



## Project Report

# The Role of Child Impact Assessments in Supporting Children and Young People Impacted by Parental Imprisonment

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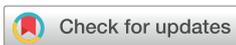
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## Abstract

Children and young people with a parent in contact with the justice system rarely receive the support they need; many are judged and stigmatised. Child Impact Assessments were developed by the Prison Reform Trust in collaboration with 28 children and young people from across the United Kingdom with experience of parental imprisonment, who said in interviews, focus groups, and an online survey that they want to be seen, listened to, and considered at all stages of a parent's journey through the justice system: arrest, court, and sentencing, prison or community sentence, and prior to a parent's release. They want to be supported, and they want to be included in decisions about that support. This paper lays out *why* Child Impact Assessments are needed; *what* they are; and crucially *how* they can be used in practice to ensure the right support is offered to meet a child's needs at the earliest opportunity. The paper will provide evidence of how Child Impact Assessments can improve children's wellbeing and will give an overview of recent developments to the resources. The authors will also explore future developments, including adapting the resources to understand the impact on unborn babies, babies, and very young children (the first 1001 days) when a pregnant woman or mother is in contact with the justice system.

**Keywords:** parental imprisonment; prisoners' families; prisoners' children; impact of imprisonment



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## 1. Introduction

Scotland has the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe, followed by England and Wales ([Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research 2025](#)). Several studies have highlighted the devastating and wide-reaching impact of parental imprisonment on children ([Kincaid et al. 2019](#); [Condry and Smith 2018](#); [Jones et al. 2013](#); [Scharff-Smith and Gampell 2011](#)). As well as a significant sense of loss, many children experience stigma, social isolation, shame, and fear ([McGinley and Jones 2018](#)). Parental imprisonment can have a negative impact on children's short-term emotional wellbeing, as well as their long-term health and social prospects ([McGillivray 2016](#)); the imprisonment of a household member is a recognised Adverse Childhood Experience ([Felitti et al. 1998](#)).

A major pan-European study concluded that children impacted by parental imprisonment are at significantly greater risk of suffering mental health difficulties than children who do not have parents in prison (Jones et al. 2013). Separation from a mother due to her imprisonment is particularly traumatic for children, and those affected often face significant disruption, for example due to a change of caregiver, home, and school (Minson 2019).

### 1.1. A Lack of Recognition and Support

Rule 7f of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (2015), known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, requires the names, ages, and guardianship status of a prisoner's children to be recorded upon a person's admission to prison to ensure the children's wellbeing is considered and that they are not overlooked by the authorities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2016). Despite this, there is no systematic recording and monitoring of children impacted by parental imprisonment in the UK. According to the 2024 Ministry of Justice: Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD), 192,912 children in England and Wales had a parent in prison between 1 October 2021 and 1 October 2022, but this is an estimate (Ministry of Justice 2024).

In addition to a lack of recognition, children affected by parental imprisonment are rarely offered support (Beresford 2018). Furthermore, families affected by imprisonment are often reluctant to seek, or access, support (Pugh and Lanskey 2011). This may be due to shame and stigma, a lack of knowledge of what support is available, or a mistrust of statutory agencies (Beresford 2018). Shame and stigma are reported to be among the most challenging aspects of parental imprisonment for children, with families feeling unable to ask for help because they fear being treated as guilty by association (Cooper et al. 2023; The Centre for Social Justice 2022; Flynn and Eriksson 2017).

Services and interventions that take account of the needs of children with imprisoned parents, and in particular the stigma and shame they experience, are patchy, uncoordinated, and accessible by only a relatively small number of children (Jones et al. 2013). Schools play a crucial role in supporting children's wellbeing and resilience (Butler et al. 2022). However, the bias and stigma associated with having a parent in prison can prevent this group of children from receiving support in schools (Children of Prisoners Europe 2022). Warren et al. (2019) found that teachers had low expectations of students they knew had an imprisoned parent. Goldsmith and Byrne's (2018) study noted that practitioners who work with children, including teachers, had either very little, or limited, knowledge about the criminal justice system and its impact on families and, consequently, were less confident in their ability to provide support.

A previous study found that within a small sample group, 63% of boys with a convicted father went on to offend themselves (Murray and Farrington 2008). While the report states clearly that this is not a predictor of future behaviour, nor is it necessarily generalisable, it has given rise to a prevailing narrative that suggests children of prisoners are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system as adults. This is unhelpful, unfounded, and likely to lead to further stigmatisation rather than support (Minson 2024). Young adults with lived experience of parental imprisonment during childhood report the devastating impact on them when the public narrative focuses on the likelihood of their future offending (The Parental Imprisonment Collective 2025). Children with experience of a close family member in prison are very aware of this societal stigma and want to be seen as hard working, ambitious, compassionate, and caring individuals who are engaged in their passions and interests, rather than as potential future offenders (Brookes and Daly 2024).

### 1.2. A Children's Rights Approach

The need for a child-centred approach to support for children impacted by parental imprisonment is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Several UNCRC Articles are particularly relevant to children with a parent in prison, as follows: Article 2—the right to not be discriminated against because of the status of their parent; Article 3—the right for their best interests to be a primary consideration of any court taking an action concerning them; Article 8—the right to an identity; Article 9—the right to not be separated from their parents, unless it is in their best interests, and the right to stay in contact with both parents unless this could cause them harm; Article 12—the right for their views to be considered; Article 16—the right to privacy; and Article 20—the right to be provided special protection and assistance if temporarily deprived of their family environment (United Nations 1989).

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (of which the UK remains part) recommended in 2018 to Member States that children with imprisoned parents be treated with respect for their human rights and with due regard for their situation and needs. The recommendations state that children's views should be heard, directly or indirectly, in relation to decisions which may affect them (Council of Europe 2018). Sentencing Council guidelines for England and Wales state that being the 'sole or primary carer for dependent relatives' is something which the court should consider. Guidelines specify that the court should obtain detailed information before sentencing a mother with dependent children, or a pregnant or post-natal woman, to ensure that a sentence is compatible with their support needs and childcare responsibilities and to enable them to access routine healthcare and maternity appointments. (Sentencing Council 2025). The reality is that many pre-sentence reports, which should include information about dependent children, are oral, or written hurriedly, and often fail to include information about the impact of court decisions on children (Beresford 2022).

Donson and Parkes (2021) make a compelling case for children's rights, and the centring of their voices, to be embedded within criminal justice policies to ensure the practice that follows takes appropriate account of children's needs. Only then will children, who are currently largely invisible in adult criminal justice systems and processes, and at best an add-on to the rehabilitation of their parents, be recognised and empowered. Children with imprisoned parents report that they simply want to be recognised as children, supported as children, and valued as children (Long et al. 2019).

## 2. Child Impact Assessments

This focus on a child's rights approach that prioritises children's wellbeing is a guiding principle of the Prison Reform Trust's (PRT) work on Child Impact Assessments. From its inception, the Child Impact Assessment project has been iterative and evolving, guided by the views of children and young people with their own experience of parental imprisonment. To date this has been a three-phase project, with the focus of each phase summarised in Table 1.

In total, 28 children and young people, ranging in age from five to 24, with a median age of 13, from across the UK (one from Wales, two from Northern Ireland, six from Scotland, and 14 from England) informed phase one of this project through focus groups (n = 6), one-to-one interviews (n = 12), and an anonymous online survey (n = 10). The relatively low numbers are reflective of what is often referred to as a hidden population (Ministry of Justice 2024). The children were all residing either with primary or kinship caregivers; the project did not consider the specific needs of children in out-of-home care settings. All the children were receiving support from specialist organisations in their

locality that supports families affected by imprisonment to ensure children’s wellbeing could be supported during, and following, their participation.

**Table 1.** Phases of the Child Impact Assessment project.

Phase	Timescale	Focus	Funding
1	September 2021 to December 2022	Development of Child Impact Assessment resources	Churchill Fellowship Activate Award
2	February 2023 to September 2024	Dissemination and implementation of Child Impact Assessment resources	The Eleanor Rathbone Charitable Trust The Dulverton Trust
3	October 2024 to December 2025	Using Child Impact Assessments to create systemic change	The Dulverton Trust

The responses of the children and young people during phase one shaped the aim of Child Impact Assessments: to ensure children feel listened to, are offered timely and appropriate support, and are included in decision-making about that support at all stages of their parent’s journey through the justice system, including their arrest, court appearance, community or custodial sentence, and release from prison (Beresford 2022).

Phase one concluded with the publication of “This is me”: Child Impact Assessments for children with a primary carer in the criminal justice system—a toolkit of resources (Beresford 2022). Although the original focus of this work was to improve support for children with a mother in contact with the justice system, children and young people, and the practitioners who support them, felt that the resources could be adapted for use with children whose fathers are in contact with the justice system, and this was incorporated into phase one of the project (Beresford 2022). The “This is me” toolkit includes versions of the Child Impact Assessment for children with a mother or a father in contact with the justice system; accompanying notes for practitioners supporting children; case studies describing how Child Impact Assessments can be used in practice; resources to support pilot projects focused on implementing the use of Child Impact Assessments; and links to further training and useful resources (Beresford 2022).

The Child Impact Assessment itself is written in child-friendly language and has six sections, as described in Table 2 (Beresford 2022).

It is important to note that the Child Impact Assessment was not designed as a ‘form to be completed’; rather, it is a guide for practitioners who are supporting children to explore how a child is feeling; what, if any, actions might improve their situation; and how their views can inform decisions made about them. The key to the use of Child Impact Assessments is a relational approach—working *with* and *alongside* children and young people, as opposed to doing ‘to’ or ‘for’ them. To this end, Child Impact Assessments are not a statutory process; they are offered to children as a way of identifying any support they may need. The children and young people who participated in phase one of the project said they valued the opportunity to talk in a confidential and safe space where they felt their views and needs were being heard (Beresford 2022). This upholds their right to privacy under the UNCRC (United Nations 1989). Whilst the Child Impact Assessment itself, and the views expressed within the process, belong to the child, there may be occasions where the child gives informed consent to share certain information (e.g., related to the action plan) or where information must be shared with others (e.g., if there are safeguarding concerns). The accompanying notes within the Child Impact

Assessment resources highlight the need for child protection and safeguarding procedures to be adhered to at all times (Beresford 2022).

**Table 2.** Components of the Child Impact Assessment.

Section of Child Impact Assessment	Components
Introduction	An explanation of the purpose of Child Impact Assessments
	An overview of emotions that children might feel
Part 1—About me	A reminder that children with a parent in prison are not alone and that what has happened is not their fault
	Basic information gathering about the child
Part 2—About me and my mum/dad	Additional information about the child’s likes, dreams, important relationships
	An opportunity for children to describe the relationship with their parent, including anything they particularly like or find challenging
Part 3—About what has happened	A set of questions relating to each stage of the justice system
	An opportunity to use creative processes (e.g., music, art) to express their feelings if they prefer
Part 4—Agreed actions	An opportunity to write actions in their own words
	An opportunity to revisit/revise decisions within a specified timescale
Part 5—Further resources	Resources that children have identified as particularly helpful

During phase one, children and young people reported that having a choice about whom they completed the Child Impact Assessment with was important and that, ideally, this would be someone with whom they already have an existing relationship. This relational approach means the Child Impact Assessment can be used by a wide variety of practitioners from universal and statutory services and third sector organisations, as well as by families themselves (Beresford 2022). Some agencies are more suited to signposting children and families to support, rather than using the Child Impact Assessment directly with children, such as those focused on the adult in the justice system—police, members of the judiciary, prison, and probation staff (Beresford 2022).

### 3. Using Child Impact Assessments

Table 3 illustrates responses from four children who completed a Child Impact Assessment towards the end of phase one of the project. At the time of completing the Child Impact Assessment, all four children were receiving support from a specialist organisation that works with children and families affected by imprisonment. The samples here only show details from part 3 of the Child Impact Assessment (about what has happened). Any identifying details have been removed, including names (pseudonyms are used), dates, and locations.

In phase one of the project, children and young people who participated in the consultation focus groups expressed a desire to be asked both how they are feeling and how they are doing. As Chantelle demonstrated, some children might experience strong emotions (upset and annoyed) but feel they are coping well (9 out of 10) because there are protective factors (good friendships) and support (one-to-one sessions with a support worker) in place.

**Table 3.** Four examples of children’s responses to the Child Impact Assessment.

Question	Case Study 1: “My Dad Was Arrested.”  Maya, 12 Years Old	Case Study 2: “My Mum Is Going to Court.”  Hamza, 11 Years Old	Case Study 3: “My Dad Is in Prison.”  Chantelle, 15 Years Old	Case Study 4: “My Dad Is Being Released from Prison.”  Evan, 8 Years Old
<b>How do you feel?</b>	Scared, sad. It was horrible watching him being taken away. And all those [police] cars and vans in our street. It felt like the whole street was watching our house.	Worried—when will it be? What if the judge sends her to prison? Who will look after us?	Upset and really annoyed with him. I hope he learns his lesson now.	A bit happy and a bit scared.
<b>What questions do you have?</b>	Did they hurt him? Why did they have to shout like that? Why were there so many police cars for just one person?	Can I go too? Will they [sentencers] know about us [him and his siblings]?  My mum is a good person.	Is someone helping him, so he doesn’t do the same thing again? He’s always saying he’s changing but he doesn’t ever do it. Why is there nothing to do in the visits? It’s all stuff for younger kids. Why can’t I call him when I want? What’s dad’s cell like?	Is it going to be all shouty like it was before? It’s calm when he’s away and I like that, but I miss him too. What’s the tag going to be like? Will he be able to come and watch my [football] matches?
<b>How are you doing? (You may find it helpful to answer this on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you are coping really well, and 1 means you are finding things really difficult)</b>	3 or 4. I don’t like sleeping in my own room anymore because that’s where I was when they [the police] came.	2—I am sad and worried most of the time.	9—I’m ok. I’ve got friends I can speak to and this [support sessions]. I feel like I’ve had my marbles put back in the right order.	6
<b>Is there anyone who could help you right now? What could they do?</b>	Miss [teacher at school]. She’s really kind, and I think she’ll be ok with it. She does the therapy dog so that might help.	My social worker. She is kind. She could tell them [sentencers] that my mum has been trying really hard and she just made a mistake.	Maybe my gran—I don’t want to visit dad as much and she takes us on visits.	Miss [teacher] can help me with my feelings. I like talking to her.
<b>Is there anything you would like mum/dad [the parent in contact with the justice system] to know right now?</b>	I miss him and I’m also really annoyed with him.	I love her.	That he needs to change if he wants to be in my life when he gets out. And sometimes when he calls, I’ve just got nothing to say to him because nothing has happened. He calls a lot, and it’s too much sometimes.	I miss him and I’m a little bit scared about him coming home as well.
<b>Is there anything you would like mum or the person looking after you, to know?</b>	My mum is doing amazing even though I know she’s really worried. I think she needs help to talk about it.		I don’t like going to the prison at the weekend, I want to see my friends instead. It’d be better for me to see him for a longer time but not as often.	I want to tell her that I’m a bit worried about dad coming home in case it goes all shouty again.
<b>Is there anything else you would like to talk about? (This can be anything on your mind and might not be to do with dad)</b>	One of my friends has stopped talking to me.	Some people at school have been saying things about my mum.		I want dad to come to my [football] matches but I don’t want him getting all shouty like he did before he went away.

Table 3. Cont.

Question	Case Study 1: "My Dad Was Arrested."	Case Study 2: "My Mum Is Going to Court."	Case Study 3: "My Dad Is in Prison."	Case Study 4: "My Dad Is Being Released from Prison."
	Maya, 12 Years Old	Hamza, 11 Years Old	Chantelle, 15 Years Old	Evan, 8 Years Old
<b>Actions: what needs to be done, who will do this and by when?</b>	I will speak (with Mum there too) to Miss [teacher at school] about spending time with the therapy dog.	I will speak to Miss [teacher at school] about people saying unkind things about my mum.  [Support worker] will speak to [social worker] about what she can say at court about us.	I will talk with gran about not going on a visit every Saturday.  Tell dad that I want to see friends some Saturdays and I don't want to talk on the phone every day because there's not always something to say. I will ask gran if we can talk about this with dad when we next visit.  [Support worker] will help me ask someone in the prison if I can see photos of dad's cell.	I will tell mum how I am feeling about dad coming home.  Mum will see if she can speak to dad's probation officer to find out about the tag.  Mum and I will tell Miss [teacher] that dad is coming home soon.

For children talking about their parent appearing in court (as in Hamza's case), there is an additional question: Is there anything you would like the people at court to know about you and your family? It is made clear to children that the purpose of Child Impact Assessments is not to influence sentencing, but rather to ensure that sentencers have a fuller picture of family circumstances when making crucial decisions.

In phase one, practitioners who work with children (teachers, social workers, support workers from voluntary sector organisations) said they were cautious about asking children what they wanted to happen in case this raised expectations and could not be actioned (Beresford 2022). Practitioners were often focused on formal interventions that have long waiting lists or are expensive. The actions shown here are representative of the kinds of actions children want: seeing a picture of a parent's cell (Chantelle); having a conversation with the remaining parent/caregiver (Evan, Chantelle); accessing in-school support (Maya, Hamza); communicating information to school (Hamza, Evan); requesting information from the prison or other criminal justice body (Evan); having a conversation with the imprisoned parent (Chantelle); or communication with another agency or organisation (Hamza).

Being able to identify specific actions can help children feel empowered and gives them agency to co-create solutions (Beresford 2022). This is an important element of the Child Impact Assessment, given that families impacted by the justice system often feel that decisions are made *about* them and things are done *to* them (Beresford 2022). Feedback from children during phase one was that they wanted to be able to write actions in their own words so that it was clear who would do what and by when. This helped them feel included meaningfully, rather than in a tokenistic way (Beresford 2022).

The opportunity to revisit and review decisions is an important element of the Child Impact Assessment (Beresford 2022). In phase one, some children reported that decisions were made about them in snap-shot moments of time and that sometimes these decisions were difficult to reverse. In Chantelle's case, for example, her decision not to visit her father as often might be something that she would like to revisit over time. The key is that the actions are viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a fixed plan (Beresford 2022).

A significant element of phase two of the project was supporting local initiatives to implement the use of Child Impact Assessments (Beresford 2025b). This included a UNCRF-funded project between Perth and Kinross local authority and Families Outside, the only national charity working in Scotland that supports families that are affected by imprisonment. This project took a whole systems approach and recognised the responsibility that all justice-focused agencies (police, sentencers, prison staff, and criminal justice social workers (probation in England and Wales)) have in informing families about support, as well as the crucial role that child-facing sectors (education, health, social work, and third sector organisations) have in providing support to children (Lindsay 2025). Two training sessions were developed within the project: Champion Training, which focused on the impact of parental imprisonment on children, and Toolkit Training, which looked in depth at how Child Impact Assessments can be used in various contexts to support children. Over the course of the project, 454 members of staff from justice-focused and child-facing agencies received training in multi-agency groups (Lindsay 2025).

The project included the development of clear roles and responsibilities for different organisations relating to the promotion and use of Child Impact Assessments. In addition, social media resources were developed to promote Child Impact Assessments to children and their families, as well as practitioners from justice-focused and child-facing agencies. The project was informed throughout by a steering group of children and young people with a parent in prison. This group informed project meetings, contributed to a conference to promote the project within the local authority, and developed child-friendly publicity materials about Child Impact Assessments that were distributed to schools throughout

Perth and Kinross. The group has become an established peer support group and has continued beyond the timescale of the project (Lindsay 2025).

### 3.1. The Difference Child Impact Assessments Make

Over the course of phase two of the project, at least 130 children from all four UK nations used a Child Impact Assessment to identify their support needs at different stages of their parent's journey through the justice system. Feedback from children and young people gathered during phase two confirmed that the Child Impact Assessment is an important and helpful resource (Beresford 2025b):

*"This is so helpful. There's a lot of information in an easy to digest, easy to understand way and knowing that something can come from this is really helpful."*

*"This has made things better for me. I was able to say how I felt and what I needed."*

*"I liked speaking to my teacher about dad."*

*"I drew a picture to show that I was sad about my mum being away."*

*"This is a great tool, and it has definitely helped me! It is so important to educate people on this, as the feelings of the family are too often looked past."*

This was verified by practitioners who used the resources when supporting children (Beresford 2025b):

*"The Child Impact Assessment is really helpful in making recommendations to the court."*  
(Social Worker)

*"It [Child Impact Assessment] is an invaluable resource."* (Teacher)

*"As a Family Worker, supporting and advocating for children impacted by parental imprisonment, I have worked with and supported several children to access the Child Impact Assessment to explore their individual feelings, needs and areas of support needed to help them make sense of and navigate their experiences and trauma."* (Family Worker)

*"This toolkit provides reassurance to my staff that there is a resource that will help them support children more confidently and help with the direction of the support sessions"*  
(Head of Family Support)

*"This was a really helpful tool for me in supporting a 14-year-old boy whose mother is in prison. It is an area I knew very little about, and I found the accompanying notes really useful in giving me an understanding of how he might be feeling."* (Child and Adolescent Mental Health practitioner)

*"It is imperative that children have their voices heard and their views respected. The Child Impact Assessment allows this important task to be carried out in a sensitive and timely manner."* (Children and Young People Coordinator)

It was clear from phase two that Child Impact Assessments presented information about the feelings and needs of children and young people that would not otherwise have been heard. This, in turn, informed and improved the support practitioners were able to provide (Beresford 2025b).

### 3.2. The Importance of Training

Training for all practitioners (those who may use the Child Impact Assessment directly and those who are more likely to signpost families to support) is key (Beresford 2022). The delivery of training was an integral element of phase two and continues to be an important ongoing element of this programme of work. Within phase two, awareness raising sessions about the Child Impact Assessment framework was delivered to over 350 practitioners

from a wide range of sectors, including social work, education, police, judiciary, health, prison and probation staff, and specialist voluntary sector organisations (Beresford 2025b). In addition, bespoke training on how to use the Child Impact Assessment framework with children was delivered to over 60 practitioners from specialist organisations that support families affected by imprisonment (Beresford 2025b). Most training sessions were co-delivered with children and young people with experience of parental imprisonment, which had a significant impact on participants:

*“[This training] was the most informative and interesting session [my staff] have ever had. It was incredibly thought provoking and has given us all a lot to consider.”* (Beresford 2025b)

Children and young people received support before and after their participation and were all engaged with organisations that could offer ongoing support. The children and young people who contributed to the phase one consultation consistently said that they wanted Child Impact Assessments to lead to action—actions that will improve their situation as well as action to create systemic change. To this end, all Child Impact Assessment training includes a focus on the calls to action for a range of sectors and stakeholders in the “*This is me*” toolkit of resources (Beresford 2022).

## 4. Implications and Future Directions

### 4.1. Creating Systemic Change

In progress at the time of writing, phase three of the Child Impact Assessment project is considering what systemic change is needed to ensure children are offered the right support at the earliest opportunity at all stages of a parent’s journey through the justice system and how Child Impact Assessments can support policy and practice. A key element of phase three has been recognising the need for a fundamental shift from adult-focused to child-led approaches (Beresford 2025a). In practice, this means bringing policy leads and children and young people with lived experience together to explore policy considerations and developments, as demonstrated in PRT’s *Right here, right now!* event. This included children, young people, and young adults with experience of a close family member in prison alongside policymakers and practitioners from different sectors, including education, health, social work, prison, police, probation, housing, local community, academia, and voluntary sector organisations. Its purpose was to explore why a children’s rights approach to support for children with a parent in prison is needed, how that can be achieved collaboratively, and the role that Child Impact Assessments can play in this (Beresford 2025a). This collaboration is something children and young people have asked for:

*“I invite anyone who might come across a child who is impacted by the criminal justice system to talk to us! Ask us what we want and need. We want to be included in decisions that affect us. We can no longer be ignored.”* (Young person whose father was in prison)

This approach, which aligns with the UNCRC, makes a significant impact on decision-makers:

*“It was an honour to hear children and young people, to hear them speak, to see them have a seat on every panel, each table.”*

*“Collaboration is essential—having all the voices around the table, including those with lived experience, is critical in developing informed, realistic and child-centred policy and practice.”* (Delegates at PRT’s *Right here, right now!* event)

### 4.2. Adaptations of Resources

Very little research looks specifically at the impact on children and young people of having a brother or sister in the justice system, and very few resources exist for children in

this situation (Deacon 2023). In response to feedback from practitioners who support children and young people with a family member in prison, phase two of the project included adaptations to the Child Impact Assessment and the accompanying notes for practitioners for use with children with a brother in contact with the justice system (Beresford 2024b). The adapted resources have been welcomed by young people and those supporting them:

*“Just having something that mentions ‘brother’, rather than ‘mum’ or ‘dad’, that’s amazing—it’s like it was written for me.”* (Young person with a brother in prison)

Following the publication of the resources for children with a brother in contact with the justice system, practitioners working with children welcomed the inclusion of the section, *About me and my brother*, which, recognising that sibling relationships vary enormously, aims to help practitioners supporting children understand the relationship between the child and their brother. A workshop in phase three with practitioners who support children and young people impacted by parental imprisonment confirmed that this would be a welcome addition to the original Child Impact Assessment resources, and this adaptation was made (Beresford 2025c). It is hoped that the resources will be adapted in a future phase of the project for children with a sister in contact with the justice system as well as wider family members such as grandparents.

#### 4.3. Areas for Development

A key strength of the Child Impact Assessment project is that all the resources are free to use and available on the Prison Reform Trust’s website. This means, however, that the precise number of children who have used a Child Impact Assessment is not known. Furthermore, there has not yet been a formal evaluation of the difference Child Impact Assessments make to children; feedback from children, parents, practitioners, and policy leads thus far, while positive, remains ad hoc. How to gather data effectively and robustly evaluate the impact of Child Impact Assessments on children will be considered within phase four of the project.

Some children and young people using the Child Impact Assessment have said that they do not like the term ‘assessment’ and that this can be a barrier to accessing the resources. Furthermore, there is some confusion in Scotland between Child Impact Assessments to support children with a close family member in contact with the justice system and the Scottish Government’s Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments, which were made via a legal requirement in 2024 to ensure children’s rights are taken into account in all legislation, policies, and strategic decisions, following the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act (The Scottish Government 2024). Phase four of the project will include considerations around alternative names for the Child Impact Assessment.

#### 4.4. Support for Children During the First 1001 Days

Phase four will also look at adapting the Child Impact Assessment resources to consider the needs of children during the first 1001 days, from conception to a child’s second birthday. This will also include the needs of their mothers, given the interplay of needs and dependencies. As recent guidance on supporting parents through adversity shows, effective programmes in this critical period are underpinned by the science of early child development and usually involve both parents and children together (Foundations 2025).

Sentencing guidance now makes explicit reference to the needs of women who are pregnant and postnatal and those who have very young dependent children. These situations are included in a separate mitigating factor; it is therefore key that all practitioners involved in decision-making about pregnant and postnatal women and those with very young children have a means to collate relevant information on women’s, and their chil-

dren's, needs and the impacts of decision-making, including sentencing, probation contact, and license conditions (Sentencing Council 2024, 2025).

The charity Birth Companions has led work to improve the care and support of pregnant women and mothers who experience contact with the criminal justice system in the first 1001 days to ensure their children have the best possible start in life. The Prison Reform Trust will work with the charity's policy and research arm, The Birth Companions Institute, and members of its Lived Experience Team, to shape an extension of the Child Impact Assessment designed to understand the specific needs, concerns, and opportunities for this group of women and children. This is a key development, as the Child Impact Assessment in its current form is primarily based on conversations with children and is therefore limited in its application to pre-verbal children, although there are examples of Child Impact Assessments being used successfully with younger children, (Beresford 2024a). Together Scotland's 2025 report, exploring how babies communicate their rights and the barriers they face in being heard, will underpin this work (Together 2025).

## 5. Conclusions

The work to date on the use of Child Impact Assessments to support children with a close family member in the justice system emphasises the need for a whole system, multi-agency approach that is underpinned by the UNCRC and meaningfully includes children and young people as agents of change (Beresford 2025a). Each phase of the project has demonstrated that effective leadership is key to bringing stakeholders together with children and young people with lived experience to find creative, collective solutions (Beresford 2025b). The nature of the work on Child Impact Assessments is fluid and responsive, based always on the vision, experience, and expertise of children and young people themselves and those working to support them (Beresford 2025b).

Phase four of the project (beginning in January 2026) aims to create a robust evidence-base which can guide further policy reform. In England and Wales, a new legislative framework is being shaped by the 2025 Sentencing Bill (UK Parliament 2025), which will implement recommendations from the Independent Sentencing Review to reduce the prison population and improve offender management (Gauke 2025); the Leveson Review, which aims to streamline Crown Court processes (Leveson 2025); and the Women's Justice Board, which was established to reduce the number of women in prison and address the distinct needs of women in the justice system (Ministry of Justice n.d.). It is hoped that the learning from the Child Impact Assessment project will inform these key considerations.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all stakeholders involved in the project.

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