

Drugs

Do prisoners get help for drug problems while they are in prison?

Every prison offers some support for people with drug problems, often through partnerships with specialist drug services. Some prisons have their own rehabilitation programmes, again often run by specialist organisations. Under certain circumstances prisoners may be transferred to another prison if the treatment they need is not available where they are. The Prison Service has set up CARAT services which aim to offer help to every prisoner who is identified as having a drug problem. Each prison has a designated CARAT team.

What does CARAT stand for?

The initials represent the types of help which every prisoner with a drug problem should be offered, ie **C**ounselling: someone to talk to, either a counselor or a self help group; **A**ssessment: making sure the treatment they are offered is appropriate to their situation; **R**eferral: arranging for a prisoner to get help from other services when necessary; **A**dvice: making sure they have clear information about drug use and the treatments available; and **T**hroughcare: planning for support on release. The service is voluntary – although prisoners who are misusing drugs will be encouraged to take part, they are not forced to do so.

Will the prison know if someone has a drug problem?

Every prisoner is seen by a doctor or nurse when they first arrive at prison, and they will hopefully pick up on any health issues the prisoner has at that time. They will usually be aware of the symptoms of withdrawal, for example, and common health problems associated with drug use. The prisoner also has a chance to raise any health concerns they may have. The prisoner may also have to provide a urine sample, which will be tested for the presence of drugs.

Do they get any support while withdrawing?

If a prisoner needs medical supervision while withdrawing they may be admitted to the health care wing, or detox unit, if the prison has one. If the medical staff feel it appropriate, they will prescribe medication to help alleviate withdrawal symptoms.

What if withdrawal makes someone suicidal?

Prison officers try to be alert to any circumstance that might make a prisoner at risk of suicide or self harm, including the physical and/or psychological effects of drug withdrawal, and will keep a close watch on the prisoner concerned. If you have reason to believe that a prisoner might harm him/herself, please phone the prison and ask to speak to the Duty Governor about your concerns.

What if the prisoner asks me to take drugs in to him/her on a visit?

You would be taking a big risk. Taking drugs in to a prisoner on a visit is against both the law and prison rules and is treated as a serious offence. The prison will call the police who will arrest the visitor, which could result in them receiving a prison sentence themselves. In any case, they will be banned from visiting for at least three months, have closed or non-contact visits for at least a further three months following the ban, and the visitor may then be subjected to thorough searches at each visit until the Prison Service is satisfied they are no longer a risk. The inmate you are visiting will also face disciplinary action which may mean their privileges, security category and prison placement may be affected. Most prisons search at least a random sample of visitors, many use drug dogs and CCTV, and all will have officers in the visits hall who will be watching for signs of visitors passing things to inmates or other visitors.

I am a drug user. Does that mean I can't visit?

You can visit, but it would not be advisable to arrive for a visit under the influence of drugs or alcohol, as you will not then be allowed to visit. If you are found to be in

possession of an illegal substance in the prison or visitor's centre, the staff will be obliged to report it, even if the substance was only for your own use. If you are registered and using prescribed medication, you will not be allowed to take it into the prison.

What does a drug dog do?

A drug dog has been trained to recognise the scent of a range of drugs. They can do this just by walking past someone. The dog will be on a lead and controlled by a trained officer. If the dog detects the scent of drugs on a person, it has been trained to indicate this – usually by sitting or standing in front of them.

What if the dog picks me out?

You may be searched to check if you are carrying drugs. If you are, the police will be called and you will be arrested. If no drugs are found, you may still have to visit in closed conditions. If a child is found to have drugs on them, the parent or carer with them will be held responsible.

I've never used drugs in my life, but the drug dog stopped me.

The dogs are not infallible, and very occasionally they do select people who have had no contact with drugs. There could be any number of reasons for this. However, as the Prison Service take measures to prevent drug smuggling very seriously, and usually err on the side of caution by restricting contact during the visit, even when no drugs are found. If you feel you have been treated unfairly as a result of a false detection by a dog, you should raise it with the governor of the prison, in writing.

I have medication that I must take every few hours, so will have to take it with me to the prison.

Keep it in the bottle or packet you got from the chemist, clearly marked with your name. You will have to leave it in a locker unless it is something that may be needed urgently, such as an asthma inhaler, and even then you will probably have to leave it with an officer on duty in the visits room.

Where can I get more information about drug use and what help is available?

"Talk to Frank" (formerly the National Drugs Helpline) is a free, 24 hour helpline for anyone concerned about drug misuse. Their number is 0800 776600.

Adfam is a national organisation that works with and for families who are concerned about drugs and/or alcohol. If you are looking for information specifically about prisons and drugs, you can call their Criminal Justice Ringback Service on 020 7553 7655. You can leave a message and an Adfam support worker will call you back, or you can visit the Adfam website: www.adfam.org.uk.

For information about drugs in general, local drug services and rehabilitation units, you can contact Drugscope, 40 Bermondsey Street, London, SE1 3UD Phone: 020 7940 7500. Web site: www.drugscope.org.uk.

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