

Debt in prison, and how it works

When we talk about debt in prison, we mean the debts that prisoners owe to each other. If the prison knows a prisoner is in debt and their safety is at risk, they will take action to keep the prisoner safe.

Prisoners are not supposed to lend, borrow or trade items between each other, but this does happen and can sometimes result in prisoners owing debts to each other.

Prisons work hard to keep prisons safe, but items like illegal drugs and mobile phones are also traded, and can result in large debts building up between prisoners.

These items are sold by prisoners for much more in prison than they cost outside. People who sell these items in prison are often linked with criminal gangs in the community.

Items that are traded can be things that are allowed in prison, such as vaping materials, prescription medication, clothes, food and other canteen items.

Prisoners who lend these items to others will often expect a lot more in return than was originally borrowed, which can make it difficult to pay the debt back.

Once a prisoner is in debt to another prisoner, it can be hard to get out of it, and not paying these debts can have consequences, like bullying, blackmail and violence.



What should I do if I think someone is in debt?

You should tell the prison straight away by contacting the Safer Custody number (or you can ring our helpline on 0808 808 2003 if you do not know the safer custody number)



Encourage the prisoner to:

- Speak to a staff member about it, so they can help
- Speak to a staff member to ask for help with drug misuse, if you think they are in debt because they are using drugs
- Only use the **prison pin phones** to make calls. If they have or are using a mobile phone this will be costing them a lot of money and could get them into trouble.



You should NEVER:

- **Get involved in trying to pay back a prisoner's debt for them. This could make the situation worse, and you could get into trouble yourself, both with the police or a criminal gang if they are involved in the debt.**
- **Transfer money into a prison money account or outside bank account for someone you don't know, even if the prisoner tells you to. Tell the prison if this happens.**

Phone the police and the prison straight away if you are being threatened or blackmailed by someone else about a prisoner's debt.



For advice and support on all aspects of arrest, going to court and prison.

Helpline opening hours:
Monday - Friday 9am - 8pm
Saturday and Sunday 10am - 3pm