

A Parent's Story:

Louisa's Story



Below is the sixteenth in a series of blog posts created by those caring for children with a parent in prison. The series aims to shine a light on the harms experienced by children and families when a parent goes to prison, and highlight the benefits that providing good support can bring.

It must have been about 4 or 5 in the morning.

I thought we were actually getting broken into, and my partner did as well. We both just heard this smash and so I went to the top of the landing. I went to get my phone to call the police and then realised it was actually the police themselves that were in the house. They ran up the stairs, grabbed my partner and then put me in another room with the kids. I was in too much shock to know what was going on really. The police raided the house for about four hours, but I don't think anything was taken. It was all quite nasty. Even a year later we were still stepping on bits of glass from the raid.

My daughter (Jasmine) was in a separate room, so I never know how much she properly saw at the time or what she feels. I've never wanted to bring it back up in case it re-traumatises her.

I think it was the shock that you can wake up and someone can be ripped away from you straight away just like that. That was the hardest thing I think, because I just wasn't prepared for that.

To me it was like someone died basically. That's the only way I can describe it. Obviously I know that's worse, but I felt like I was going through the same grieving process. I always worry how much what she's gone through might have affected Jasmine, seeing how much it's affected me as an adult.

I couldn't stay at the house on my own for a long time. I don't know how long it took me to get back here, but I hated the house. I used to relive the whole experience. Sometimes like a milkman would knock at the door, and I used to have a panic attack thinking it was someone there to get me. It was really hard. I felt like I was going to get attacked by someone. I finally did get into my own routine and felt secure in my own home, but it took a while.

When I was visiting the prison, we could hear lots of parents saying to the children that Dad was at work. Sometimes the parents were talking about it being prison, and I used to get nervous because I hadn't told Jasmine the truth at the point. I used to think 'Oh God she's going to hear the word prison.' That used to give me anxiety, standing in the queue for visits and hearing other parents talk about it. I don't like lying anyway, so to lie to Jasmine then was hard.

Some of the prison officers were lovely to me, but visiting is just an awful process to go through really. I absolutely hated it. It put so much stress on me, constantly going to visit.

It used to make the whole day stressful for the kids just to have an hour with their dad. Jasmine would find it harder and harder to say bye at the end. She used to get upset and hold it in when he walked away. I remember my partner saying he didn't want us to go through it to go and see him. But what was I meant to do? She's always had the best relationship with her dad, so it's almost like I had to put myself through it for her really.

It was hard with the baby as well. Sometimes it would take forever getting in, and they could see I was struggling with two kids. They wouldn't say 'take a seat' or anything like that. I used to have to take my parents with me and they would wait in the car park, because I knew I wouldn't be in a good way to drive back.

I've got my own business, two kids, solicitors phoning me, all the pressure of the house and all the outgoings are now on me. You suddenly have to do it all alone. I'm lucky in that I've got good support network of family and friends, but not everyone has that do they? God knows where I'd be without them.

I think as a parent I worry about the impact it all had on my children's lives. That's why I looked for help and reached out to Children Heard and Seen.

I didn't initially tell Jasmine the truth about the situation. I think I just said someone broke in and they were looking for other people. I think I used to say Dad was working away, but then she was trying to understand why the job wouldn't let him come home. When her behaviour started getting quite bad, that's when I started looking for help.

She was hitting me a lot, that was the main problem. She would also hide away if anything went wrong.

She was telling me the teachers were asking her stuff. This is before they knew. They were saying 'Can you get daddy to make you a paper aeroplane?' or 'Has daddy done your breakfast this morning?' and things like that. I remember her hiding under a blanket while she was telling me like she was scared to say. I think she knew that the teachers were probing her.

The school were saying that Jasmine would hide whenever there was a problem. I wouldn't say she does that anymore I don't think. She's a different child now my partner's home. She's a lot better and she doesn't hit me at all anymore. I think she felt angry and didn't know how to let it out.

I think finding Children Heard and Seen has been the main help for her. When I came out with the truth to her, it was such a relief. I feel like deep down she already knew, even though she was only four. I felt like she was relieved that I'd stopped lying to her. So now we're honest with her about everything, she deals with it a lot better.

Children shouldn't be made to live with this trauma alone. If I'd have kept lying to Jasmine and brushing all her feelings away, God knows what it would have brought out in later life.