

# Keeping in touch by phone and mail

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## **Can prisoners make telephone calls to people outside?**

Yes. There are telephones in the prison which inmates can use to telephone their families and friends. However, they will not be able to call whenever they like - there will probably be restrictions on the times of day the phones can be used. It is also likely there will be queues for the phone, or a booking system where they book a time to make their calls. A prisoner may be allowed more calls or telephone time under the incentives and earned privileges scheme. Those with close family abroad are usually allowed to make a five-minute call from an official phone once a month, but will be expected to pay for it. Restrictions on access to private cash may be waived if someone needs to phone close relatives abroad.

## **Can I phone and speak to them?**

It is not possible to make a direct phone call to a prisoner.

## **How are the calls paid for? Will it help if I send in a phone card?**

All prisons now have a pin number system on the inmates' telephones. In high security prisons, soon after reception, the prisoner is asked to submit a list of telephone numbers of family, friends and legal contacts for approval. They will then only be allowed to call numbers that are on their list. If someone in the family changes their number, the prisoner will need to put in an application to change their account. Some prisons outside the high security estate may allow prisoners to make telephone calls without prior approval of the numbers, depending on their security category. The system works on a credit basis - credit is purchased from their account. If you want to help a prisoner with the cost of phone calls, you will need to send money in the form of a postal order.

## **What if the prisoner needs to get in touch with someone in an emergency?**

If a prisoner needs to contact their lawyer urgently, or anyone else for very strong compassionate reasons, they may, at the

governor's discretion, be allowed to use an official telephone.

## **Is there any way to get an urgent message to a prisoner?**

You can telephone the prison and ask to speak with the Chaplain, who will be able to go to the wing and pass the message on. It does not matter if you and/or the prisoner are not religious. Messages appropriate to be passed on this way include news of illness or death in the family, or the birth of a baby. If the prisoner has not been in touch in any way and you are concerned about them, the Chaplain can find out how they are and call back to reassure you.

## **Do prison staff listen to inmates telephone calls?**

Not all the time, but prison officers can listen to a random number of calls, except in an open prison. All calls by high risk Category A prisoners are monitored. Officers can hear both sides of the conversation and can record it. Officers may terminate a call if the call contains anything that:

- ◆ compromises prison security or relates to plans to escape
- ◆ helps someone commit a criminal offence or break prison rules
- ◆ affects national security
- ◆ contains threats or blackmail
- ◆ is racially offensive or obscene.

## **Can I write to a prisoner as often as I like?**

There is not usually any restriction on the number of letters a prisoner can receive. When you write, remember to put the person's name and prison number on the letter.

## **Can the prisoner write to me?**

Yes. The prisoner will be allowed to send one free letter each week, or two if they are on remand. If they want to write more often they can, but will have to pay for the postage themselves.

## **Will prison officers read the letters?**

Usually, the prison will only open the envelope to make sure there is nothing being sent in which is not allowed. However, incoming and outgoing mail may be read in maximum security prisons. In other prisons the governor may order routine reading of mail from time to time. As with telephone calls, letters must not contain anything that:

- ◆ compromises prison security or relates to plans to escape
- ◆ helps someone commit a criminal offence or break prison rules
- ◆ affects national security
- ◆ contains threats or blackmail
- ◆ is racially offensive or obscene.

Letters can be stopped or restricted if these rules are broken.

### **What if I don't want the prisoner to write to me any more?**

You can tell the prison that you no longer wish to receive mail from the person and they will be asked to stop writing.

### **Can I send money to a prisoner?**

Yes - send a cheque or a postal order and write the prisoner's name and prison number on the back. Some prisons require the sender to write their name and address on the back also. Some prisons ask for cheques/POs to be made payable to "The Governor", others ask for them to be made out to "HM Prison Service". Before sending a Postal Order, it's advisable to phone the prison and check which system that particular prison uses. The money will be transferred into the person's private account. The amount of spending money a prisoner is allowed each week depends on whether they are on remand or convicted, and the privilege level they are on. It's advisable to send letters containing postal orders by recorded delivery.

### **What do I do if the prisoner doesn't receive something I sent?**

Contact the prison's property office, who will be able to tell you whether the item was received by the prison, and the procedure to follow if something has gone missing within the prison system.

### **Can I send photographs of myself or the children?**

Yes, but do remember that prisoners are not allowed photographs of themselves, and that includes family snapshots that include them. Photographs of an explicit or pornographic nature would not be allowed.

### **Can I send the prisoner clothes, toiletries or gifts?**

Every prison has different rules about what can be sent in for inmates, and these rules can change at short notice. If there is something you want to send, you will need to contact the prison or visitor's centre and check whether the item can be posted in or handed in on a visit. Some prisons will only allow money to be sent and nothing else.

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