

October 2019



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BRIEFING

## Think Family briefing 2: Developing a Think Family approach for key workers

A series of briefings developed as part of the 10 Prison Project family engagement programme

This series of briefings have been developed as part of the 10 Prison Project family engagement programme.

### About the project

In 2018, the Prisons Minister launched a 12 month initiative in 10 prisons to reduce violence and substance misuse as part of his wider strategy to stabilise the prison estate. The family engagement programme, delivered in four of the 10 establishments across six months, was a key element in supporting the 10 Prison Project ambition.

Clinks was commissioned to deliver the project with the support of on-site family engagement workers from voluntary organisations: Pact, Lincolnshire Action Trust and Jigsaw.



It aimed to support prisons to ensure that the role of families and significant others was integrated into decision making and development processes in order to stabilise the population and support implementation of the wider 10 Prison Project. The project focused on three key areas of prison delivery: safer custody, visit provision and roll-out of the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) key worker model.



### About the briefings

These briefings draw on the key findings from the project as well as the learning gained from supporting prisons to establish a Think Family approach. They are practical briefings that provide insight into current family practice within the prison estate as well as guidance about how to develop a Think Family approach. The briefings cover the following 4 topics:

1. Effective Communication with families
2. Developing a Think Family approach for key workers
3. Gateway communication systems
4. Strategic development of a Think Family approach.

The briefings are accompanied by a series of resources which can be downloaded, adapted and used to support the development of Think Family working. Relevant resources are signposted to throughout the briefings.



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## Developing a Think Family approach for key workers

The Offender Management in Custody model (OMiC) places rehabilitative culture at the centre of offender management. Key to this model is promoting positive staff-prisoner relationships which support effective rehabilitation and re-integration into the community. Key workers are an integral part of OMiC, and in the male estate prisoners should receive weekly key worker sessions for an average of 45 minutes. These sessions might consist of “a structured interview or a range of activities such as attending an ACCT review, meeting family during a visit or engaging in conversation during an activity to build relationships”<sup>1</sup>

## The potential of key workers in supporting a Think Family approach

### **Key workers develop consistent and sustained relationships with prisoners which enable them to talk about their families and significant others.**

Many people will be reluctant to talk about their family relationships, children or significant others with people whom they do not know or trust. Weekly contact with prisoners allows key workers to gradually build relationships over time and initiate conversations about family and significant others.

***“It’s about building bridges. A lot of issues that prisoners have are because they have burnt their bridges with their families and they are anxious about that. They need a person in the middle to help them to rebuild those bridges.” - Prison substance misuse worker***

***“Talking about families is something that comes up quite naturally when you are talking to prisoners.” - Prison staff member***

***“It can be challenging to talk to men about families when we are in uniform and that uniform signifies control, but it will take persistence. It is definitely good that key workers work with prisoners on wings that are different from the ones that they work on – it helps them move away from that disciplining role. Relationships have definitely started to develop between staff and prisoners.” - Prison staff member***

### **Key workers identify and support those prisoners who are not receiving social visits or who do not have family ties, such as care leavers.**

Prisoners might not be receiving social visits for a variety of different reasons – the nature of their offence, family breakdown, distance from home, financial wellbeing, family member disability or ill-health. Often prisons will be unaware of the reasons. Key workers play a valuable role in identifying those who are not receiving visits and exploring ways in which relationships with family or significant others can be developed and maintained.

For some prisoners it might be simply informing them about financial support available for their family through the Assisted Prison Visit Scheme (APVU). For care leavers it might be helping them to get in touch with their personal advisor and for others it might be speaking about how to create contacts with individuals in the





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community via mentoring schemes, pen pal initiatives or prison visitor schemes.

***“We should be looking out for those who are not receiving visits – this should be picked up by key workers. There are lots of lads who just bury themselves in their cells.” - Prison staff member***

### Key workers support referrals to specialist family interventions and initiatives

Many prisoners will not be aware of specialist family support available in the prison or feel confident in asking for support. Key workers play an essential role in sharing information about the services and interventions available – for example parenting programmes, family engagement casework or extended family visits – and encouraging and supporting prisoners to engage. Two of the establishments involved in this project reported an increase in referrals to specialist family support services following work to increase key workers’ awareness of a Think Family approach.

### Key workers provide a single point of contact for families

Although it is not necessarily a role of key workers to act as a liaison between prisoners and their families, they can provide a valuable point of contact for families, particularly when a prisoner is unwell or requires additional support. Prison staff and families spoke of the benefit of key workers meeting families in the visit hall, although cautioned that this must be undertaken carefully so as not to interrupt a valuable social visit or breach confidentiality.

***“Key workers are sometimes asked to go down to the visit hall. It is reassuring for families to know that their loved one is being looked after.” - Prison staff member***

***“The key worker role will be fab when we get used to it and it is embedded into the prison. It will be really helpful for families as there will be a key worker who we can contact for updates on the prisoner.” - Prison staff member***

### Key workers support prisoners to understand why family ties are important to their rehabilitation and share information about the initiatives/services available to support them

Key workers play a key role in encouraging prisoners to maintain relationships with their family members and ensuring that they are aware of the services that are available to support them with those relationships, such as: family visits, parent-craft courses, Storybook Dads (a voluntary organisation which helps imprisoned parents to make story CD/DVDs, comics and educational gifts for their kids, improving literacy skills for parent and child), 1:1 support from family engagement workers.





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# Developing a Think Family approach within the key worker role

Although prison staff involved in this project could see the potential of the key worker role there was an acknowledgement that some development was needed to ensure that a Think Family approach was embedded within the model. Here's how to develop a Think Family approach within the key worker role.

## Demonstrate how a Think Family approach contributes to the wider OMiC model

A Think Family approach needs to be understood as a crucial element of the key worker role, rather than a stand-alone concept. Clear guidance about effective key worker records, which includes reference to the importance of 'family and significant other', may help in embedding this into practice. Demonstrating to staff that it also contributes towards creating an 'enabling environment' and 'rehabilitative culture' would further demonstrate the value of a Think Family approach.

***"Important to link the family strand... to the green/amber/red markers on key worker records. Talking about family ties would support key workers to achieve green." - Prison staff member***

## Develop assessments and checklists which incorporate 'Family'

Although the value of the key worker model in supporting a family focused approach was acknowledged, local assessment templates, briefings and checklists for key workers did not routinely include reference to 'families or significant others'. In order to remind key workers to have families in mind, the inclusion of 'family and significant others' in assessment and review processes, key worker checklists, briefings and guidance, would support this approach. (See resource: [Think Family checklist<sup>2</sup>](#)).

## Develop key workers' knowledge and understanding

Staff identified a number of areas where they felt additional training or skills development would support an effective Think Family approach amongst both key workers and broader staff groups across prison functions and departments.

- Understanding of why it is important to support prisoners to maintain family ties and the policy/strategy that governs the work should be improved.

***"The Hidden Sentence training that we have delivered has been really well received by staff, there is a definite need to develop an understanding about families as it is easy to forget." - Prison staff member***

***"The training needs to increase understanding about the links between what they are doing and the role of the family. Staff need to understand the impact of family issues further down the line." - Prison staff member***

- Child protection and safeguarding

Although partner agencies within establishments had compulsory child protection training in place for their staff (such as healthcare teams and family service providers), prison





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staff identified a need for training both around the practice of child safeguarding (how to identify and respond to concerns) and the policy in place within the establishment.

- Public protection and how to ensure family work is delivered effectively within the parameters of public protection, particularly around issues such as domestic violence and sexual offences.

***“The key worker training had no information about families or public protection – we really need more legal stuff around public protection – it is quite concerning that this can get missed.” - Prison staff member***

- Practical guidance on how to integrate a Think Family approach into day to day duties and conversations with prisoners.

***“If you are meeting a prisoner every week you might well get stuck to know what to talk about, but we need to give key workers a bit of training about how to start that relationship and what it is appropriate to talk about.” - Prison staff member***

***“The training needs to cover the impact on families and how to talk to people about their families – the sorts of phrases you can use to get them talking – we need to empower the shop floor.” - Prison staff member***

- Knowledge and understanding about the support and services available to prisoners and their families.

***“It would be good to include a section on [visits] and what they are entitled to.” - Prison staff member***

***“They should be exploring issues around family contact but they don’t necessarily have the knowledge, confidence or experience – they need to understand what support is available.” - Prison staff member***

- Knowledge and understanding about the specific needs of care leavers and the services available to support them.

***“[Key workers] 100% don’t have the understanding of trauma or the impact of the care system – I think it is one of the last things they think about in the back of their minds.” - Prison staff member***

(See resource: [Think Family training](#)<sup>3</sup>)

### Provide resources and references to support a Think Family approach

While establishments acknowledged the value of, and need for, face to face training, releasing staff for training and ensuring that all staff had access to it was often challenging. Think Family resources, that are accessible to all staff, including key workers, and provide information and guidance regarding family work, are therefore essential.

***“It would be difficult to fit in more training for key workers at this stage, but a Think Family toolkit would be useful to support their work.” - Prison staff member***





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**“Key workers need to have confidence in their role before they can take on additional training. An information pack would be helpful though and it could be included in the induction for new workers.” - Prison staff member**

(See resources: [Think Family resources](#)<sup>4</sup>)

## Practice resources

### Think Family training for prison staff (including key workers)

In response to the training needs identified during this project, a two hour Think Family workshop has been developed for prison staff – including key workers, Operational Support Grades, Chaplains, resettlement workers or healthcare workers. The training covers:

- Why it is important to support family ties
- Understanding the impact of imprisonment of families
- Understanding the support prisoners may require to maintain family ties
- Opportunities for Think Family approaches within the prison estate
- Raising awareness about family work in individual establishments.

**“Excellent training which should be given to all staff.” - Prison Drug Strategy Lead**

**“Brilliant training. Must do it regularly.” - Prison Practice Nurse**

(See resource: [Think Family training](#)<sup>5</sup>)

### Think Family checklist for key workers

One of the establishments has developed a key worker information booklet to support key workers in their duties. It includes topics such as: healthcare, immigration enforcement, Offender Management Unit checklists, public protection, resettlement and security. The booklet is being developed to include a section on Think Family and will include a checklist to support key workers to consider prisoners’ needs in relation to maintaining ties with family or significant others. (See resource: [Think Family checklist](#)<sup>6</sup>)

## End notes

1. Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service. (2018). *Policy name: Manage the Custodial Sentence Policy Framework*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/789926/manage-custodial-sentence-pf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789926/manage-custodial-sentence-pf.pdf) (last accessed: 18/09/19)
2. Clinks. (2019). *Think Family checklist*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed: 04/10/19)
3. Clinks. (2019). *Think Family training*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
4. Clinks website, (2019). 10 Prison Project: Family engagement resources. [online] Available at: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
5. Clinks. (2019). *Think Family training*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
6. Clinks. (2019). *Think Family checklist*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed: 04/10/19)