asked to stand still while a light shines in your face.

The record of your eye scan will be used to check your identity at your next visit. Remember that you must provide identification each time you visit. You'll need one form of ID from List 1 or three forms of ID from List 2. One of these must show the address where you currently live.

#### **List 1**

- > current Driver's Licence with photo;
- > photo card from issued by the Roads and Maritime Services or similar from interstate;
- > current passport or one that has expired within the last two years;
- > any current photo ID issued by an Australian Government department agency or authority.

#### **List 2**

- > Birth Certificate;
- > confirmation of enrolment letter from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC);
- > water, power or phone accounts issued less than six months before the visit date;
- > current car or boat registration papers;
- > Marriage Certificate;
- > Australian citizenship card issued by a government department agency or authority (e.g. a pension card, Medicare card);
- > Department of Home Affairs papers;
- > Credit or debit card with your signature.

### **Visitor Information Volunteer Scheme (VIVS)**

The Visitor Information Volunteer Scheme (VIVS) is operating at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (MRRC) and the Bathurst Correctional Centre. Volunteers provide information, guidance and support to families and friends visiting inmates. The volunteers are easy to spot as they wear badges which identify them.

## **Visiting for children**

### **Arrangements for children**

Children under 18 years must be with an adult. Take the children's ID (e.g. birth certificate or passport) if

you have it. Visiting with children can be challenging, particularly if they're young. They'll be expected to stay seated near you and not to disturb other people. There will be no toys for them to play with, and they can't bring toys or playthings from home. If you have sensitive issues to discuss with your family member in prison, it's often better to leave the children at home that day. SHINE for Kids provides childcare during visits at prisons in Silverwater, Parklea, Windsor, Goulburn, Bathurst, Cessnock, Wellington, Junee, Nowra and Kempsey. This MUST be booked in advance. Contact SHINE for Kids on **9714 3000**.

### **What to tell children**

Depending on their age, children may have different expectations and reactions to visiting a prison. Younger children may not realise that they're visiting a prison. Older children may be fearful or uncertain, and may need reassurance about what will happen when they visit.

Some families try to avoid telling children that they're visiting a prison. They may say that the visit is taking place at the family member's work or some other setting. While it's up to individual parents and carers to decide what to tell children when visiting a prison, many people find that children cope best when told the truth. **See p.45** for more

information about what to tell children.

### **Child protection**

Be aware that parents are expected to keep their children safe during visits. If parents are observed physically abusing children (e.g. smacking) or harming them in other ways, the visit may be terminated. Also CSNSW staff are required to report child abuse to FACS. Physical abuse includes hitting children around the head, or hitting them hard enough to mark them or hurt more than a few moments.

If you want to take a child to visit an inmate who has been charged or convicted of an offence with a child victim, the inmate will need to make a special application for the visit and will have to be assessed regarding the safety of the visit for the child. This process will also apply to Family Video Contact (**see p. 50**). To find out more, call CSNSW's Child Protection Coordination and Support Unit on **8346 1008**.

### **Help for children to visit parents in prison**

SHINE for Kids has centres at different locations across the state. SHINE may be able to assist with transporting children to other centres if they're unable to attend visits otherwise. To find out how they can help you, contact them on **9714 3000** or **see p.75** for locations and more phone numbers.

## Security

Officers may ask you to turn out your pockets, or your child's pockets, and open bags or other belongings (where these are allowed into visiting areas). They may scan you with a hand-held scanning device, or ask you to walk through a metal detector.

Sniffer dogs, trained to detect drugs, may walk around visitors and their children. Sniffer dogs can detect drugs from a week ago. Visitors need to make sure there are no traces of drugs on their possessions or in any car in which they travelled to the prison.

Visitors may be required to remove face coverings (e.g. an item of clothing, helmet, mask) to verify the identity of the person entering or exiting a prison.

Requests for visitors to remove face coverings worn for religious reasons will be carried out in a sensitive manner.

Visitors will not be strip searched by CSNSW officers, but police can strip search if called. Muslim women wearing a veil or hijab may be asked to remove it so it can be searched. This will be conducted by a female CSNSW officer. You won't be allowed to remove any clothing during the visit.

Inmates in higher security centres will be wearing one-piece white or orange jumpsuits during visits, as a security measure.

## Visiting arrangements

Each prison has individual visiting arrangements. The security classification (maximum, medium, minimum) will make a difference to the arrangements during visits.

Generally the following will apply in the visits area:

- > no smoking;
- > you will not be admitted if under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and can't behave in a disruptive way;
- > you must stay seated, and can't sit on laps or tables;
- > you can only make contact with the inmate you've been authorised to visit;
- > you can't join other visitors at other tables;
- > you won't be able to bring a camera, mobile phone, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, syringes or weapons;
- > maximum security prisons are generally very restrictive about bringing in items.

## You should check with the centre about the following:

### Location of an inmate

Check that the inmate is still at the prison you plan to visit. They could be moved at the last minute and be unable to let you know. Phone as close as possible to the visit. **A**

**list of prisons and their phone numbers is on page 124 of this book.** The Corrective Services website has the most up-to-date contact information:

[www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au)

### Access to lockers

Some centres will have lockers where you can leave valuables. Check what change is needed for lockers.

### Baby care

You may be able to bring baby food in a sealed jar or a baby bottle. You may be able to bring nappies or nappies and wipes may be provided. Strollers will often not be permitted inside prisons. Check whether any other food will be permitted for toddlers and older children.

In maximum security centres, no food may be permitted beyond that needed for infants.

### Medication

If you need to have medication accessible to you at all times, you'll need to hand it to the Visits Processing Officer during your visit. It should be in its original container. Prescribed medication should be in its original package with your name on it. It would be wise to bring the prescription or doctor's certificate. Before the visit, complete an Application for Special Medical Consideration form with a copy of a medical certificate.

### Toilets

Some centres will only have toilets at the gate, so you won't be able to use toilets after you enter the visitors waiting area. At some centres, visits will have to end once you leave the room to use the toilet. This may also happen if children need to use the toilet. If you're allowed to return to the visit, you'll need to be rescreened before the visit resumes.

If you have a medical condition that means you'll need access to toilets, apply to the Governor or Manager of Security in writing by completing an Application for Special Medical Consideration form with a copy of a medical certificate before the visit.

### Vending machines

Some prisons have vending machines where you can buy junk food for yourself or your family member during visits.

Only you can use the machine – your family member won't be allowed to handle the money. Check how much change you can bring in, and what kinds of coins are needed. There are no change machines at prisons so make sure you have change with you.



## What to wear

Remember you may be scanned by a metal detector. If the metal detector goes off you'll delay other visitors, so it's best to avoid metal – e.g. in shoes, buttons, bra under-wires, jewellery except for wedding rings, or jewellery – that you are unable to remove. CSNSW requires visitors to wear clothing that 'conforms to family standards'. This means avoiding see through or revealing clothing. Staff may be very strict about what's appropriate clothing. You may not be able to wear sunglasses or sunhats.

## Transport

You can ask the prison about transport options and directions. These are also given on the CSNSW website, [www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au) – look for 'correctional centres'. You can ring the Transport Infoline on **131 500** or go to [www.transportnsw.info](http://www.transportnsw.info) for information about public transport.

Junee Correctional Centre provides a free weekly return train ticket to Junee from Central Station / Campbelltown Station, and a free taxi service to and from Junee station to the centre. Bookings can be made by contacting Junee Correctional Centre on **02 6924 3222** Monday - Wednesday between 12.30pm - 4pm. Visitors must book and pay their own accommodation.

## Money for inmates

You won't be able to directly give any items to your family member during visits.

CSNSW is no longer able to accept cash deposits at prisons or money sent in by post. You will be able to deposit money in their trust account by using BPAY (internet and phone banking) or at an Australia Post outlet (cash and debit card). You'll need a VIN (Visitor's Identification Number) before you can deposit money. Once you have a VIN then you can be issued with a form that will allow you to use BPAY and Australia Post services. This form will either be emailed or posted to you by prison administration staff. You can deposit \$100 only at a time. There is also a monthly limit of \$600, if an inmate receives more than \$600 in one month the amount over the limit will be put in a separate account that can't be accessed until the inmate's release. Inmates can use money to order items ('buy-up') such as toiletries, additional food, clothing, tobacco, papers and personal items. Inmates are not permitted to have money or other items, such as stamps, that could be used as currency.

## Mail for inmates

Prisons encourage the sending of letters between inmates and their families. Inmates really value





letters, and often keep and reread all that they receive. Be aware that inmates may find it hard to find much to write about, and so may not respond to every letter they receive. Even if they don't write back regularly, they usually love to receive letters and like hearing about what's going on beyond the prison.

Mail is usually opened by prison staff, but may not be read in detail. Inmates' letters will be screened for any illegal activity. If you have legal or other official papers that you urgently need to pass on to an inmate, check with the prison about the fastest way to do this. You may be able to leave them to be passed on after your visit.

Each centre has individual rules about sending clothing or reading material to inmates. Check with the centre about whether you can send in clothing, books or magazines.

## Phone calls

You won't be able to phone your family member in prison. Each inmate receives a phone card with six phone numbers that can be programmed for family or friends. They can also allocate three numbers for services they may wish to phone. They must have money in their account to make phone calls. Phone calls generally last six minutes.



To use their phone card, inmates enter their MIN then a PIN for the card. They can then make the call. You'll be advised that the call is from a prison. It can be a good idea to plan ahead, organising times for the inmate to call so that you're not waiting around the call. Partners and family may feel anxious if an inmate doesn't call when they said they would. Inmates may have to queue to use one of a limited number of phones, so they may not be able to contact you exactly when you are expecting a call. Professional visits, medical appointments and inmate lock downs may also prevent them from calling.

Avoid spending hours sitting and waiting for calls. If they haven't called within an hour of when they said they would, it's best to get on with other things. Don't jump to awful conclusions about why the inmate has not called. Keep in mind all the everyday reasons that could have prevented them from calling you.

## In an emergency ...

In a genuine emergency – i.e. a serious situation such as death, major injury or illness in the family – contact the prison (see inside back cover for numbers) and say that you need to pass on an urgent message to your family member.

## Family Video Contact

### What is a video visit?

A Family Video Contact links an inmate in a prison using video conferencing equipment with family who go to a venue where video conferencing is also available. Some prisons have video conferencing so that inmates don't have to be transported for brief court appearances, and to assist in provision of professional services such as access to solicitors. Family Video Contact uses this technology for family and friend's visits.

### Why have a Family Video Contact?

A Family Video Contact can mean that an inmate can have contact with family members and friends who have difficulty visiting the prison. Difficulties may arise due to distance, costs or because family members are elderly or have disabilities.

### How is a Family Video Contact organised?

Inmates can apply for a Family Video Contact by filling out a **'Family Video Contact' form**.

This form can be obtained from the officer in charge of the video conferencing area or from the Manager Offender Services and Programs (MOSP). The SAPO or Welfare Officer can also help find and complete this form. If a support agency like SHINE for Kids or Community Restorative Centre (CRC) has been supporting the family, they may be able to provide a supporting letter or, if they're visiting the inmate, add their support for the visit on the application form.

It's best for inmates to discuss the option of the contact with their family before putting in the application, so the family knows what to expect. It takes about two weeks for applications to be reviewed and approved. If the Family Video Contact session is

approved, the family will receive a phone call either from a support organisation. A time will be set for the contact to take place, and the prison will be advised. The family will be asked to go to a venue where video conferencing is available. This will usually be a government or council



*Video conferencing suite*

building, such as a TAFE, school or library.

Families may have to travel to a neighbouring suburb or town if video facilities aren't available locally. Family Video Contact sessions are generally about an hour long.

Because video conferencing facilities at the prison must also be used for court hearings and professional visits, there may be a delay in the start of a visit, and sometimes visits will be a little shorter than an hour. Sometimes families find that they don't want to use the whole hour, especially if they're just starting to re-establish a relationship with someone in prison.

The inmate can nominate up to four adults and four children for their Family Video contact. There are no difficulties if some of the people nominated can't attend the visit. However, only the people nominated on the form can attend

the visit. You can't bring along other people to take the places of people who were nominated but can't attend on the day.

### **Hints for getting the most out of video visits**

It really helps if family can bring items to the visit. For example, family could show photos or children could bring a toy or something they've done at childcare or school. The inmate won't usually be able to bring anything to show.

Children will often find it hard to stay engaged with the video, especially at first. It can help to bring toys so they can be occupied during the contact session. It may be helpful to reassure the inmate that if children don't seem interested, it doesn't mean the inmate is not important to them - it's just that they have a short attention span, especially when they have to watch and listen.

### **Need help?**

Note that **1800** numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

For advice about AVOs contact:

### **Domestic Violence Advocacy Centre**

A Community Legal Centre specialising in free advice on domestic violence.

**8745 6999**  
**1800 810 784**

### **FACS Domestic Violence Line**

24-hour advice about safety, AVOs and child protection.

**1800 656 463**