

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Information for Families during the Coronavirus Pandemic



Department of
Justice
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND
PRISON  **SERVICE**

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Introduction

I am sure you will agree we are living in very challenging times.

Like other front-line services, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is having to make very difficult decisions every day. We are working day and night to keep your loved ones safe and I want to assure you that the health and wellbeing of our staff and those in our care is our top priority.

We have put robust plans in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 getting into our prisons and to manage an outbreak should that happen. The measures we have taken and the plans we have made follow carefully the guidelines issued by the Public Health Agency. It is important that we remain vigilant and act decisively as we deal with the challenges ahead.

On behalf of the Prison Service, I want to thank you for your patience and understanding. While I know that some of our decisions have had a significant impact on the families of those in our care, I am committed to working with our partners in the voluntary and community sector to support both you and your loved one in prison in the best way I can.

I hope you will find the information in this booklet helpful.

Ronnie Armour

Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service

May 2020



Support for individuals in our care

Social distancing

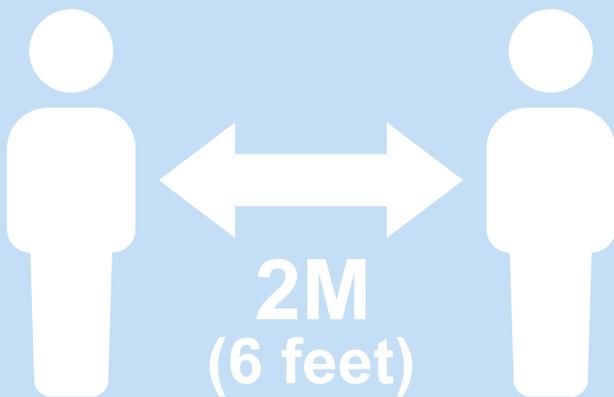
Within the general prison population

We know that social distancing and self-isolation may harm mental health. This of course also applies to those in our care. Our staff know how to support people at risk and provide a trauma informed service.

We are working with education, health and psychology colleagues to build on this and develop more ways to address anxiety and build the resilience of those in our care.

To keep people safe, as in the community, we have social distancing within our prisons. This includes, for example, keeping 2 metres distance between people as they queue for their meals, or exercising outside whilst maintaining social distance.

Movement is also limited throughout all the prison establishments with the majority of interaction and activities happening within each residential landing.



New committals - those coming into custody

Currently to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all those in our care, in line with public health advice, individuals who come into custody are being isolated for a period of 14 days.

This is because it can take 14 days for symptoms of the virus to appear. If they are symptom-free after 14 days, they enter the prison population.

If they have symptoms, they will be supported and cared for in isolation until it is safe for them to be introduced into the population.

While isolated, those in our care have access to a phone to maintain contact with family and friends.

We know that being isolated for two weeks can be challenging. However, in relation to the coronavirus, those in our care are not being asked to do anything more than the general public are currently being asked to do.



Hand washing

We have all heard about how important it is to wash our hands. This also applies to staff and those in our care.

So we have made sure additional hand washing facilities and special hand washing pods are in place for everyone to wash their hands regularly.

We have plenty of soap and cleaning supplies in place and on order.



Supporting those at most risk of self-harm

We recognise that some individuals may require additional help and support while in our care.

On arrival each new committal is assessed to see if they may be 'at risk'.

When needed, a referral will be made to 'Supporting People at Risk' – Evolution (SPAR – EVO). This is delivered with the Mental Health & Primary Health teams (South Eastern Health Trust).

As movement is limited throughout all the prison establishments, Mental Health teams have started working on residential landings.



Changes to practice and the daily routine

We are trying to keep a positive routine and focus for those in our care, in line with good practice. Much remains the same, for example your loved one's behaviour still dictates whether they are on an enhanced, standard or basic regime. However, certain things have had to change to keep everyone safe, such as suspending visits in each of the three prison establishments, video and audio conferencing being used instead of face to face communication (e.g. legal visits, parole etc). However strengthening relations with family and friends remains vital - important information on how to keep in contact with your loved ones is provided under [Contact with family/friends](#).

Withdrawal of Programmes

We know that programmes, for example rehabilitation, sports and education, really help with mental and physical health. However, the health of staff and those in our care in terms of the coronavirus has now to be considered. To reduce the risk of spreading the virus we have to limit the number of people coming into, and moving around, the prison.

So we have withdrawn programmes at this time. This is in line with health advice. To support ongoing study Further Education colleges have provided written materials to students and we are now looking to develop virtual learning building on the success of virtual visits.

We will keep this decision under review and in line with updated Public Health Agency advice.

Exercise

Exercise is still taking place outside whilst people adhere to social distancing. This type of exercise would only stop on medical grounds and only for the length of time needed. Exercise on landings is also available through the help of gym staff and/or, where there is the facility, the gym on landings is used on a rota basis to ensure social distancing.

Television

At this time, we have also suspended TV rental charges. A TV is currently available to everyone, irrespective of their regime.



In house library service and activity packs

The Library is currently closed, however, the librarians are undertaking a mobile in-house service.

We are also mindful that we are all looking for interesting things to do as we spend more time indoors. So in-cell activity packs are available to those in our care, these focus on health and well-being, including exercise.

Those in our care attending classes have also been provided with additional material so they can continue to be creative through art and creative writing.

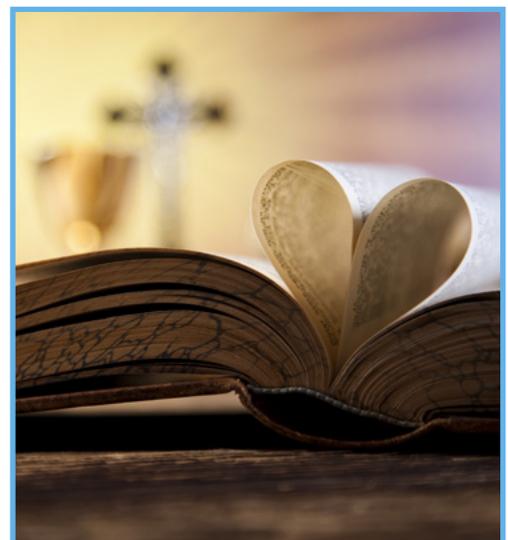
Work and wages

Essential workers such as kitchen staff or wing orderlies will continue with their jobs. They will receive the most up to date information and guidance on how to keep safe and well while working. This may require changes in practice, for example enhanced hygiene. Any changes to working practice will be in line with public health advice.

Non-essential work has been suspended to keep people safe. Individuals will not lose their wages due to this work being suspended.

Chaplaincy

We know in times of concern and anxiety people use a range of things to cope, including religion, spirituality etc. This may no longer happen in the usual way as individuals cannot gather for worship. For example this may involve an inter-faith prayer service over the tannoy or individuals being provided with advice on how to worship in private. Chaplaincy is also available remotely on request.



Suspension of day release

At the moment it is not possible to facilitate day release, leading up to release. So all day releases have been suspended. This will reduce the possible risk of infection and spread of coronavirus. This decision will be kept under review.

Temporary early release

On 30 March, the Minister of Justice agreed to the temporary early release of some individuals within our care up to three months before their actual release date. This is needed to support the health and wellbeing of our staff and those in our care and is subject to continuous review. The Minister indicated at the time, if necessary, this scheme may be extended.

Individuals eligible for release are subject to a number of conditions, including:

- a curfew – being at home between set times;
- following Public Health Agency advice;
- having no contact with their victim;
- an alcohol ban; and
- having no contact with the media.

Under the law we may recall them back to prison at any time, whether the release conditions are broken or not.

Public safety is the main concern, so there are limits around who can be released early.

Certain sentence types, offences and prisoners will **not** be considered. Naturally all appropriate risk assessments will be conducted.

Finally, we want to make sure those in our care have enough support in the community and do not present a danger to themselves or others.

So an individual will only be released early if:

- (i) they have somewhere to live;
- (ii) they are not considered or being supported under 'Supporting People at Risk' (SPAR) Evolution programme at the time of temporary release.

Further information at:

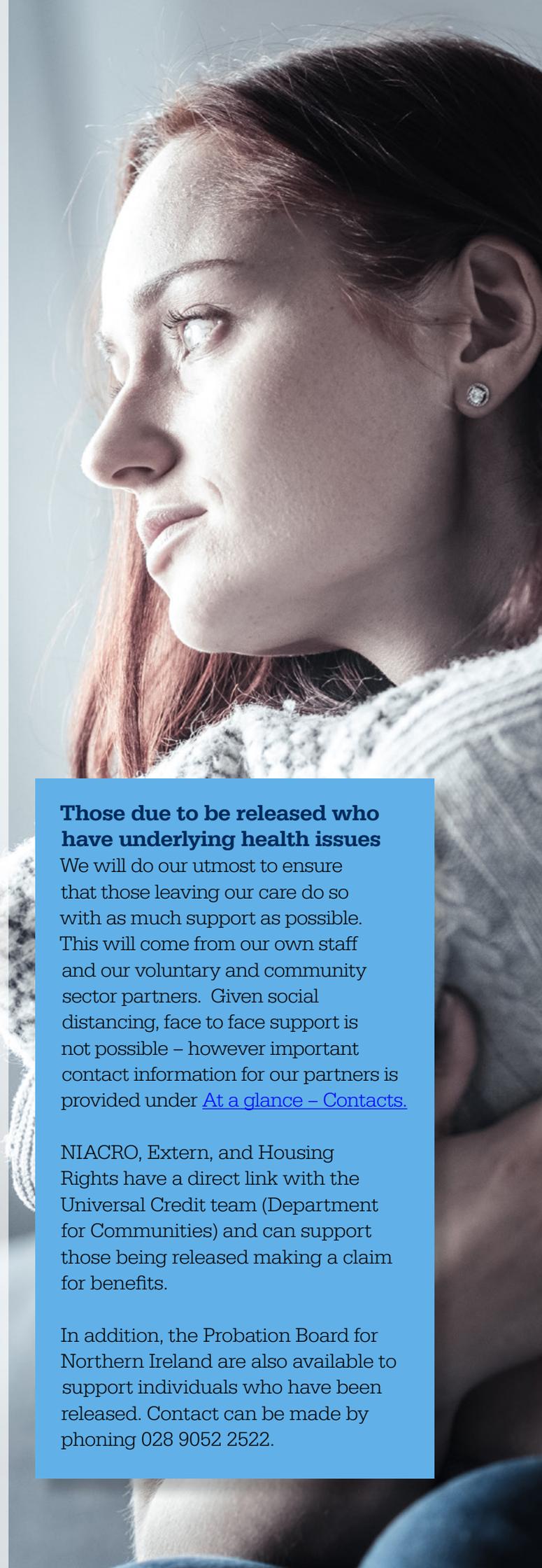
<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/covid-19-temporary-release-prisoners-scheme>

Those due to be released who have underlying health issues

We will do our utmost to ensure that those leaving our care do so with as much support as possible. This will come from our own staff and our voluntary and community sector partners. Given social distancing, face to face support is not possible – however important contact information for our partners is provided under [At a glance – Contacts](#).

NIACRO, Extern, and Housing Rights have a direct link with the Universal Credit team (Department for Communities) and can support those being released making a claim for benefits.

In addition, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland are also available to support individuals who have been released. Contact can be made by phoning 028 9052 2522.





Families

Contact with family/friends

We have suspended visits to reduce the risk of infection or spread of the virus. However, keeping in contact is even more important now.

Virtual visits (online)

Video call facilities have been introduced into the three prison establishments.

Those in our care can benefit from one virtual visit a week. They will be given a booking reference, which they will pass to you before you book the visit by telephoning the Visits Booking Office (contact information below). You will need to provide the reference and an email address at the time of the booking, so you can receive instructions for connection to the virtual visit. If a request is made for a visit by your friend/relative in Magilligan, the Visits Booking office will make contact with you to confirm arrangements for the visit.

Visits will last 20 minutes and can be conducted through the use of a personal computer, tablet or smart phone. Virtual visits will be allocated according to availability, this means that a number of video-conferencing technologies will be used, both ZOOM and SKYPE, which are free to download. Separate guidance has been produced on how to download both technologies. See <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/guide-arranging-virtual-visits-and-privacy-notice>.

The booking office will notify you of which technology will be used for your visit.

It is likely you will use the same video-conferencing technology for each subsequent visit, but this cannot always be guaranteed.

If the online visit is to be conducted via ZOOM, the booking office will provide you with a meeting ID and password, which you will need to enter to initiate the virtual visit. If the online visit is to be conducted via SKYPE, you will need to have your computer or device switched on, as the staff in the prison establishment will initiate the call and you will need to accept it.

You can contact the Visits Booking Office by contacting 0300 200 7866 or alternatively:

Maghaberry Prison (0044) 028 9261 4029

Hydebank Wood College (0044) 028 9049 4333

Additional details on how to book an online visit can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/visiting-someone-prison

Should you encounter persistent technical problems during your virtual visit that could not be resolved by staff, please contact the relevant booking office (details above).



Phone calls

To support those in our care keeping in contact with family and friends, we have:

- Increased phone credit limits by £5; and
- Given those in our care £5 extra phone credit per week.

E-mail

You can use the 'Email a Prisoner' service to contact those in Maghaberry and Magilligan prison establishments. You need to register at www.emailaprisoner.com. If you send an e-mail through the service it will be printed out and delivered by prison staff. Each email costs 40p and you need to buy credit on the website to use the service.

Letters

Mail is still being handled in the same way. Your loved ones are still receiving their mail. This includes drawings and things from their children and grandchildren. This is such important contact and we would encourage that you keep this up. There are no restrictions placed on letters going out to family and friends, indeed we have also increased the letters prisoners can send (free of charge) to 5 per week.

Sending funds

Prisoner's account can now be increased through telephone debit card payments. Postal Orders can also be sent.

To use this service, you must contact the telephone numbers below and have details of the person's name, prison number as well as the debit card you want the funds to be taken from.

Maghaberry Prison

(0044) 028 9261 4026
(Mon-Fri 9.00am to 2.00pm,
Sat-Sun 9.00am to 4.00pm)

Magilligan Prison

(0044) 0300 200 7866
(Mon-Sun 8.00am to 5.00pm)

Hydebank Wood College

(0044) 0300 200 7866
(Mon-Fri 9.00am to 3.30pm)

The maximum balance in an individual account will continue to be £500. Only one debit card payment will be accepted per prisoner, per calendar week. The booking office will register details of the individual transferring the funds to the person in custody.

Support available for families

Families can avail of support from a number of sources.

Family Support Officers within each establishment are available to provide support and guidance to families and friends. They can be contacted on the following numbers:

Maghaberry	(0044) 028 9261 6067
Magilligan	(0044) 028 7776 3311
Hydebank Wood College	(0044) 028 9049 4331

Our voluntary and community sector partners are continuing to provide support to families at this worrying time.

Details can be found below with further contact details at [At a glance – Contacts](#):

NIACRO

NIACRO's Family Links team offer practical and emotional support to help families and children cope with the imprisonment of a loved one. Your relative in prison can pass your contact details onto NIACRO who will make contact with you within 24 hours. Or, if you wish, you can phone NIACRO directly to find out about how the team can help you, for example, with benefits and welfare advice, budgeting and emotional support. The team also offer tailored one to one support for children/siblings. Children and young people can also receive help with making cards or writing letters to be sent to the prison. All support is currently being offered by telephone/video calls. Family Links is also available to provide support to families of those being released under the Temporary Early Release Scheme.

<https://www.niacro.co.uk/>

Barnardo's

Barnardo's are continuing to provide support for children and families. Barnardo's are also available to provide support to families of those being released under the Temporary Early Release Scheme.

In addition, if your relative in custody needs support in relation to their parental role, Barnardo's will assist where possible.

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/northern-ireland>

Housing Rights

In addition to providing housing support for those in prison and ex-offenders, Housing Rights will provide families with advice on their housing needs. They will help and advise those who are worried about homelessness, finding a suitable place to live, paying for their homes, bad housing and disrepair.

<https://www.housingrights.org.uk/>

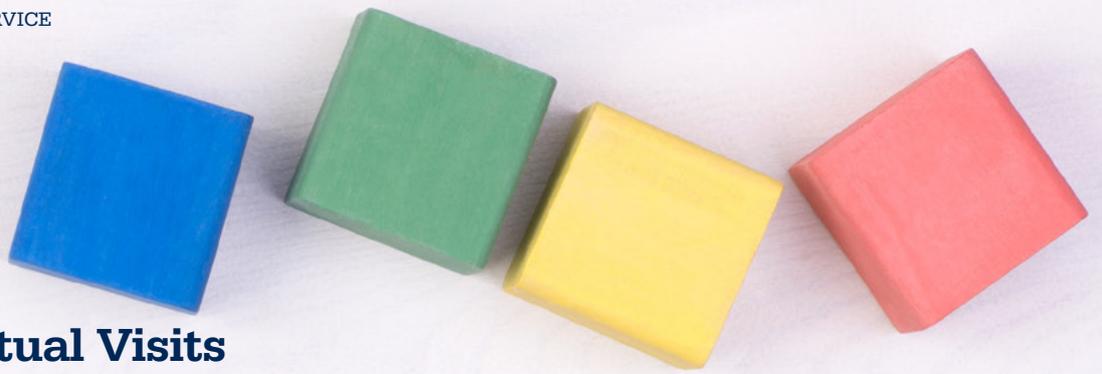
Chaplaincy

The Chaplaincy support provided in prison establishments is also available to family members upon request through your loved one in custody.

Prison Fellowship

Prison Fellowship is offering emotional and social support to families of prisoners. Family workers are happy to make regular contact with family members providing emotional support over the phone and where necessary signpost to a relevant organisation or Prison Fellowship volunteer in your local area. They will also seek to provide practical support for families through activity packs for children under 16 years of age with a parents consent.

<https://www.pfni.org/>



Tips for Virtual Visits

Be practical:

Make sure the device you are using is charged/on a charger. Make sure you are connected to the internet or have enough data to cover the call. It might help the connection if other devices are not using the internet at the same time as the virtual visit.

Be ready to sign in early. If you haven't used the app before ask family who live at home to help or ask a friend over the phone to talk you through doing a test run. This will help you feel more confident when you get a call. NIACRO's Family Links staff can also help with the test run, please contact their helpline number 0800 169 2207.

Be prepared:

For younger children especially, having some table top toys/crafts can help them keep engaged.

Have a diary for the week and write down all the things that you would usually share with your loved one e.g. funny things that have happened, things that have went well and plans you have made for the following week. Encourage your loved one to do the same.

Ask your loved one questions about what they have been doing to keep busy (activities, e.g. did they clap for the NHS and front-line staff on Thursday evening).

This is not something you need to do alone. There are a range of support services that can help. Details are provided in the previous section [Support available for families](#).



Be positive:

Try not to focus on the distance/absence. Try to make the most of the time during the visit.

It could be a good time to show dad/mum etc. any new things you have done that you can't bring into a visit normally. E.g. arts and crafts, lego creations or things you have done together at home.

Be playful:

Adapt some games to play together - My granny went to the market, I spy, Charades. Or, play a dice game, the person in prison can't have a dice but someone else could roll it for them. Just to make it a bit more fun for the children.

Have your loved one and the child visiting create an activity or play diary together. During the visit the mum/dad could challenge the child to do certain things and the child can feed back on their next visit e.g. bake something, find 5 types of insects in the garden, make a den using a bed sheet, or get crafty. An example of a diary is provided.

Be patient:

Don't put too much pressure on yourself to fill all the silences.

The virtual visit is a new process for everyone and there may be problems. Try not to worry. Should you encounter persistent technical problems during your virtual visit that could not be resolved by staff please contact the relevant booking office – contact details can be found at [At a glance – Contacts](#).



Example of a Play Diary

- Draw a picture of you and me

- Play a game of hunt in the house/garden

- Collect 3 different leaves when out for a walk

- Learn 5 things about... (eg frogs, clouds)

- Draw a rainbow - put it in the window

- Build a den using bed sheets

- Write a poem or song

- Bake/cook something

- Go a full day with no mobile

- Eat 3 green things!

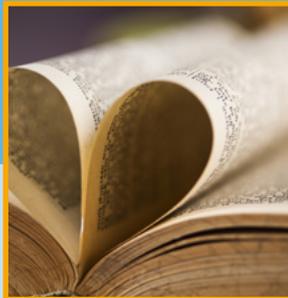
- Make a paper chain

At a glance: What's Changed



Social Distancing and Hand Washing

- 2 metres apart
- Limited movement
- Isolation where needed
- Additional hand washing facilities
- Special hand washing pods



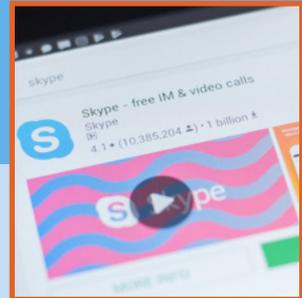
Changes to Daily Activity

- Programmes suspended
- Exercise – still keeping active!
- Keeping busy – in house library and activity packs
- Free TV for all
- Further education students given written material
- Non-essential work suspended – wages still paid
- Worship in private



Release

- Day release suspended
- Temporary early release with conditions
- Only released if they have somewhere appropriate to live and are not considered 'at risk' of self harm



Family Contact

- Virtual (online) visits now available
- Prisoners can now send five letters a week (for free)
- E-mail a prisoner for 40p (Maghaberry and Magilligan)
- Phone calls - £5 extra credit a week
- Send funds by telephone debit card payment or Postal Order
- Support for families still available

At a glance: Contacts

Organisation, service & details		Contact (Tel UK code 0044)
Prisoner Accounts		
Maghaberry Prison		028 9261 4026
Magilligan Prison		0300 200 7866
Hydebank Wood College		0300 200 7866
Visits Booking Office (central number)		0300 200 7866
Maghaberry Prison		028 9261 4029
Magilligan Prison		0300 200 7866
Hydebank Wood College		028 9049 4333
Family Support Officers		
Maghaberry Prison		028 9261 6067
Magilligan Prison		028 7776 3311
Hydebank Wood College		028 9049 4331
Probation Board for Northern Ireland		028 9052 2522
Partners		
Barnardo's	Maghaberry Prison	07740515042
		07594512284
	Magilligan Prison Hydebank Wood College	07763580036 07593501786
Housing Rights	Housing and Debt Helpline	028 9024 5640
NIACRO	Families Helpline (inc Family Links)	0800 169 2207
	Individuals on release	028 9032 0157
Prison Fellowship	Family Workers	028 9024 3691



