

Keeping in contact with family and friends

The Prison Rules require prisons to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties.



Phones

When I arrive

You should be allowed to make a phone call within 24 hours of arriving at prison. If there are security concerns a staff member may make this call for you. At some prisons, you can make this call for free, at others you may have to pay after the call.

Phone access

You will be given a Personal Identification Number (PIN) which you must use when you want to make phone calls. You enter this number before dialling the number you want to call.

You have to put money into your PIN account to make a phone call, unless there are exceptional circumstances - see below for more information.

Depending on the local regime, you should be allowed to use the telephones during association and at any other times that are 'reasonably practicable and appropriate'. You should generally have access to the phones for a period of two hours each day. There is more information in PSI 75/2011 *Residential services* and our information sheet about *Regime and time out of cell*.

Are my calls private?

Your calls are recorded and may be listened to by prison staff, unless they are to your legal advisor or one of the organisations list under Rule 39. There is more information about Rule 39 in PSI 49/2011 and in our information sheet about *Contact with solicitors and other organisations*.

Am I allowed to call any number?

You must apply to have a number added to your PIN account. Once it is approved you can call that number.

You are allowed to have up to 20 social numbers added to your PIN. You are not allowed to add a number on behalf of another prisoner. The prison may check with the intended recipient of your call to make sure that they wish to be contacted by you.

You are not allowed to call businesses unless it is to speak to family and friends.

In addition to this, you can call 'global' or 'estate-wide' numbers. These are phone numbers that are allowed at all prisons. These include the Prison Reform Trust, the Samaritans, Prison and Probation Ombudsman and Crimestoppers, as well the Courts and the Palace of Westminster. There is a full list in in PSI 49/2011 and in our information sheet about *Contact with solicitors and other organisations*.

What about 0800 numbers?

These are **not** allowed unless the call is to a legal representative or other approved confidential number. These are approved by HMPPS for the whole prison estate.

What if I am in segregation?

You should still have access to phones whilst on segregation.

What happens if I transfer prisons?

Your numbers are not automatically approved when you transfer – speak to prison staff or put in an application if you have any problems with this.

Exceptional Circumstances

If you have an urgent legal matter, such as imminent court proceedings, or a domestic crisis, the prison has the discretion to allow you to make a call for free.



Letters

Generally, you may write to and receive letters from anyone, subject to the acceptability of the contents and any specific restrictions. You must include your name, number, and establishment address on any outgoing correspondence.

How many letters am I allowed to write

You can write as many letters as you wish at your expense *subject to any local policy that is in place*.

Some prisons restrict the number of pages and number of letters, this might happen where routine reading takes place. But you must be allowed a minimum of 4 sides of A5 paper.

You can write in any language, but if your letter is not written in English and if your letters are routinely read, then your letters may be delayed while translations are obtained.

There are 3 types of letters:

- 1) **Statutory letters** – these are free to send, you are allowed one per week. The first letter should be issued to you immediately on reception
- 2) **Privilege letter** – these are letters that you are regularly allowed to send over and above your statutory entitlement, you pay for these. You can send as many as you wish, except where routine reading takes place.
- 3) **Special letter** – these are letters you may be allowed for something urgent. For example:
 - to let your family know you are being transferred,
 - to make urgent contact with your Offender Manager
 - to notify the relevant Council Tax Officer
 - to write to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman.

There is a full list in PSI 49/2011. You normally pay for these, but the prison may pay under certain circumstances, for example on transfer.

The Governor may allow you to accumulate your allowance of statutory and privilege letters.

What if I am on remand and not yet convicted

You are allowed two statutory letters per week and as many privilege letters as you wish.

You are also allowed to send special letters under certain circumstances.

How many letters can I receive?

If correspondence is not monitored, there is no limit on the number you may receive.

If monitoring is in place, you are allowed to receive as many as you are allowed to send.

However, the Governor has the discretion to place limits if the number of letters received is habitually excessive.

Stamped Addressed Envelopes

In exceptional circumstances, the governor can allow you to have stamped addressed envelopes sent in by family members. You will need to ask for this on an application form. You should explain why family contact is important for you at this time.

There is more information in the Incentives Policy Framework.

Writing to other prisoners or ex-prisoners

This is at the Governor's discretion. Approval should be given unless there are specific concerns about safety.



Visits

If you're a convicted prisoner you are entitled to receive at least one statutory social visit every two weeks and at least one weekend visit every four weeks. These visits must be at least one hour long. Unconvicted prisoners are entitled to three one hour visits per week, one of which may be on the weekend.

Visits from certain people do not count against your allowance, these people include your lawyer, the Samaritans, MPs and social workers. For the complete list, please see PSI 16/2011 *Providing Visits and Services to Visitors*.

All visits are allowed subject to security considerations.

Accumulated visits

If your family live a long distance away and find visiting difficult you can apply for accumulated visits. This means saving up your visits allowance and using them in a shorter space of time. You can ask to be temporarily transferred closer to home to use them.

You can accumulate 26 statutory visits in a 12 month period. You normally have to be in your current establishment for at least six months before you can transfer in order to have Accumulated Visits. Transfers will normally be for one month and can take place every 6 months.

Inter-prison visits

If you want to visit a close relative who is also in prison you may be allowed inter-prison visits. Subject to security and transport considerations, Governors should make reasonable efforts to accommodate inter-prison visits. Where inter-prison visits prove exceptionally difficult to organise Governors should consider the use of video-link facilities as an alternative.

Closed visits

Closed visits mean you and your visitor will be separated by a glass screen and cannot make physical contact.

Closed visits may be imposed if the prison feels that there is a risk of smuggling drugs or if there is concern about behaviour that threatens the good order and control of the prison.

Segregation

You should usually still be able to get visits when you are on segregation.

However, your visits may be deferred while you are on segregation. This should only happen if your behaviour makes a visit clearly impracticable or undesirable. At the Governor's discretion however, visits may take place.

Special visits

The Governor has the discretion to allow an extra visit above the usual entitlement, for example under compassionate circumstances.

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

Family and friends can apply for financial help for visits. This can include money for

- travel to the prison
- somewhere to stay overnight
- meals

They must be getting certain benefits or have a health certificate to get help.

If they are bringing a child with them or someone to help them (for example because they are disabled) they might also be able to get help paying for their visit.

They can contact:

Assisted Prison Visits Unit
PO Box 2152
Birmingham
B15 1SD

Telephone: 0300 063 2100
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Family visits in hospital

As far as possible, hospital visits must seek to replicate prison visits.

Visits whilst in hospital will be approved on an individual basis and visitors should book visits in advance via the standard prison visits booking procedures.

If a visitor arrives unannounced, the visit will not usually be allowed to take place. In these circumstances, staff should give them all the information needed to book a visit. There may be occasions where the prison will allow the visit to go ahead if identification can be confirmed but this will be assessed on an individual basis.

Visitors must produce identification in line with the Management of Security at Visits Policy Framework.

Visitors will remain under the same restrictions as when visiting the prison, and will need to adhere to the prison prohibited items list.

Visitors cannot give you any items during the visit.

Social Video Calls

Social video calls have been available across the prison estate since the early stages of the pandemic in 2020. The prison service has since published the *Secure Social Video Calling (Interim) Policy Framework*.

The Policy Framework states that social video calls are supposed to be in addition to communications through letters, phone calls and social visits to help maintain and strengthen family ties. They are not intended to be a substitute for face-to-face visits, and that when it is safe for prisons to provide face-to-face visits they should do so.

How often can I have a social video call?

You should be able to access to a minimum of one 30-minute social video call per month at public expense.

Additional secure social video calls can be offered at local discretion where face-to-face social visits are suspended, or other significant regime restrictions are in place.

Governors may also offer additional secure social video calls where necessary for wellbeing reasons or in exceptional circumstances.

It is up to each prison to decide the times that calls can take place, but they should take account of when families and children are available, and consideration should be given to offering video calls in the evenings and at weekends.

Who can I have a social video call with?

You can receive social video calls from those already on your approved list for phone calls or social visits. Any requests for social video calls to any banned visitor must only be authorised by the responsible operational manager for social video calling.

Usually, you will be allowed a maximum of four call recipients during a single call. However, consideration should be given to large families with more than three children. Children under the age of 18 may join social video calls as an additional participant but they cannot be the main or only caller. There is more detail in the Policy Framework about the considerations which must be observed for those with child contact restrictions.

How are video calls monitored?

You will be required to sign a 'Video Calling Communication Compact' before accessing social video calls. The compact will include information about how calls are recorded and monitored. It will also include information about expected conduct during calls and what will happen if this is not adhered to.

All live social video calls are viewed by a member of staff to check that rules are being followed by everyone. If staff suspect that rules are not being followed they may briefly listen to the call for no longer than is required to confirm or disprove their suspicions and take further action if needed.

Staff may also view and listen to your specific social video call to help with a technical problem if you agree to them doing so.

Staff may pause or end video calls when it is necessary and proportionate to do so. You must be informed what the reason for this was and it must be recorded. If a video call has been ended by staff, it cannot be started again.

If you are currently subject to PIN phone monitoring your use of social video calls will also be monitored in line with the monitoring of PIN phone communications set out in PSI 04/2016 *The Interception of Communications in Prisons and Security Measures*..

Social video calls can be intercepted where it is considered necessary and proportionate on the grounds listed in Prison Rule 35A(1) and 35A(2) (YOI Rule 11(1) and 11(2)). There is more information about this in the Policy Framework and in PSI 04/2016.

All social video calls will be recorded automatically and retained for a period of three months after which they will be automatically deleted unless there are grounds to retain them for longer.

Can I be banned from social video calls?

Governors can consider temporarily banning someone from social video calls or bar them from contacting a particular individual where it is necessary and proportionate to do so, under one of the grounds in Prison Rule 34 (YOI Rule 9). They must document times when they have done this, including the rationale for doing so. The grounds include those that are listed above in relation to interception, with the addition of the following:

- a) the protection of the reputation of others;
- b) maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary; or
- c) the protection of the rights and freedoms of any person

Further information

The following may be of interest to you. If you are unable to access them elsewhere feel free to contact our Advice and Information Service and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Useful policy documents (these should be available in the library):

PSI 16/2011 *Providing Visits and Services to Visitors*

PSI 04/2016 *The Interception of Communications in Prisons and Security Measures*

PSI 49/2011 *Prisoner Communications*

Management of security at visits Policy Framework: Closed estate

Management of security at visits Policy Framework: Open estate

Secure Social Video Calling (Interim) Policy Framework

Incentives Policy Framework

Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties Policy Framework

Contact our Advice and Information Service

We are a small service which provides information and advice for people in prison. We are independent of the prison service.

Our freephone information line is **0808 802 0060**.

This number is **free** and you do not need to put it on your PIN.

This number is open:

Monday	3pm – 5pm
Wednesday	10:30am – 12:30pm
Thursday	10:30am – 12:30pm

When we are not taking calls you can still leave a short voicemail. Please give your name, prison number, the prison you are in and what information you are looking for. Voicemails will be checked during working hours Monday to Friday and we will respond as soon as possible by post or email a prisoner.

You can write to us at:

Prison Reform Trust
FREEPOST ND 6125
London
EC1B 1PN

You do not need to use a stamp.