

Criminal justice and you

An essential guide for victims and witnesses

Prison and probation

By Ellie

My name is Ellie, and I work as a Victim Liaison Officer, known as a VLO, in the Victim Liaison Unit of the Probation Service, where we deliver the victim contact scheme. If you are the victim of a serious sexual or violent offence when offender receives study on sentence of 12 months or more, you may want to know about the sentence someone receives.

As a specially trained VLO, I can keep in contact with you during the sentence, answer your questions, give you information about how the justice system works and signpost you for any ongoing support. You are entitled to know certain information and you are entitled to request additional conditions to an offender's licence relating to you and/or your family.

This is completely up to you and depends on how you feel. If you tell us you don't want contact, we will not contact you again. If you change your mind, however, you can contact us at any time during the sentence, one of the Victim Liaison team will firstly write to ask if you would like to receive contact. Where possible, they will also offer for your VLO to visit you to explain their role in more detail and answer any questions you may have. If you decide to opt in, your VLO will become your personal point of contact. If you do not opt in, the VLO will not be able to keep up to date about the offender's sentence or the offender's release date.

Your Victim Liaison Officer will ask you how much information you want to receive. Different levels of contact can include just knowing the month when an offender is going to be released. Receiving an annual contact letter. Being informed at key stages in the sentence. For example, a move from a close prison to an open prison, or released temporarily, on licence.

Most offenders receive a standard determinate sentence, which means they will be released automatically halfway through the sentence. They serve the rest of their sentence on licence in the community with a number of strict conditions. If they break

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these conditions of their licence, they may be recalled back to prison. Other types of sentences have different release provisions which your VLO will be able to explain.

You can request additional conditions relating to you and/or your family to be attached to the offender's licence. Conditions may include an exclusion zone and/or a condition preventing them from contacting you.

For some offenders, the Parole Board will decide when they can be safely released back into the community. In these cases, you will have the chance to: Write a personal statement to explain the impact the offence had or still has on your life, for the Parole Board to consider at hearings; Ask the Parole Board to attach additional conditions relating to you and/or your family to the offender's licence; Request a summary of the Parole Board's decision if they are considering the offender's release from custody.

Your Victim Liaison Officer is there to guide and assist you through all of the processes whilst an offender is subject to the court sentence.

Thanks for watching and I hope this was helpful.

Glossary

Probation Service - The Probation Service is a statutory criminal justice service that supervises offenders released into the community, while protecting the public.

Victim Contact Scheme - If you join, you'll be given a Victim Liaison Officer who'll tell you: how long the offender will be in prison for, if there are any changes to their sentence, and when they'll be released. when an offender is up for parole and how to make a victim statement at the parole hearing.

Sentencing - If you are found guilty of a crime, your sentence will depend on a number of factors, including the type, seriousness and circumstances of the crime.

Standard determinate sentence - A determinate prison sentence is for a fixed length of time. It includes a period of time in prison and a period of time in the community 'on

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licence'. If you break any licence conditions or commit another crime while on licence, you could be sent back to prison.

Licence - Being released 'on licence' means that for the rest of their sentence the released prisoner must stick to certain conditions. Time spent 'on licence' in the community is supervised by probation. Before release from prison the prisoner will be given the licence and have the conditions explained.

Exclusion zone - This means you cannot enter a specific area whilst on licence. This could be based on where previous victims live or locations that are linked to offending behaviour. The Policy Framework states that 'exclusion zones must have clear boundaries that can be understood on the ground.

Parole Board - an independent body that carries out risk assessments on prisoners to determine whether they can be safely released into the community.