

Site

HMP Maghaberry

Name of project / initiative

Making visits autism friendly

Overview

Quite a few men have children with autism and they were unable to attend visits because the experience (noise, rub down searches etc) was too overwhelming for them. With that in mind, the prison introduced special "autism friendly" visits just for families with children with autism, together with "pre-visit guides" for the children on what to expect, additional equipment in the crèche, and a "relaxation room" - including bubble lamps, toys and gadgets - to help provide a calming environment. And all the staff on duty during the "autism friendly" visits have received autism awareness training. Around 15 families a week are now taking advantage of the sessions. This initiative complements the work the prison has done to meet the needs of prisoners with autism, leading to the jail achieving the Autism NI "Autism Impact Award".

Longevity

Introduced in July 2019

Benefits

This has helped to maintain, and in many cases re-establish, family contacts, in some cases allowing the men to meet their children for the first time in years. It has also led to improvements in the discipline of the prisoners involved.

Uniqueness

We are not aware of this happening elsewhere

Applicability

Autism-friendly visits could be rolled out in any custodial setting.

Requirements

Some investment in equipment, training for staff, an available "slot" for the visits to take place

For more information:

Contact: SO Amanda Wilson – amanda.wilson@justice-ni.gov.uk.

See also: [additional documentation](#) and a [short video about the initiative](#).

Submitted by:

David Savage, Governor, HMP Maghaberry – david.savage@justice-ni.gov.uk