



# Methods and Techniques Used in European Prisons to Maintain a Good Family and Emotional Life

## Introduction

In recent years, the European penitentiary approach has increasingly focused on promoting the fundamental rights of prisoners, with emphasis on maintaining and improving the quality of their emotional and family life. In the context of concerns about mental health, preventing recidivism, and facilitating social reintegration, numerous studies, norms, and recommendations from the European Council have encouraged the development of specific methods and techniques designed to support family relationships and the emotional health of individuals in detention. However, the application of these methods varies considerably between countries and prison systems, influenced by infrastructure, resources, penitentiary culture, and national policies. In this article, we will analyze the main methods and techniques used in European prisons, highlighting good practices and their role in promoting a healthy emotional and family life, based on legislation, international recommendations, and specialized studies.

## Psychosocial Interventions and Specialized Counseling

One of the most frequent and effective methods used in European prisons to support family life and emotional health is the provision of psychosocial interventions. These include individual and group psychological counseling, as well as family therapy.

**Individual Counseling** is often used to help inmates manage anxiety, stress, and negative emotions, thereby facilitating adaptation to prison conditions and preparation for reintegration. Especially in countries such as Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands, these programs are standardized, with regular sessions and specialized support, which has led to a reduction in the rate of anxiety and depression among inmates.

**Family Therapy**, usually conducted by specialists in psychotoxicology or psychology, focuses on maintaining and strengthening relationships with family members. As part of these interventions, families participate in counseling sessions where they discuss the difficulties of maintaining contact and develop strategies for healthy communication despite physical separation. In countries such as the United Kingdom and France, these programs are an integral part of penitentiary policies, being reserved for longer periods of detention or situations where relationships are most threatened.

**Results:** Studies (De Lange et al., 2018) indicate that regular participation in counseling and family therapy programs leads to a reduction in recidivism of up to 25%, as well as an increase in the level of mental well-being of inmates. In addition, these programs contribute to creating a calmer and safer environment in prison, reducing tensions and conflicts.

## Educational Programs and Parental Training

An essential aspect in maintaining a healthy family life in detention is educational and parental training programs. These are often structured in the form of participatory workshops and training sessions on topics such as effective communication, conflict management, developing parenting skills, and understanding the parental role.

**Parental Education Programs** have a dual benefit: first, they help the inmate improve their parenting skills, and second, they support the relationship with children to maintain normalcy and family stability.

In countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands, these programs are provided for in legislation and supported by partnerships with non-governmental organizations and social assistance institutions. A concrete example is the „ParaDesign“ project in the Netherlands, which offers free parenting courses for inmates, with the results being a low rate of conflict in the relationship and a significant improvement in the parent-child relationship.

**Results:** Recent research (Kroll & Wallis, 2019) shows that, following these programs, inmates observe an increase in the quality of the relationship with children and a major benefit in communication and mutual trust.

## Infrastructural Measures and Support Activities

A critical factor for the success of these interventions is the penitentiary infrastructure.

- **Spaces for private visits:** in countries such as Norway and the Netherlands, these rooms are equipped with comfortable furniture

Modernized and appropriately designed prison infrastructure plays an essential role in facilitating the maintenance and improvement of the family and emotional life of inmates.

**Private visiting rooms:** Countries such as Norway, the Netherlands, or Sweden have developed special spaces where inmates can have safe and intimate physical and emotional contact with family members. These spaces are equipped with comfortable furniture, rooms for games and recreational activities, as well as facilities for communication and emotional expression. Sessions in such rooms increase the quality of contact, reduce conflicts, and promote the consolidation of affective relationships.

**Support Programs for families:** Many European prisons collaborate with non-governmental organizations, social workers, and psychologists to provide material and emotional support to families. Regular meetings, workshops, counseling sessions, as well as joint recreational activities are organized to reduce tensions and family stress.

**Recreational and cultural activities:** To enhance social cohesion and maintain morale, prisons implement cultural programs (concerts, theater, exhibitions), sports activities, picnics, and other social events. In some cases, these are organized in partnership with schools, civic organizations, and local communities to ensure a more friendly and participatory environment.

**Results:** These infrastructural measures and support activities have confirmed the positive results of research: reducing stress levels, creating a calmer and safer climate, and, consequently, improving the family and emotional relationships of inmates.

### Benefits of Methods and Techniques in European Penitentiary Systems

The application of these methods has had a significant impact on the mental and emotional well-being of inmates and their family relationships:

- Reducing anxiety and stress: regular contact and specialized support have led to a decrease in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders.
- Maintaining and increasing family ties: private visits, family therapy, and educational programs have allowed the prevention of ruptures and the consolidation of parental and marital relationships.
- Facilitating social reintegration: inmates with stable family relationships and emotional support manifest a faster pace of reintegration and a lower rate of recidivism.
- Improving the prison climate: recreational and cultural activities have contributed to reducing tensions and creating a more humane and solidary environment.

### Case Study and Good European Practices

A concrete example is offered by **the Netherlands**, where the standardization of methods and techniques in prisons has led to a 20% reduction in recidivism.

- **The „Family Support Program“** includes private visits, family counseling, and access to recreational activities, being considered a model of good practice and success.

**Sweden and Norway**, other countries at the forefront of penitentiary reforms, have also adopted similar interventions, with visible results in reducing stress among inmates and in increasing satisfaction related to family life.

### Conclusion

The methods and techniques used in European prisons to support the family and emotional health of inmates and their family members prove that investments in infrastructure, specialized interventions, and staff training yield concrete results. The application and continuous development of these practices are essential for respecting fundamental human rights, for reducing recidivism, and for a successful social reintegration.

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