

# A Parent's Story:

## Alexis's Story



***Below is the seventeenth 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.***

I found out my husband was arrested over the internet. I didn't have a phone call from the police or anything. I was given no support from the police or from social services. We've had 11 social workers in the last year going through the same conversations again and again a bit. You feel like you're being judged all the time. And it makes me feel very much alone.

There's only so much you can do for your children when you've got literally little to no support going on. I had to find a group for myself called the Lucy Faithful Foundation, and it was through them that I found Children Heard and Seen to help me with what my children were going through.

I was struggling because my son is three, and he's constantly calling out for Dad. All I can say is "he's at work". I've got nothing better to say for a three year old than "he's at work". I've never hidden anything about the sentence from my daughter. She's 13, so there's not much point hiding it. You do it in a child-friendly way, but you still have to explain everything to them.

It is heartbreaking for my children because all I want to do is give them a happy, stable home. But even family has been nonexistent. I used to speak to my Mum about everything. We would have hour-long phone calls. Now I'm lucky if it's a very tenuous 15-minutes.

When my husband went to prison, my parents gave me basically an ultimatum: "If you ever stay with him, we are going to cut you off completely". I love my parents, but after that ultimatum, there's a lot of trepidation. I couldn't talk to them about my husband or what was going on. Because they didn't want to hear it. It's understandable because of what he's done to me and my children psychologically. Yet, regardless of what family thinks about your husband, your children have done nothing wrong, so it's unfair to them when these relationships become strained.

My husband's parents have completely cut off everything and everyone to do with us. So my son has never met his grandmother, never met his great grandparents, never met his aunts and uncles, never met his cousins. They don't even send cards.

I talk to my husband once a week. I cannot handle talking to my own husband more than that. It's like being heartbroken every time. Some people can visit but I couldn't do that. I still haven't visited because I just don't want to see him that way. My children haven't had contact with their dad even though they want it.

My daughter wanted to visit her dad and I instantly said, "I'm really sorry, but I would never subject anyone to that.". When you go into a prison, you get searched. You have to take ID, and that's the most basic part of all of it. It's a bit like our airport security, but you have to go through the door and have it locked behind you and then you have to go through another door and have it locked behind you... And yet another door that is locked behind you. It starts to feel very claustrophobic. You can't just go outside when you want because you need a breath of fresh air.

I don't think it's fair to subject my children to that. I understand the principle of it and the reasoning behind the security, but it's too much for a young one to comprehend. And when my daughter gets upset, what she tends to do is run away from the situation. If she is in the middle of talking to her dad and she gets upset, she'll try to run out of the building. And that's not going to work.

My kids just aren't ready for it.

The thing nobody tells you about someone you know going to prison, is that your brain ceases to work. You can't focus at all. You don't realize just how much that one person being gone can totally screw you up. It's like someone's died without actually having them die. My biological father was in prison, so I've seen the other side of it too. Having a parent in prison is extremely difficult because you've kind of have the stages of grief without the grief and without the support. And you're judged on top of that.

I've got a neighbour who will constantly stop my daughter in the street and taunt her by asking, "how's your daddy?" I've got a phobia now - I don't go out unless I have to take my son to the nursery. I've reported the incidents to the police and nothing's been done. The only thing the police and social services ever say is "Have you thought about moving?" That's the solution. Why should the victim have to move?

I hate that sentiment - "the victim". I hate being called a victim and I hate my children being called victims. We're not victims, we are collateral damage.

I do really curse my husband. I'm not going to deny that. I really, really curse him. But there's no point holding on to that hate because it will just destroy you. So the best thing to do is try and get help.

I speak to Lucy Faithful and to Children Heard and Seen, and I also have a therapist. Other than that, I've got no one. It's demoralizing and soul-destroying when you have zero people to speak to. My first phone call with the Lucy Faithful Foundation just

opened the world up to me. I wasn't alone anymore. I was crying my eyes out and could barely get a sentence out.

Since then, I've brought my children to Children Heard and Seen. We have spoken to various people and we've never been judged. That's the primary thing which I really appreciate - I don't feel judged. I'm not classified as the "non offending" person, a word I so hate. And through Children Heard and Seen, my daughter is coming out of her shell more. She participates in the Girls group every week. And she participates in a weekly session with her support worker, Nazrin. She is really coming out of her shell again.

I've given her lots of outlets, but children will not listen to their parents - full stop. So when she hears it from Children Heard and Seen, she grasps the situation. She understands and she works on it. And they pretty much say the same things which I've been saying, but from another person it helps. And she's enjoying it. She's got something to do and she is definitely, definitely brighter. I couldn't have asked for something more.

At one point, my daughter was no longer my daughter. Since CHAS came on board, she's herself again.