



Caring for Your Family from Inside

**PARENTHOOD, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, AND SUPPORT
WHEN YOU ARE DEPRIVED OF YOUR LIBERTY**

You Are Deprived of Your Liberty – But Still Part of Your Family

When a parent, sibling, or other family member is imprisoned or placed in a remand centre, children may experience a wide range of emotions and have a lot of questions. Being separated from a trusted adult can cause them anxiety, fear, confusion, and grief. It is important that the child has access to appropriate support and other resources to help them cope with the situation in a healthy way. At Buff, we support children and other young people who have a family member deprived of liberty.

We offer support to the whole family when a close relative is deprived of their liberty. For this reason, we work with the child, the caregiving parent, and the family member who is in custody, while always keeping the child's perspective in focus.

How Are Children Affected?

Children notice when something is wrong, even if no one says anything. Many children ask questions such as: “What have you done?”, “Is it my fault?”, “When are you coming home?” Others are afraid to ask questions. Some show their feelings openly, while others become withdrawn.

It is important to understand that children's reactions can vary widely, and that these can change over time. Some become sad, others get angry. Some may develop stomach aches, have trouble sleeping, or struggle at school.

You can make a difference. Being considerate, taking responsibility, and being open – even when it is difficult – can provide a sense of security for the child.

You Can Be a Good Parent, Even from Inside

Being deprived of your liberty does not make you powerless as a parent. There is still a great deal you can do to show kindness and consideration, create a sense of security, and demonstrate that you care – even if you cannot be there in person. Here are some practical ways to do so:

- **Write letters or postcards**

Even short letters can mean a great deal. You might write about everyday things, memories you have in common, or simply let the child know that you are thinking of them.

- **Send drawings or small hand-crafted items**

Something you have personally made can feel especially valuable to the recipient.

- **Ask questions in your letters.**

For example, “How is school going?” or “Is there anything you would like to ask me?” This shows that you are interested in them.

- **Develop a routine**

For example, tell them “I will write to you every Sunday.” This will give the child something to look forward to.

Take responsibility

- **Put what has happened into words**

Do so in a way the child can understand. You do not need to go into every detail, but you could say:

*“I did something I was not allowed to do.
That is why I am here now.
it was my fault, not yours.”*

- **Make it clear that the child is not to blame**

Many children believe that they are at fault, even if no one has said so out loud.

- **Apologise, if it feels appropriate to do so**

This can help the child let go of feelings of guilt or anger.

- **Respect the child’s feelings**

Do so even if the child is angry, quiet, or hesitant about keeping in contact.

**“My dad is in prison.
He says he works there, but I
know that isn’t true. It’s a shame
he doesn’t dare to tell me the
truth. Who is he fooling?
Not me.”**

– 11-year-old girl

Create a sense of security

- **Describe to the child what life is like in prison or the remand centre**

Children often wonder what life is like for you. Where do you live? What you do every day? How do you feel? By explaining things in a simple and calm manner, you can reduce your child's anxiety and give them a sense of security. It is sufficient to give them a few details about your daily routine, whether you get to go outside, what you eat, or if you have someone to talk to etc.

- **Be clear and honest in what you say**

Children can often sense when something is not right.

- **Keep your promises.**

This can help the child let go of feelings of guilt or anger.

- **Try to be a reliable adult, despite the distance**

This can involve showing patience, remaining calm, and being kind and considerate, even when you are having a difficult time yourself.

- **Take responsibility for yourself**

By participating in conversations, programmes, or education available to you, you show the child that you want to make positive changes.

- **Be sensitive to the signals your child is giving you**

If your child does not want contact with you right now, show that you respect their choice but that you are still there for them. For example, you might write:

“I understand that you do not want to write to me right now. But I still think of you. You can get in touch whenever you like.”

Staying Connected – On the Child’s Terms

It can be very difficult to be apart from one’s child. You may wonder how your child is doing, whether they want to stay in touch, and how you can be a parent away from home.

Children have a legal right to keep in contact with their parents – if it is in their best interests. This can take the form of letters, telephone calls, video calls or in-person visits. For many children, knowing where you are and that you are still there for them provides a sense of security. But it is important to remember that any contact must take place on the child’s terms and that the child is under no obligation to maintain such contact with you.

What often matters most to a child is that you reach out to them regularly and in a kind manner. It does not have to be anything elaborate; a simple letter, a greeting, a drawing – small things can mean a lot, especially when done consistently.

Sometimes, children are not ready to have contact straight away. This can be difficult to accept, but it is important to respect their wishes and to be patient. A child’s feelings can change over time.

Showing that you care, taking responsibility, and being there for your child in a way that gives them a sense of security – that is what it means to be an active parent, even from inside.



Children's Rights and Your Responsibility

Children do not have obligations in your situation, but they do have rights. According to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which is Swedish law), children are entitled to:

- Receive clear, honest information in a way they can understand.
- Express their feelings and be listened to.
- Receive support from adults and the authorities.
- Maintain contact with their parents, if it is in their best interests.

This, however, is the child's right, not yours. If the child does not want contact, this must be respected.

Misunderstandings Children May Have

Many children believe things that are not true. Here are some

- **“It is my fault that my dad/mum is in prison.”**
The truth: It is never the child's fault. Adults are responsible for their own actions.
- **“If someone in my family has done something wrong, I will turn out like them.”**
The truth: No. Children are individuals – they can choose their own path.
- **“I have to see my parent, even if I don't want to.”**
The truth: It is never a requirement – it is a choice.

Talking openly about these misunderstandings can reduce feelings of shame, guilt, and loneliness. When you as the child's parent or caregiver regularly reassure them that they are not responsible for what has happened, you help them let go of an emotional burden and feel more secure in their own feelings and choices.

How to Talk to Your Child

Telling the truth – without going into unnecessary detail – builds trust. You might say:

*“I feel better now than I did before,
and I am trying to take responsibility for what happened.”*

*“I’m sorry I can’t be at home –
but I think about you every day.”*

You do not need to have all the answers. What matters most is that your child can sense that you are being honest, that you care, and that it is okay to feel differently.



What Children Need in a Difficult Situation

Children need:

- To know where and how you are – that you are alive and thinking about them.
- To be allowed to ask questions – and to receive answers they can understand.
- To be able to express all of their feelings – anger, longing, love, anxiety etc.
- To feel that the adults around them are working together.
- To have a functioning daily life – school, meals, routines and a feeling of security.

Understanding and having the courage to express one's emotions is one of the hardest things we humans can do – and that is true even of adults. Feelings such as anger, guilt, or shame can be especially difficult to bear. For this reason, it can be helpful for you as a parent or caregiver to broach the subject yourself in a simple, down-to-earth way; for example:

“It’s very common for children to be angry with their parent if they have done something that means they have to go to prison. That’s completely normal. Is that how you feel?”

“Some children are embarrassed about having a parent in prison. Do you feel that way? It’s okay to feel like that – and you’re not alone.”

By opening the door for conversation, you show your child that all kinds of feelings are valid and that it is safe to talk about them.

Children also need to feel hope.

Explain that even though life is hard right now, it will not always be like that. Children also need to know that it is okay to feel happy sometimes. Being happy is not a betrayal of you as a parent, and this is something they need to hear clearly.



About Buff

When you are deprived of your liberty, you are not the only one affected; it has an impact on your entire family. Everyday life changes, relationships are tested, and adults and children alike can experience anxiety, longing, anger, grief, and guilt. It is common to feel powerless or uncertain about how you can be there for your loved ones, especially your children.

Buff is a children's rights organisation that supports children, young people and their families when someone in the family is deprived of their liberty. This could be a parent, a sibling, or another important adult, and they could be in a remand centre, prison, or on probation. We know how difficult it can be for children when someone important to them is suddenly no longer there, and we understand how much support, information, and reassurance they may need.

But we also know that, even though you have been deprived of your liberty, you are likely to have strong feelings yourself and a desire to remain part of your child's life despite the separation. It is not always easy, but you are still important to your child. It is possible to be a good parent, even from inside.

Buff is here to make things easier for you during this difficult time. We work with the whole family – your child, the one taking care of them, and perhaps also you, the person being deprived of liberty – on matters relating to the child. Our work is centred on the child's needs, and we always keep their best interests in focus. Buff works to uphold the right that children have to feel secure and understood, and to ensure they can simply be children.

What Buff Can Do for Your Family

We offer both practical and emotional support. This can include:

- **Counselling** – for children, young people and adults, both individually and in groups. Buff offers counselling and support grounded on human kindness. We do not provide treatment or therapy. Conversations with us are not documented, and they take place entirely on your terms. You decide what the conversation will be about and how much, if anything, you want to share.
- **Safe meeting spaces** – where children and other young people can meet others who are in a similar situation.
- **Children and youth groups** – where children and young people can meet others who have similar circumstances.
- **Family activities and camps** – to build relationships, create a break from everyday stress, and bring joy.
- **Information and guidance** – to build relationships, create a break from everyday stress, and bring joy.
- **Support for relatives** – to build relationships, create a break from everyday stress, and bring joy.
- **Support in contact with other services** – including schools, social services or the probation service, if you would like help in this area.
- **Support via phone, email, or anonymous online chat** – you decide what you want to share.

What Bufff Cannot Do

To help you and your family feel secure, it is important to know what we do not do:

- We do not take part in legal proceedings
- We do not make decisions regarding custody, contact, or living arrangements
- We do not assess guilt or innocence
- We do not deal with immigration issues
- We do not keep records that could be used in legal contexts
- We do not provide financial support or legal advice
- We do not have access to confidential information from the authorities

Bufff has a duty of confidentiality. Anything shared with us stays with us, unless your family explicitly requests otherwise.

We Are There for You Too

Buff operates throughout Sweden, and the support we provide is always optional and free of charge. We know it is not easy to be a parent, partner, or close relative from a distance – but you are not alone.

We are here so that children can get the support they need, as well as to help families find a sense of security, hope, and meaning – even in difficult times. You can ask a family liaison officer within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service to pass information on to your family, or you could suggest that they get in touch with us.

Please note that Buff is never able to make first contact – your family needs to reach out to us first. You can also:

- **Call us:** Submit a request to call Buff.
- **Meet us:** If we visit the prison or unit you are staying at, you can apply to meet with us.
- **Write to us:** If it suits you better, you are welcome to write to us with your questions or concerns. Our contact details and address can be found on the last page.

When You Are Released – Reunion

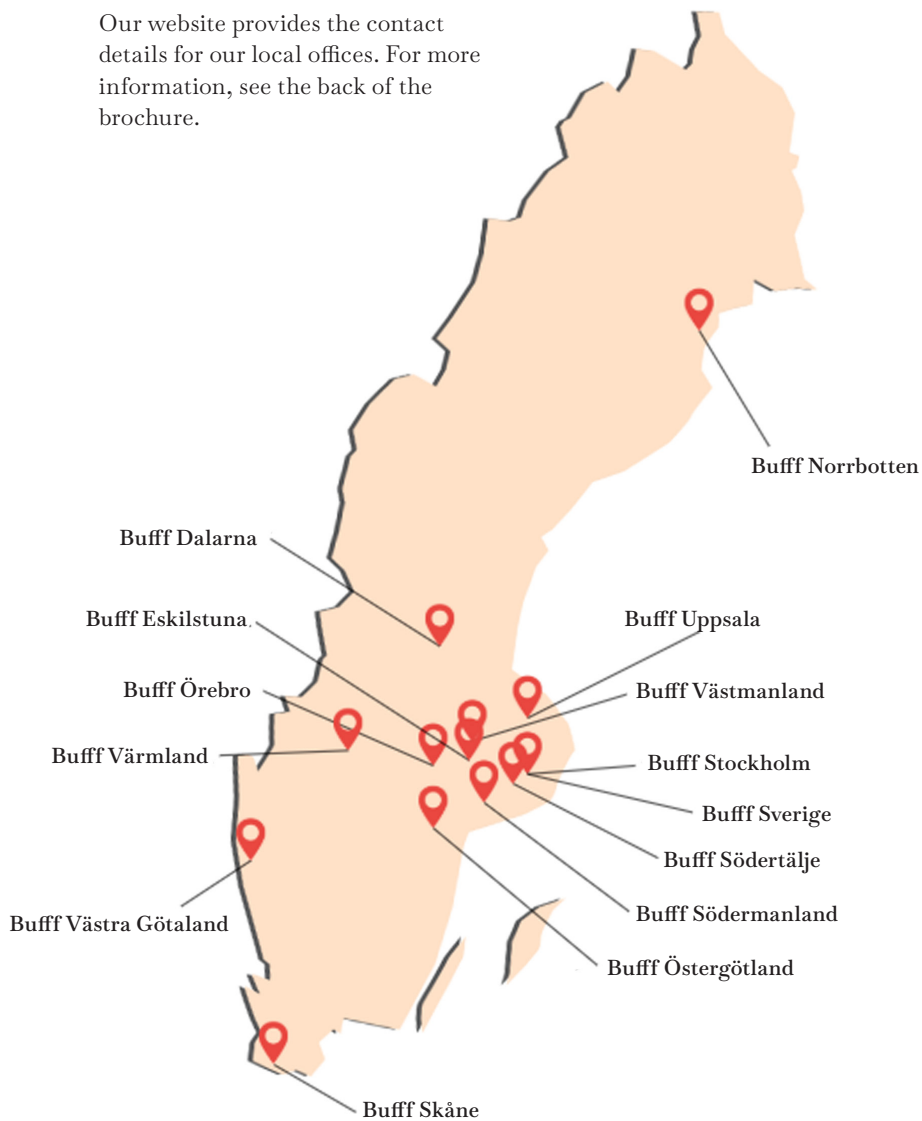
Being released can evoke many different emotions, such as joy, anxiety, hope or uncertainty. This applies to both you and your family. Seeing each other again may be something you all long for, but it can also be difficult. It is a good idea to start talking well in advance. What are you looking forward to? What feels difficult? How do you want things to be between you?

Listening, showing respect, and being willing to talk – even about the difficult things – are what build trust. A lot may have changed, both in you personally and in your family. Reunion is a process, not something that happens all at once. Allow it to take time.

Buff is here for you if you want to talk about your relationship with your children or other relatives – before or after release. You are warmly welcome.

Where to Find Buff

Our website provides the contact details for our local offices. For more information, see the back of the brochure.



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Bufff.Sverige



BufffSverige



Bufff Sverige



We provide support for and give a voice to children and young people who have a parent or family member in prison, a remand centre, or on probation.