

October 2019



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BRIEFING

## Think Family briefing 4: Strategic development of a Think Family approach

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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# Strategic development of a Think Family approach

The Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework<sup>1</sup> requires all establishments to have a Family and Significant Other Strategy in place which is reviewed annually. In addition, the 2019 HMPPS tool - *Family and Significant Other Measurement: Shadow Measure 2019-2020* - ensures that all establishments review and score their own practice on an annual basis, developing action plans to inform the ongoing development of a family-focused approach.

This policy and resource support the strategic development of a whole-prison Think Family approach. Establishments are encouraged to consider family ties in all aspects of their work (from induction to release) and to develop reflective, evidence-based practice that can demonstrate effective maintenance of family ties.

Developing a strategic approach to Think Family is essential in embedding 'family and significant others' into the day to day work of an establishment, rather than as a bolt-on activity that exists in isolation. It also helps to ensure that family work is sustained and developed over time.

***"You need to integrate it into a wider strategic approach to create sustained change." - Prison governor***

***"Impact is about resource, structure and impetus." - Prison governor***

This project identified a number of key issues concerned with developing a strategic approach to Think Family. The briefing below summarises these issues and the actions and learning that was developed in response.

## Cultural shift that acknowledges barriers while focusing on solutions

During the project, prison staff identified significant barriers and challenges to developing and sustaining a Think Family approach. At a strategic level it was acknowledged that a whole-prison approach to 'family and significant others' required additional resources and time to create a sustained shift in culture and practice.

***"Staff awareness has been very slow to make a dent in and there remains a significant way to go to improve this in order to get the full range of what has been envisioned." - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending***

***"The work involved has brought on additional requirements to an already challenging role as there are no additional resources to do this work." - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending***

At a practice level, prison staff cited issues of public protection, confidentiality, time, resources, family complexity and knowledge/expertise as barriers to taking a Think Family approach.

***"Families have been on my radar for years, but we have just not had the capacity to do anything about it." - Resettlement team member***

***"All the information is interesting and in theory would be good to use, but as an officer working on a landing by myself with 60-70 prisoners, what opportunities would I have to use this information?" - Prison staff***





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### Actions and learning

- The project benefitted from having resource allocated to strategic development of family work within the prisons. None of the existing Family Provider contracts within the establishments included allocated funds for a strategic development role. However, it was suggested that this should be included in future commissioning arrangements.

***“I now need for the family inclusion officer to be a main feature within the [family provider] contract, to ensure strategy can be embedded and long term added value is reflected.” - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending***

- Ensuring close working with the regional prison family lead enabled the prisons to receive sustained strategic support, information and guidance. It also encouraged shared learning across the establishments as the lead was able to feedback on what other prisons had achieved and how.
- Think Family training at each establishment acknowledged the challenges associated with engaging families, while encouraging staff to understand the significant benefits of a Think Family approach for the prison, prisoners and families. The workshop also included information about government guidance and policy as well as the focus on effective family practice by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

***“Elevated my thinking on the priority of family ties should have in regime planning.” - Prison Officer attending Think Family training***

***“I got a better view of how families are pivotal in improving behaviour.” - Prison Officer attending Think Family training***

Supporting prisons to develop a solution focused approach to Think Family, which identified the challenges or gaps in practice and then created realistic plans for how to respond, enabled prisons to adapt their thinking. One establishment, when asked what one message they would share with other establishments said:

***“Everything is possible, start again, look at what’s good, ask yourself ‘why can’t we do something?’” - Prison family lead***

### Using data and evidence to develop an informed response

- Prisons gather, or have access to, a significant amount of information and data that has the potential to inform their Think Family approach. This includes:
  - » Audit and inspection reports regarding family engagement provision (inspectorate reports, Operational and Systems Assurance Group Risk Management audits and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life surveys)
  - » Visitor data and evaluations gathered by family providers
  - » Data regarding the number of prisoners not receiving social visits
  - » Information regarding the number and nature of calls to the safer custody line – for example, the key concerns being raised by family members
  - » Service user feedback gathered, for example, via: visit centre surveys, family forums, prisoner information desk meetings.





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- Much of this information was not shared across functions, agencies or departments and therefore was not being used to inform the development of family practice. Reviewing and collating this information enabled prisons to develop an evidence-based approach to developing their family practice.

***“The project team has brought statistics and data to the voice of F&SO, the team have outlined the huge potential for supporting stability and in how we can provide better quality of life for those experiencing a ‘hidden sentence’” - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending***

### Actions and learning

- Prisons could consider undertaking a review process to:
  - » Identify what data and information is currently gathered which could inform the Family and Significant Other Strategy
  - » Identify what additional data/information is needed to inform effective family practice
  - » Establish processes by which data is collated and fed into relevant strategies to influence change and development.
- The Family Strategy Groups at each establishment have been encouraged to have standing agenda items that review available evidence and inform future planning (see resource: [Cross-departmental family strategy group<sup>2</sup>](#)).

### Working in partnership with the family provider

- Although there was a family provider commissioned to deliver visits and family support at each of the four establishments, relationships between the prison and provider were often restricted to a limited number of functions or individuals within the prison
- In addition to delivering their family contracts, family providers at each establishment had the potential to provide:
  - » Valuable communication pathways between the prison and family members, sharing information with families about prison processes, services and support
  - » Expert advice and information about how to effectively engage with children and families. For example, supporting establishments to set up family forums or engagement of families in celebration events
  - » Valuable insight and understanding about the needs of prisoners’ families
  - » Relationships with potential partners and external agencies.
- Additional work was needed to:
  - » Raise awareness of the services – and referral pathways where family engagement case work was provided – delivered by the provider across the prison staff teams.
  - » Identify opportunities for the family provider to engage with and inform wider practice in the prison, for example via existing strategy or development groups.
  - » Utilise the data and information gathered by family providers regarding visitors and/or prisoner-family relationships.





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***“There has been a massive change in our relationship with [family provider]. We try to bring them in a lot more now to what we are doing in the prison.” - Prison staff member***

***“We had a decent line of communication with [family provider] before, but we are definitely communicating more with them back from the prison – we are telling them more about changes in the prison and we probably weren’t doing that before. Previously we were very visit focused in terms of what we talked to them about.” - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending***

- Key strategy or development groups were identified at each site, where there was the potential for the family provider to attend and support a Think Family approach. These groups included:
  - » Reducing Reoffending Strategy Groups
  - » Safer custody/public protection meetings
  - » Prisoner information desk meetings
  - » Equalities meetings
  - » Development meetings for new initiatives – such as the incentivised substance free living wings.
- New information boards have been developed in visit centres, dedicated to sharing information with visitors about specific prison functions such as healthcare or resettlement. This has encouraged greater collaborative working between the provider and prison functions
- Where prisons have full-staff meetings, family providers have asked to present on an annual basis to inform staff about their organisation and what they deliver
- The cross-departmental family strategy groups held at each establishment, attended by the family provider as well as representatives from all functions/ departments, also supported the building of relationships and shared practice (see resource: [Cross-departmental family strategy group](#)<sup>3</sup>).

### Demonstrated commitment from Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service and senior management

Prison staff highlighted the integral role that policy and senior management played in driving the family agenda. The publication of the *Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework*<sup>4</sup> and particularly the requirement to complete the Family and Significant Other Measurement Tool, created the motivation to further develop family engagement.

***“The policy framework means that senior management are forced to listen and they are having to embrace it.” - Prison family lead***

Alongside this, the commitment from governors and senior management was seen to be essential in terms of creating sustained development around a Think Family approach.





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***“It really needs the buy in of the governor to change the culture and I definitely think our governor and the deputy are really supportive of this.” - Substance misuse provider***

## Promoting a Think Family approach

- Although all four establishments had a Family and Significant Other Strategy in place, the majority of staff consulted as part of this project and during Think Family training events, were unaware of the strategy and its implications for their practice.
- Similarly, strategies had not been shared with families visiting the prison. On average, across the four sites, only 25% of families, when consulted, felt that the prison recognised the importance of the role of the family.
- Prison staff attending Think Family training were asked to score their levels of understanding (on a scale of one to 10, where one is ‘no understanding’) before and after the workshop. On average, prison staff scored their ‘understanding of what the prison is doing to support a Think Family approach’ as four, rising to eight after the training.

***“Knowing what we have in place to help prisoners has been explained in more detail and where to find information.”  
- Prison officer attending Think Family training***

***“I don’t think people get it. I don’t know if they understand the benefit and why we do this work and how it should be linked to everything that we do – I don’t think they understand the impact it can have.” - Prison staff***

## Actions and learning

- Establishments were supported to develop Think Family toolkits that were available to all staff and partner agencies, promoted their family practice (including their Family and Significant Other Strategy) and provided information and resources to support a Think Family approach (see resource: [Think Family resources](#)<sup>5</sup>).
- One establishment pointed to the use of the Think Family label as a useful tool for engaging staff.

***“Calling it Think Family has helped. It is useful to have a tag line or a brand name, it has helped get it around and there is more of a buzz about family.” - Prison staff member***

- The cross-departmental family strategy groups established at each site had a responsibility to review the family strategy, ensure it reflected practice across all prison functions and that it was disseminated to all staff within their departments/ functions (see resource: [Cross-departmental family strategy group](#)<sup>6</sup>).
- Establishments recognised the need for additional staff training and awareness regarding a Think Family approach. This was achieved via:
  - » Think Family training workshops which provided staff with an overview of family strategy and practice within their establishment (see resource: [Think Family training](#)<sup>7</sup>).





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- » Key worker briefings which included reference to the Family and Significant Other Strategy and the importance of taking a Think Family approach
  - » Presentations from the family provider as part of new staff induction processes
  - » An annual Think Family standing agenda item for full-staff meetings.
- Supported by the Family and Significant Other Shadow Measurement Tool, establishments reviewed their family strategies against whether they were available and accessible to prison staff, prisoners, family and significant others. Once updated, the strategies will be made available in their visit centres and on the [National Information Centre on Children of Offenders website](#)<sup>8</sup>.
  - The following activities were also identified as ways to actively promote the prisons' commitment and practice regarding family engagement:
    - » Think Family information boards in all wings, promoting the prisons' commitment to family engagement, the value of working with prisoners' families and the services available to support prisoner family ties.
    - » Information about prison commitment to Think Family in both prisoner and family induction booklets.

## Developing a cross-departmental approach

***"It is useful to do it as an establishment-wide approach."***  
**- Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending**

Consultation across prison functions and departments demonstrated examples of effective family-focused practice. However, there were few examples of functions and/or departments working together to develop a consolidated prison-wide approach. This was also evident with regards to inter-related strategies which did not routinely make reference to one another – for example, links between the Family and Significant Other Strategy and Rehabilitative Culture or Reducing Reoffending Strategies.

***"I would like to see the consideration [of families and significant others] within other strategy documents such as VR, IEP, drugs and Safety."*** - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending

### Actions learning

The establishment of cross-departmental family strategy groups attended by representatives from offender management unit, chaplaincy, programmes and education, healthcare, operations, residency, safer custody and resettlement supported a whole-prison approach. One of the key aims of the strategy groups was to develop shared learning and working across departments (see resource: [Cross-departmental family strategy group](#)<sup>9</sup>).

***"It is the family strategy group that will sustain and drive delivery"*** - Prison Head of Reducing Reoffending





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### Innovation and shared practice

Prison staff acknowledged that this project, working across four sites, had encouraged and supported sharing of practice and expertise, and that previously sharing of practice could be limited.

***“Shared practice needs to be a lot more developed across prisons.” - Prison staff member***

***“Talk to other prisons... come and visit us!” - Prison staff member***

Staff also suggested that the project, which had encouraged discussion and debate about Think Family approaches (via staff consultation, training and cross-departmental family strategy meetings), had helped them to think more innovatively about new ways of working – something which they felt was essential in developing effective family practice in the prison estate:

***“This project has opened up our minds and shown us different pathways.” - Prison staff member***

### Practice example: Supporting a strategic approach through joint working with the regional family lead

Although the 10 Prison Project family engagement programme has been a time-limited programme of work undertaken in only four establishments, links with the regional partnership and family lead has enabled:

- Learning, resources and practice to be shared across the prisons in the region. For example, staff from all prisons in the region were invited to attend Think Family training delivered at their neighbouring prison sites, so that learning could then be disseminated back to their own establishments.
- Key issues raised at the four sites, such as the need to develop improved child safeguarding policies and practice, have been raised and addressed at a regional level to ensure strategic and region-wide developments.
- Key issues which have implications for national practice, such as the need to include Think Family in ‘Know your Job’ briefings for key workers, have been communicated with national leads.
- Strategic development work initiated by the project will be sustained with the support of the regional lead (for example, through attendance at establishment family strategy groups).
- Prisons have been able to utilise the strategic relationships, already held by the lead, to support their family work. For example, in one establishment the regional lead has enabled engagement with the local school network to support the development of a school project which will provide teachers with increased knowledge and understanding about the impact of the criminal justice system on children and families.







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### End notes

1. Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service. (2019). *Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthening-prisoners-family-ties-policy-framework> (last accessed: 18/09/19)
2. Clinks. (2019). *Cross-departmental family strategy group*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
3. Ibid
4. Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service. (2019). *Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties Policy Framework*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthening-prisoners-family-ties-policy-framework> (last accessed: 18/09/19)
5. 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)
6. Clinks. (2019). *Cross-departmental family strategy group*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
7. Clinks. (2019). *Think Family training*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)
8. See <http://www.nicco.org.uk>
9. Clinks. (2019). *Cross-departmental family strategy group*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/10-prison-project-family-engagement-programme-resources> (last accessed 04/10/19)