

Jami'an:

Supporting Families Separated by Prison



About Maslaha

Maslaha means working for the common good. We work in shared struggle with Muslim communities to live free from racism and oppression in all its forms. We work in solidarity with Muslims in prison and through this we understand the wider impact imprisonment has on the family. Our work is rooted in practical change, critical learning and public imagination and operates at a local and systemic level.

This resource can also be translated in to other languages. Please contact us at info@maslaha.org to request Jami'an in the language of preference.

maslaha

E: info@maslaha.org

X: [@maslaha](https://twitter.com/maslaha)

IG: [@maslaha_uk](https://www.instagram.com/maslaha_uk)

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Credits

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In solidarity with those who remain in prison, and their families.



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This resource has been created at a time when Muslims make up 18% of the prison population (as opposed to 5% of the general population) – a record high¹. This means that more and more families have loved ones that have been taken from them and locked away.

This is not a normal situation for families to be in and can cause a lot of stress and anxiety. It's natural to feel overwhelmed trying to navigate the legal and prison system, especially when also dealing with the sense of loss from a loved one being removed from the home. We've heard from many Muslims that they have not received proper support to understand administrative processes. They have not known where to ask for help or were reluctant to challenge a discriminatory system that community members have had negative experiences with.

This resource is designed to ease that pressure and stress, so that families can focus on providing emotional support to their loved ones in prison. It provides basic information on how to find out where your loved one is, how to contact them and arrange visits, and send money and parcels. We hope this resource will help remove some of the fear and the sense of isolation in trying to make sense

¹ As of March 2024. See: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/SN04334.pdf>

of administrative processes or communicating with institutions, especially where there is an understandable lack of trust.

It's important for us as a Muslim community to remember that brothers and sisters in prison are still part of our Ummah. Islam's approach to justice is rooted in understanding the context in which any harm takes place, and focusing on the repair of relations.

Jami'an in Arabic translates to 'all together' - all together we can support those facing challenges to find a better way to live.

**“Verily with hardship comes ease...”
(Quran; 94:5-6).**

Locating your loved one

If your family member or friend has been given a prison sentence after appearing in court, there are a couple of ways to find out which prison they have been placed in:

1. The easiest and quickest way is usually to call the court where they were sentenced, and ask what prison they are being taken to. You should receive a response almost immediately. Prison buses leave the court at set times during the day so your family or friend may leave around lunch time or at the end of the day. Do not be afraid to ring the court room more than once, on the same day if needed. You can find the number of any court in England and Wales here:

<https://www.find-court-tribunal.service.gov.uk/>

2. There is also a 'find a prisoner' service that you can access by sending an email to **findaprisoner@justice.gov.uk**. It can take a number of days to receive a response and you will need to include further information such as the name and date of birth of the person. You can find out what information you need to provide here:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-prisoner>

Prison number

Your family member or friend will be assigned a prison number on arrival in prison. This will be made up of 7 characters beginning with a letter, followed by 4 digits, and ending with two letters. You can find out their prison number by asking.

Example: A1234EK

It is important that you note down the prison number as soon as possible as you will need it for any communication with the prison – such as sending a letter, booking a visit, or sending money.

This prison number will stay the same even if the person is moved to another prison, or they end up in prison another time, even if it is to a different prison.

Sending money

Each person has their own prison 'bank' account to which they can receive money. The safest and easiest way to send money to them is online via:

<https://www.gov.uk/send-prisoner-money>

You will need the person's name, prison number and date of birth. You can send money using any Visa, Mastercard or Maestro debit card. It is completely free and usually takes less than 3 working days to reach their prison account.

When using this service please make sure you get to the 'payment successful' page where you will receive a confirmation number. If you have the confirmation number and the money has left your account, you can be sure it is on its way to the person's prison account.

Payment successful

Your confirmation number is

6AB12345

[Print this page](#)

Payment to:	John Doe
Amount:	£10
Date payment made:	01/01/2024
Confirmation number:	6AB12345

What happens next

1. We'll email you a copy of this confirmation page. Please check your spam folder.
2. Money usually takes less than 3 working days to reach a prisoner's account, but may take longer.

Arranging visits

Remember, for your loved one, being in prison and having their freedom taken away can come as a shock. Sometimes your loved one can feel ashamed and may not want their family - especially children or parents - to see them. They might find it hard to express this, so if they refuse to see you or tell you not to visit, try not to be upset. Try and give them some space and attempt to speak to them about it at a later time. Remind them how much they are missed by the whole family, and reassure them that you are there to support them.

If you would like to visit someone in prison within the first 72 hours (3 days) after they have been sentenced you may be able to book a 'reception visit'. This can be arranged by calling the prison visit booking line. You can find the booking line number for each prison at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>

Sometimes these numbers are very busy, so it is best to call at the earliest opportunity, for example when the booking line opens – usually around 9.30am. If you do not get through the first time, try again until you speak to someone to book the reception visit. You will need the name of the person in prison, and the names and dates of births of each visitor, usually a maximum of 3 people. Some families have called over 20 times before being able to speak to anybody.

After 72 hours, you can still use the prison visiting booking line to arrange a visit. Each person in prison has a visitor list that they have to complete with all the names of people that might come to visit them at some point during their sentence. Your loved one will need to make sure your name and those of other visitors are included on their list before you can book a visit. When you arrange a visit, your loved one will then need to submit a list of visitors expected for that specific visit. They will then receive a visiting order (VO) with these names on it. Only those names on the VO will be allowed to visit.

The number of visits a person in prison can have depends on a number of factors e.g. if they are sentenced or on remand, the level of privilege scheme they are on, and the amount of people the prison can accommodate in the visit hall. It may take longer for visitor lists to be approved depending on the security level of a prison – there are usually additional security checks in A (high security) prison estates.

When you call to book a visit, the person on the phone will advise you of the dates and times available for a visit. Once the visit is booked, they will also provide you with a reference number.

Online booking

The prison visit telephone booking line can be extremely busy, so you can book visits at most prisons online. You can check on <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales> to see if the prison you'd like to visit is part of the online booking system.

You will need the person's name, location, prison number, and date of birth.

The names of all visitors need to be included on the visitors list and the VO before you can use the online booking system. (Be aware that any update to the visitors list or VO can sometimes take up to 2 weeks.) You will also need an email address, telephone number, the names and dates of birth of all the people planning to visit.

You will be asked to select 3 different dates and times that you can visit and the prison will email you back confirming the exact visit date and time. This is usually within 3 working days.

Please remember that the visit booking systems can vary from one prison to another.

“Visit days are some of the best days when in prison, you look forward to these days like no other. It gives you a feeling of normality spending time with your loved ones.”

(Former Prisoner)

The Visit

Please make sure you arrive early for the visit especially if it is your first time. Visitors can be refused entry if they arrive late. There should be a clearly signposted visitor's entrance. If travelling by car, remember to check for parking before travelling to the prison. It is usually best to leave as many items as possible at home or in the car such as jewellery, hats, gloves etc. The visitor centre will usually have lockers to store small items such as phones and wallets. There should be a bathroom for visitors to use before and after the visit.

Each visitor will need to bring a valid photo I.D. with them, such as a passport, driving licence or EU identity card. This will be checked on arrival at the visitor's centre to confirm the identity of visitors. Please also bring along the VO if you have received one. Although the prison should have all details regarding the visit, it is always useful to bring the VO. If your name is not on the VO or if there is another name on the VO, you will not be allowed into the visit.

You are allowed to bring in money in the form of £1 coins (usually to a maximum of £5 per visitor), to purchase refreshments for yourself and the person you're visiting in the visit hall. If there is more than one visitor, you can all take coins. Please remember you are not allowed to take in any notes - only coins.

You can only bring in items from an approved list² to give to your loved one during a scheduled visit, such as clothes or shoes. The person in prison will have to obtain permission for the items before you can bring them in. Food and drinks are not allowed to be taken into the prison. You may want to bring home cooked food for your loved one but this is generally not allowed. Individual prisons have different rules.

Body searches

To enter the visit hall, visitors must consent to being searched – the prison has a list of unauthorised items they will check visitors for. This will usually consist of a ‘rub down’ search by a prison officer of the same gender. Remember to check all your pockets before entering the visit hall.

Sometimes, you will be asked to go through a metal detector and be scanned over by a metal detector wand. If you forget an item in your pocket that sets off the metal detectors, e.g. keys, don’t worry – you will be able to put this in your locker before coming back through the metal detector. If you refuse the search, you will not be allowed into the prison.

² You can find more information here regarding the approved items and how to get in touch with the prison: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>



We have heard that some prisons may ask to search under a women's headscarf/hijab. If this is the case, you have the right to ask that this search takes place in a private space with no men present.

Dogs

Most prisons will have a sniffer dog used to detect drugs. You will be asked to stand on the spot whilst the dog walks past you - the dog may brush you as it walks past. Do not be afraid as this is a regular procedure in most prisons and the dogs do not bark or jump and will not harm you. If the dog sniffs anything³ that is not authorised to enter the prison, they will only sit down next to the person.

³ You can find more information here regarding the prohibited items and how to get in touch with the prison: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>

Providing emotional support to your loved one

‘Fear not. Indeed, I am with you both; I hear and I see’ Surah Taha Ayat 46

Being in prison and having your freedom taken away is not natural, even though it is presented as a normal part of our society. You and your loved one may feel a huge sense of loss, anger and shock. Some people may even refuse to believe it's happening to them. This is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Your loved one might display behaviour that is out of character for them – anger and resentment – and they might refuse to speak or see you or other friends. They may begin to doubt themselves and feel they are losing sense of who they are. Little things might cause them to become upset towards you e.g. money taking longer than expected to arrive into their account, and they may appear ungrateful for all the effort you are making to support them. This can be hard to understand and accept, especially when you are also feeling upset and grieving their absence.

‘O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. Allah is truly with those who are patient.’

**Surah Al-Baqarah,
Ayat 153**

Whilst it's important to acknowledge the stress your loved one may be feeling and provide some space for them, you should also let them know the hurt that this behaviour causes you and the rest of the family, and talk about the need to support each other.

It's also natural for families to want to protect their loved ones. You may think you shouldn't speak about what's happening with younger members of the family, or feel the person in prison should behave in certain ways. Fear is a healthy feeling that Allah created in us to warn us of danger and protect us. However, sometimes this fear can make us over-anxious about children getting into trouble and ending up in prison if they do something they are not supposed to. It's important to be aware of how such a fear might cause us to limit our children's actions.



Contacting someone in prison

Post

People in prison can send and receive letters to stay in contact with family and friends. Letters are invaluable and precious to a person in prison: it is a way to keep in touch with their life and with people outside of prison, and can help them deal with the loneliness and isolation of being away from home.

Sending a gift or a card to someone on their birthday or other special occasion is also an important reminder that they are valued and precious to their family, and that their presence is still something to be celebrated, regardless of what they have done. You should be able to send birthday cards and pictures in the post but your family or friend in prison may need to submit an application to the prison before you can send gifts or parcels.

You also need to check the approved items list⁴ which is available from the prison. Individual prisons have different rules, so it is

⁴ You can find more information about approved items and how to get in touch with the prison here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>

always best to check with the prison before sending anything.

When writing to someone in prison, make sure you include their prison number after their name when writing the address⁵ on the envelope, to ensure there's no delay in it reaching them.

Phone calls

Your loved one will also have access to a phone that they can use to call family or friends. This is a 'pay as you go' service which needs to be topped up from their prison bank account. Each person in prison also has a 'phone pin' containing the names and telephone numbers of people they wish to call. They will need to make sure any contact number they wish to call is on this phone pin before they are able to call. Calling mobile numbers is more expensive than landline numbers.

⁵You can find the prison address from a google search or by visiting the prisons page on:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>

Emails

Some prisons have an 'email a prisoner' service - this is much quicker than posting a letter. There is a small charge to use the service and you will also need the person's prison number. Your loved one in prison can also respond using this service, if you tick the option for a 'reply sheet' to be paid for. If they respond, you will be emailed a scan of their written response. You can find more information regarding this service and if it is available at the prison you want to contact, here:

<https://www.emailaprisoner.com/>

Be aware that emails and letters/packages will be opened and read by prison staff before they are passed onto your family member or friend.



Prison Chaplaincy

Your loved one should always be able to practice their religion in prison – here's information about what they can expect which you can share with them. All prisons have a chaplaincy team that will include a Muslim Chaplain. The Muslim Chaplain will usually speak to every Muslim entering prison during their induction, usually in the first week of arriving.

- All Muslims will be able to attend Friday prayers in prison. They will also be able to obtain a Qur'an, prayer mat, prayer hat and prayer beads, books, CD's etc from the Chaplaincy and/or the weekly canteen sheet.
- In many prisons, the Muslim Chaplain also arranges teaching groups, organises events for Eid, Mawlid etc, and provides support if a loved one passes away. They also provide general support and if your loved one is having any difficulties or is feeling down, they can speak to the Muslim chaplain.
- Your loved one can contact the Chaplaincy via a general application or by visiting the Chaplaincy department. Chaplains also regularly

visit residential areas of the prison and people can speak to them then.

- ◇ Families can also contact the Chaplaincy by calling the prison's main number and asking to be put through to the Chaplaincy department. Some prisons will only put families through to the Chaplaincy if there is an emergency situation like a death or serious illness within the family.

Ramadan and Eid

All Muslims in prison will be given the option to fast during the month of Ramadan. The prison will provide breakfast packs the night before so people can eat this at Suhoor time when they are in their cells. In the evenings, Muslims will be given food boxes/flasks which keep the food warm until Iftaar time. During the month of Ramadan, there will be a Muslim working in the prison kitchen to arrange all the Iftaar boxes and breakfast packs.

Eid prayers will also be performed at the prison chaplaincy on Eid morning and people will be given a chance to shower before these prayers. Pay phones will also be switched on so people can phone their loved ones on Eid morning. After Eid prayers, people will sometimes have the option to eat together at the chaplaincy.

Safety/Welfare

Each prison has a *Safer Custody Team*⁶ that you can contact if you have any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a loved one.

If there is an emergency or you have an immediate concern about the safety of somebody in prison, then you should contact the prison emergency telephone number and ask for the orderly officer or duty governor, or Muslim Chaplain.

If you have concerns about someone's health or safety and do not want to report it to the prison, please see some of the support services available at the end of this resource.

⁶ The telephone numbers for both these teams can be found by selecting the specific prison on: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>

Complaints

We understand that people in prison may be very reluctant to submit a complaint. There is an understandable lack of trust in the complaint process, and a fear that doing so could have negative repercussions for the person. We encourage people to use the complaints process even if they feel they will not receive a sufficient response. It will at least create a record of the incident, which can be used to escalate the matter with authorities responsible for holding the prison service accountable.

If your loved one wants to make a complaint e.g. if they have suffered discrimination from officers or had their rights denied, they can submit a complaint form (COMP1 form). If they feel the complaint is not properly resolved, they can appeal the outcome (COMP 1A form) and also escalate it to the governor (COMP 2 form).

You can let your loved one know that they can refer to the 'Prison Service Instruction' (PSI) manual that is available in all prison libraries, when making a complaint. This sets out the standards prisons should be operating to, and gives guidance on different rights prisoners have. Including information about how the prison is in breach of specific obligations can be an effective tool to receive a more sufficient response to the complaint.

If they still feel it has not been resolved to their satisfaction, they can get in touch with us at Maslaha for further support. We are working with lawyers who can investigate the complaint to see if there are grounds to escalate it further.

Please ask them to contact us and send us copies of all the complaint forms to: Freepost – MASLAHA

Release

On the day of release, your loved one will be given a £76 discharge grant and any belongings they wish to take with them. They will also be given a travel voucher if they are being released far from home. Your loved one will be expected to report to their local probation office on the day of release or as soon as they possibly can. They will spend the remainder of their sentence (now called 'licence') in the community working with their designated probation officer, to help them with issues such as skills training, employment, addiction support. For more information see:

<https://unlock.org.uk/guide/prison/>.

If you are worried about housing for your loved one on release, see this helpful guide:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/help_if_youre_homeless_ex_prisoners

Other support services for people in prison and their families

◆ Coming Home

Coming Home is a free, confidential counselling service provided by Muslim therapists for Muslims harmed by the prison system, as well as their families. Coming Home commits to providing a non-securitised, non-judgmental and inclusive space, and allows people to find comfort and safety in their faith if and how they choose to do so. Coming Home is co-developed by Maslaha, The Lantern Initiative and Dr Tarek Younis. Find out more at: <https://www.maslaha.org/Project/coming-home-project> or write to us at FREEPOST Maslaha.

◆ Osmani Trust

Osmani Trust's Bridge Programme provides mentoring for minority ethnic and/or Muslim adults aged 18-40. It is open to those engaging with Probation services and living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets or Newham. They provide support in Accommodation, Employment, Education/training, Health, Drugs and alcohol misuse, Finance, benefits and debt, Family relationships, and Positive mindset. For more information contact ashik.ali@osmanitrust.org or call 0207-247-8080.

◆ Nejma Collective

A UK-based collective of Muslim volunteers who work in solidarity with people in prisons by sharing resources (financial grants and books) and mutual support. They provide small grants of £65 that can be used to buy items from the prison shop, from companies approved by the prison for mail order, and for the purchase of books, and is sent to their prison bank account. You can write to them at FREEPOST – *Nejma Collective* for a grant application form or look for their advert in Inside Times (the newspaper which goes out across the prison estate in the UK.)

◆ Himaya Haven

Himaya Haven works with minority ethnic and Muslim communities in the Birmingham area, and specialises in supporting families of loved ones in custody and prison. They provide culturally-sensitive services to families during their journey through the criminal justice system – arrest, sentencing, imprisonment and release, including holistic support, advice, guidance, information, coping therapies and access to mainstream services. <http://himayahaven.co.uk/>

◆ Kids of Colour

Kids of Colour is an anti-racist youth work organisation, committed to racial justice for young people of colour in Greater Manchester. This includes offering advocacy support to young people of colour (individuals or groups), and families affected by the criminal injustice system. They use their expertise and experience to put pressure on institutions and organisations, offer guidance, and connect people to legal networks. As an organisation, they remain independent from the police. For more info see: <https://kidsofcolour.com/>

◆ Muslim Women in Prison

The *Muslim Women in Prison* (MWIP) rehabilitation project is a community-led, culturally and faith-informed programme that supports women primarily, but not exclusively, from HMP/YOI New Hall and Askham Grange prisons in West Yorkshire. MWIP is a specialist frontline service that supports women to mitigate and overcome the huge challenges that they face in their journeys back into the community. In the process, MWIP has become only too aware of the need to work collaboratively at a very practical level with agencies including prisons, probation services, and allied criminal justice system (CJS) and community agencies to mobilise tailored input.

◆ Zahid Mubarek Trust

Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) supports people from minority ethnic communities that are in or leaving prison, and their families. If someone has been treated badly in prison they offer guidance to families and advocacy on behalf of the person affected to ensure their safety, wellbeing and statutory rights are upheld. People in prison and their families can report incidents directly to them. In the past they have been able to liaise with prison authorities to remove potential threats and barriers, and have helped prisoners and their families navigate internal mechanisms for resolving concerns. ZMT also provides comprehensive support to those leaving prison, including training with practical work opportunities, both in custody and in the community. <https://thezmt.org/our-work/rehabilitation>

◆ SOAS Detainee Support

SOAS Detainee Support (SDS) supports those in immigration detention to take control of their cases and resist their imprisonment and deportation. They offer emotional and practical support including visiting those in detention, as well as help finding a solicitor or medical expert, bringing toiletries and other essential items, and campaigning alongside people in detention. They do not offer legal advice. Contact them on: <http://www.soasdetaineesupport.co.uk/contact/> 07438 407 570 or s.det.sup@gmail.com

◆ SHEWISE

SHEWISE is a London based charity, providing bilingual support to South Asian and Middle Eastern women experiencing the Criminal Justice System, in the areas of Domestic abuse, Wellbeing, Skills development, Enterprise development. They accommodate pre and post release work through a variety of workshops including personal development and healing. The 'Reconnect and Rebuild' project provides advice, guidance, signposting, counselling and skills development training leading to achieving sustainable changes in income through employment or business start-ups for women affected by the criminal justice system. <https://www.shewise.org/> Contact them on 0333 1881 505 or support@shewise.org

◆ The Lantern Initiative

The Lantern Initiative is a Muslim-run volunteer-based group currently based across Peterborough and Leicester. Together with counsellors and psychotherapists, they facilitate events and workshops, focused on various mental health and wellbeing-related topics to empower and support communities to seek and access relevant support <https://www.thelanterninitiative.co.uk/>

◆ PACT

PACT is a national charity that supports people in prison and their families. They provide a free helpline for families with a loved one in the criminal justice system. This helpline provides advice and information on all aspects of the justice system, from what happens when a loved one is arrested, to visiting a prison, to preparing for release. They can provide practical information, emotional support, and refer you to additional support should you need it. This is a free, confidential service – you do not have to give your name if you do not want to. To contact the helpline: freephone 0808 808 2003

◆ The Community Chaplaincy Association

The Community Chaplaincy Association (CCA) is an umbrella group that supports a network of members to work alongside prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, offering mentoring and holistic support within prison, though the gates and out in the community. They bring together supportive communities who welcome people coming out of the criminal justice system nationally. To find the different chaplaincy groups around the country who provide support – <https://www.communitychaplaincy.org.uk/>

◆ Mindworks

Mindworks provides counselling, including faith based and culturally sensitive, confidential services. They offer a safe place of neutrality with a non-judgemental approach. A space for you to find healing in your faith or spirituality. You can book telephone, Skype or Zoom counselling sessions where ever you are and at a time convenient to you. For more information email: referrals@mindworksuk.co.uk or see <https://www.mindworksuk.co.uk/counselling>

◆ Inspired Minds

Inspired Minds is a faith based, grassroots mental health charity in London that works predominantly with those from an Islamic faith. They provide faith sensitive therapy for Muslims including spiritual and Islamic models of psychological therapy. Additional languages we cover: Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, French, Gujarati, Hausa, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu. They provide Face-to-Face counselling, Telephone counselling, Video counselling.

◆ Eden Foundation

Eden Foundation is a charity in Handsworth, serving and welcoming Muslims from all backgrounds and facing different challenges in the local communities of North West Birmingham. They provide support and education for young people and adults, including Islamic knowledge and life skills, as well as sports for young people. Tel No: 07973 631 732; email: admin@edenfoundation.org.uk; <https://edenfoundation.org.uk/>

◆ Welcome Directory

The *Welcome Directory* provides information and contact details on mosques across the UK that welcome and appropriately support those leaving prison and their families. They include mosques in Manchester, Leicester, Cardiff, Maidstone, Southend, Woking and a number of London-based Mosques. The services offered include mentoring, housing support, counselling, and skills training.

This resource provides support to families, whose loved ones are in prison, about how to navigate the prison system. It provides basic information on how to find out where your loved one is, how to contact them and arrange visits, and send money and parcels.

We've heard from many Muslims that they have not received proper support to understand administrative processes. We hope this resource will help remove some of the fear and sense of isolation that comes with trying to make sense of the prison system and communicating with them.



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