

# The influence of family on prisoners during parole – CEO blog

The Parole Board is all too aware of the distress felt by the families of prisoners going through a parole review. When a person is sent to prison, it is not just the prisoner who serves the sentence – their families serve it alongside them, often describing it as “the hidden sentence”.

For the families of people serving indeterminate life or IPP sentences, the challenges and stresses can be severe. Any such prisoner cannot be released unless the Parole Board deems it no longer necessary for the protection of the public that they remain confined.

Whilst our sole focus is risk. I am aware that, a parole review can be an anxious period for families as they await the decision which will determine their loved one’s freedom and future. This is compounded by a common misconceptions and lack of understanding of how parole works among many people in society.

It is therefore my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Parole Board to do everything in my power to increase the understanding of how we work and the transparency of our processes and decision making for the general public, victims, prisoners and their families.

We have just announced the publication of a new information leaflet, entitled Information for family and friends of prisoners having a parole review. I hope this booklet will provide a useful go-to document for anyone wishing to support someone in prison going through parole.

The in-depth, but easy to understand, booklet takes families and friends through the entire parole process, who is involved, what happens and how it works. It also gives guidance on how to find a solicitor, how a loved one might attend a parole oral hearing and also provides sign-posts to information and services that may offer other support and advice, for example helplines, information about licences and further reading about the parole process.

There is also a section for family members of friends who may want to write something to the Parole Board in support of the prisoner and how best to do this. The booklet explains licence conditions, what they mean, how they will affect a newly released prisoner and how to support them in abiding by the conditions.

The uncertainty of the situation can make it difficult to manage the feelings of hopelessness that can sometimes arise. We explain in the leaflet that IPP prisoners can ask the Parole Board to consider terminating the licence completely after ten years from when they were first released from prison. Many prisoners may not be aware of this avenue and so we provide clear advice in the booklet on how to make such an application.

I am grateful to Dr Anna Kotova for bringing the creative work of Dr Pen Mendonça to the Board's attention. Pen's eye catching and creative graphics have provided visually striking artwork for the booklet and some insightful thoughts that illustrate the very real struggles families of people in prison face. I would like to thank Lucy Gampell, a Parole Board member for over ten years, whose expertise and experience was vital in the creation of the leaflet.

The research drew on two areas: the IPP sentence and the fact that over 2000 prisoners are still serving the sentence, as well as the role of families in rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders.