



## Opening Hours

Monday to Friday  
9.00am - 8.00pm

Saturday and Sunday  
10.00am - 3.00pm

## Visiting a Prison

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*Prison Rules require prisons to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties. Visits are seen as crucial to sustaining relationships with close relatives, partners and friends, where appropriate, and help prisoners maintain links with the community.*

### How many visits is a prisoner allowed?

Visit entitlement can vary from prison to prison and also depends on whether a prisoner is being held on remand or has been convicted. Convicted prisoners are generally allowed 3-4 visits a month but this can increase as the prisoner progresses through the system. Remanded prisoners are allowed a minimum of 90 minutes visiting per week up to a maximum of seven visits per week.

### Do I need a visiting order?

When visiting a convicted prisoner most establishments will require the visitor to be in possession of a visiting order, however, some prisons operate different procedures. For example it may be down to the prisoner to book there visits internally. It is best to always check with the establishment if you are unsure.

Most prisoners will also be entitled to a 'reception visit' at the beginning of their sentence where it is commonplace for a visiting order not to be required. Visitors should call the booking line requesting a 'reception visit'.

### When can I book my first visit?

A prisoner will not be processed and appear on the prison system until the first working day following a court appearance. This is the earliest that someone will be able to telephone to book a visit. All visits need to be booked 24-48 hours in advance (depending on the prison) so there is usually a day or two delay before you can make your first visit. Visits to Category A prisoners may be further delayed due to security clearance by the police.

### How do I book a visit?

The Justice website will tell you what methods to book a visit are in operation at the prison you wish to visit.

[www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)

Most prisons allow bookings to be made by telephone and an increasing number now allow bookings to be made by email. Some prisons, however, only allow bookings to be made by the prisoner. The prisoner books the visit for their visitors and it is the prisoner's responsibility to notify their visitors of the date and time of the booking.

When booking a visit via telephone or email you will need to provide details of all the people listed on the visiting order. Only the people named on the visiting order will be allowed to visit. The details required will include names, addresses and dates of birth. People named on the visiting order can choose not to attend but no one can attend in their place. Anyone attending who is not listed on the visiting order will be refused entry to the prison.

A maximum of three adults will be allowed to visit at any one time. The amount of children allowed can vary from establishment to establishment but a child is classed as an adult for seating purposes at 10-12 years old (depending on local policy).

The booking clerk will also require details of the prisoner, including his name and prison number. The prisoner's date of birth can be used when booking the first visit if this has not been provided by the prisoner at the point of booking.

### **What happens when I first arrive at the prison?**

Facilities at prisons will vary but generally on arrival visitors will normally be expected to go to the prison's visitor centre. Where this facility is available it will generally be a small building situated outside of the prison grounds. On arrival at the visitor centre, (or prison reception where this facility is not available) visitors should have their visiting order checked by staff. Visitors who do not have a visiting order, or who forget their visiting order, will not be allowed entry to the prison regardless of circumstance or distance travelled.

It is important to arrive at the prison at least half an hour prior to the visit time. This allows visitors time to check in with staff, hand any property in, use the facilities (toilets, baby changing, refreshments) and put personal belongings into a locker. No personal belongings can be taken into the visits hall by visitors with the exception of a small amount of money and essential baby items. Visitors should take a pound coin with them on the visit to make use of the locker facility as visitor centre staff are unable to provide change for this purpose. Visitors may be required to show their identification to visitor centre staff, although in a lot of establishments it is prison staff that must see the identification.

### **What identification do I need?**

It is a Home Office requirement that all visitors to prisons, including professionals, must have identification and visitors who fail to provide this will be refused entry to the prison.

Some prisons now operate a biometrics system to help identify visitors to the prison. New visitors to each establishment will be required to have

their photograph and fingerprints taken which will then be entered onto the prison computer system. From then on, visitors' finger prints will be scanned as part of the identification process. Finger prints taken in this way are not used for any other purpose. In addition, every visitor, including babies and children, must also provide another form of approved identification.

This includes one of the following:

- Passport (including foreign passports. Some establishments will also accept time expired passports where the photograph is still recognisable)
- Photographic driving licence
- Employer or student ID (but only if it clearly shows the name of the visitor and if the employer or the education establishment is known to exist)
- Inland Revenue registration card
- Senior citizens public transport pass

If the visitor does not have any of the documents on the list above, then they may be allowed entry with two of the following:

- A birth or marriage certificate
- A benefits card
- A rail or bus pass with photograph
- A cheque book with credit or debit card
- A young persons proof of age card
- A trade union or National Union of Students (NUS) Card
- A rent book or rent card and statement
- A tenancy agreement



Acceptable forms of identification (two to be provided) for children aged between 10 years and 17 years are as follows:

- A family passport
- A birth certificate
- Medical card
- Travel card with photograph
- A student photographic ID card

A birth certificate will suffice for children under 10 years old. Replacement or copy birth certificates can be obtained from the registry office in the town of birth for a small fee.

### **Will I be searched?**

From the visitor centre, visitors will make their way to the main prison. Before arriving at the visits hall all visitors will be searched, including babies, children and disabled visitors. Searches will include a pat down/rub down search. Female visitors will only be searched by a female officer but males can be searched by either sex. Male visitors who object to being searched by a female officer on religious or cultural grounds can ask to be searched by a male officer. The search process will also involve metal detectors (similar to those seen at the airport) and sometimes the use of a passive drug detection dog. The dogs used in the detection of drugs at prisons are trained to detect the smell of drugs on a person. They are kept on a lead at all times and will not bark at visitors. If the dog detects the scent of illegal substances it is trained to sit quietly next to the visitor. Visitors who are 'sat on' by the dog may be subject to further searches. If no drugs are found then the visitor may be offered a closed visit. If drugs are found the police will be called and the visitor will be arrested. Anyone caught trying to smuggle drugs into a prison will face a ban from the prison and potentially a lengthy prison sentence themselves.

### **What happens in the visits hall?**

Once visitors have been searched they will make their way to the visits hall. In some prisons the prisoner will already be seated waiting for his visitors. In other prisons the visitors will be seated first. Seating is dictated by prison staff and security. If there is a security concern regarding a particular prisoner or visitor then they

will be seated where they can be best observed. Prisons will generally only allow minimal physical contact at the start and end of each visit, long or passionate embraces or kisses are not permitted and may result in a visit being terminated. Young children should be permitted a greater level of contact with their parent or close family member during the course of the visit, subject to any concerns about risk to the child. Once seated the prisoner is not allowed to leave their seat and move around the visits hall, although visitors can go to the tea bar, toilet or play area. If a visitor needs the toilet, they will be accompanied by an officer and searched before and after they go. If a prisoner needs the toilet then many prisons will terminate the visit.

### **What facilities are there in the visits hall?**

During the visit, where facilities allow, visitors are able to purchase hot and cold drinks and snacks for themselves and their prisoner. The prisoner can only eat these items during the course of visit. Facilities can vary from vending machines to fully staffed canteens or tea bars and products can also vary depending on the security category of the prison. Many prisons provide play facilities for children under twelve years old, but like everything in the prison system this can vary. Some prisons simply provide a few toys but some have fully staffed and equipped play areas.

### **Special visits**

A lot of prisons are beginning to recognise the value of good quality family time. This benefits the prisoner as well as the family and can contribute to good order and discipline on the wing. The types of special visits that may be offered include:

- Family visits
- Lifer's days
- Family learning visits



All of these visits give prisoners the chance to spend some quality time with their loved ones in a more relaxed environment and outside the constraints of a normal visit. These visits usually give families the chance to participate in activities and there is often the opportunity to share a meal together.

All the above visits are dependent on a prisoner submitting an application and being subject to the appropriate security clearances.

