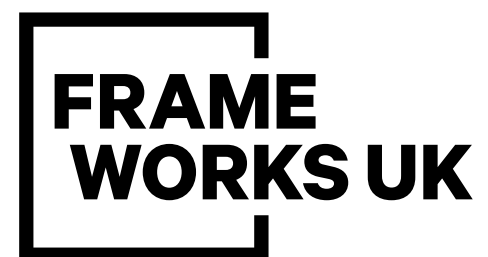


Bridges from prison

A communications toolkit for making
the case for jobs and relationships



Supported by



Contents

This toolkit builds on the communications principles set out in Bridges from Prison: making the case for jobs and relationships. You'll find practical tips and tools for anyone communicating about people in and leaving prison. This includes people working in the criminal justice sector, media and content creators, and people with lived experience.

It was created by FrameWorks UK, a not-for-profit organisation which collaborates with charities and other mission-driven organisations to communicate about social issues in ways that will create change. FrameWorks researches how people understand social issues and uses this knowledge to develop and test strategic communications to help organisations create change. FrameWorks UK is the sister organisation of the FrameWorks Institute in the US.

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Introduction

Evidence shows job opportunities and supportive relationships, such as family, are two of the most significant things that will help people to lead a decent life after prison and not reoffend. We call these 'bridges from prison'.

This toolkit draws from our latest research into criminal justice in the UK, which focuses on how to frame communications in order to make the case for creating these bridges from prison. The principles in this toolkit can be applied to any form of communications, from reports to social media, speeches to funding applications.

In 2016 we published research about how to build support for alternatives to prison, with an accompanying [toolkit created by Transform Justice](#). This new research approaches criminal justice reform from another, equally important angle: while prisons do exist, we need to do things differently to help people do well after they leave. [You can read more about our research methodology and findings here.](#)

FrameWorks would like to thank Porticus for supporting this work and also Nina Champion, Director of the Criminal Justice Alliance, and Christopher Stacey, Director of Support and Development at Clinks for their invaluable feedback.



WHAT IS FRAMING?

Framing is the choices we make about which ideas we share and how we share them. It's what we emphasise, how we explain an issue, and what we leave unsaid.

These choices affect how people think, feel and act.

Frames are more than key words or phrases. Frames are the ideas and principles that provide a scaffolding for you to build your communications, helping you to tell the same powerful story but in different ways – adapted for your audience and channels.

Our communications challenges

When we want to communicate the importance of bridges from prison, there are particular obstacles in people's thinking which we need to overcome.

1.

An emphasis on punishment

People tend to think of prison as being *more* about punishment than rehabilitation. This leads to more focus on why people should *stay* in prison rather than thinking about what it takes to enable people to live a better life after they leave.

2.

Deservingness and fatalism

When people do think about rehabilitation, they tend to focus on who 'deserves' it and this depends on what type of crime they committed. They assume that how people do after they leave prison is up to the individual and believe fatalistically that some people will always go back to committing crimes.

3.

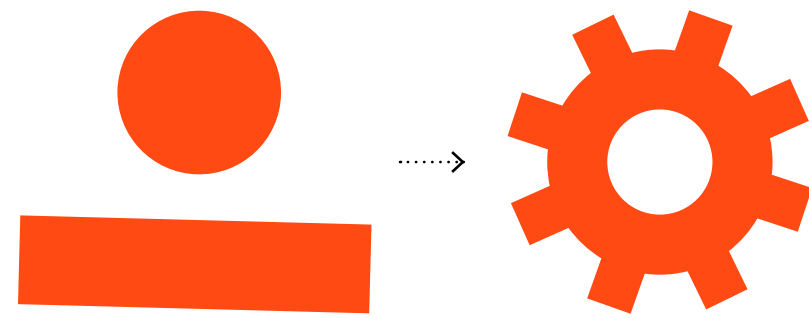
Prejudiced assumptions

There's a prejudiced tendency to assume that people from minoritised ethnic groups (such as people from Black and Asian backgrounds) and those from low-income backgrounds are more likely to return to a 'life of crime' because 'their communities' are more disposed to commit crimes – rather than seeing the structural challenges and racism that affect people's life outcomes.



We can overcome these obstacles in thinking by making choices about how we frame our communications

We have two tasks:



Shift focus from thinking about *individuals* to thinking about the *systems* that need to be improved



Build understanding of what support for people leaving prison could look like and why it's needed

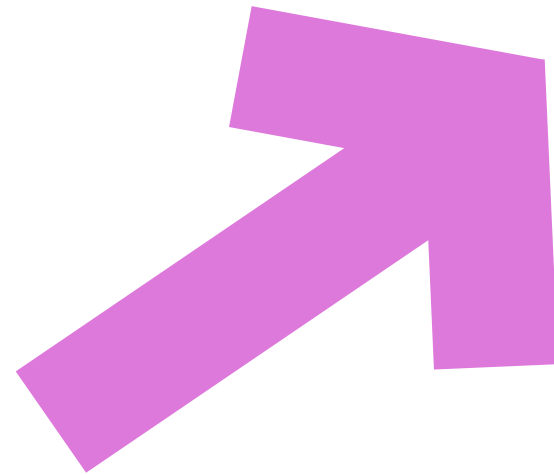
Communications principles at a glance

1.



Talk about people leaving prison as *people first* to humanise the conversation

2.



Focus on making progress for our society to show why supporting people leaving prison matters

3.



Use the metaphor of 'bridges' to explain what supports are needed

4.



Appeal to pragmatism and emphasise practical solutions to expand understanding

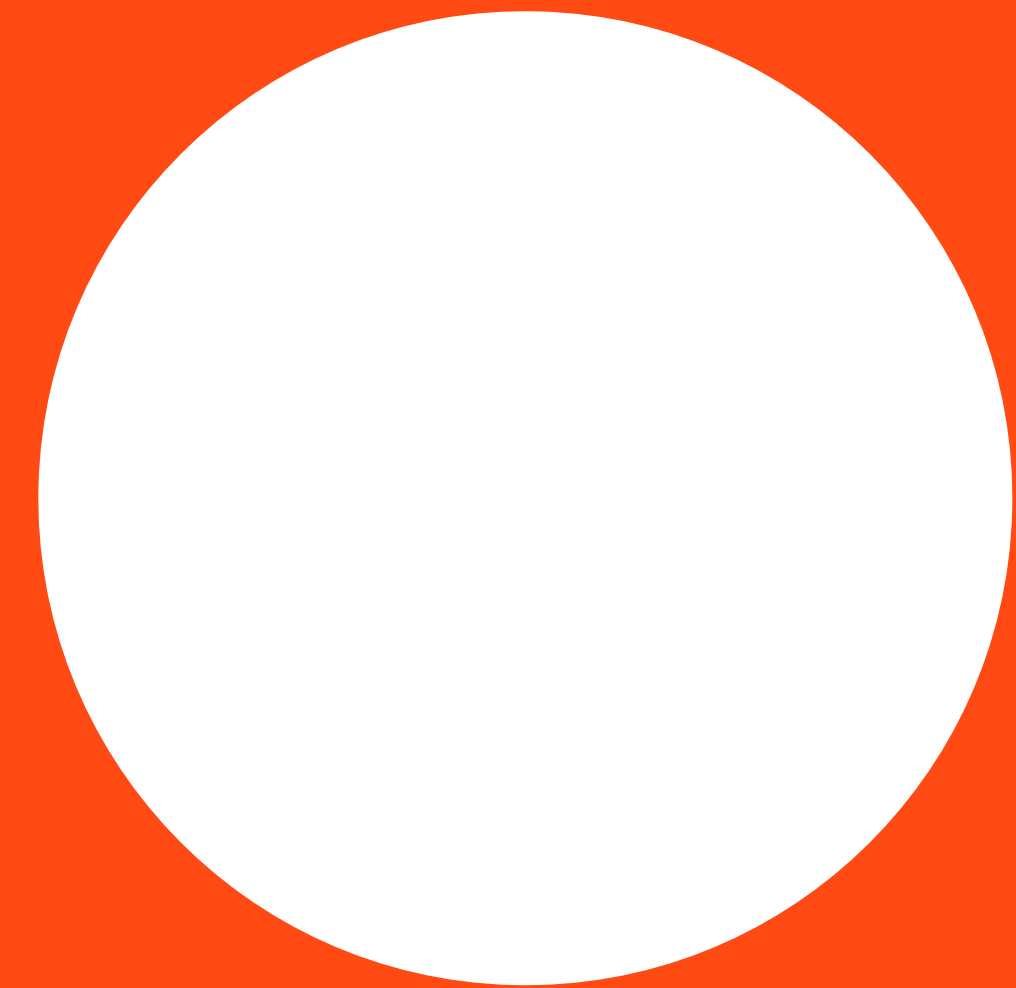
5.



Tell stories that show how solutions work to explain how we can do better

1.

**Talk about people
leaving prison as
*people first***



1. Talk about people leaving prison as *people first*

Choose terms that humanise people leaving prison – laying the foundations for building empathy and shifting focus away from crimes.

Our research shows that people have a tendency to ‘other’ and dehumanise people who have served time in prison, so efforts should be made to avoid triggering this thinking.

HOW TO DO IT

- **Use humanising terms** – such as ‘people leaving prison’ or ‘people who have been in prison’, rather than dehumanising phrases like ‘ex-offenders’.
- **Talk about** life ‘after prison’, ‘after release’, and so on, rather than using language like ‘re-entering society’, which suggests prisons are not part of our society.



A few examples of how we can use more humanising terms

FROM THIS...	TO THIS...
Prisoners	People in prison
Ex-prisoners	People leaving prison
Offenders	People who have <left/served time in> prison
Ex-offenders	People with criminal records
Probationers	People on probation

1. Talk about people leaving prison as *people* first

What this could look like

Examples

INSTEAD OF...

“Ex-prisoners are struggling to successfully reintegrate into society. The criminal justice system needs more resources to improve reintegration efforts and help ex-offenders find jobs so they’re less likely to re-offend.”

TRY...

“When **people** leave prison, they often face obstacles, making it hard for them to **adjust to this next stage in their lives**. Offering support to find stable jobs is one way we can help **people leaving prison** – benefitting them and all of our society.”

WHY?

While both examples make broadly the same point with the same intentions, the second uses more humanising language. It refers to people leaving prison as people, rather than ‘ex-prisoners’ and ‘ex-offenders’.

Also by spelling out what concepts like ‘reintegration’ really mean eg. ‘adjust to the next stage in their lives’ we can build a clearer picture of why this is important in a more human and relatable way.

INSTEAD OF...

“Ban the Box is an initiative that calls on UK employers to give ex-offenders a fair chance to compete for jobs.”

TRY...

“Ban the Box is an initiative that calls on UK employers to give **people** more **opportunities to find stable employment after prison**.”

WHY?

Again, replacing ‘ex-offenders’ with people-first language is more humanising.

Spelling out that people need opportunities for stable employment is likely to build more helpful understanding, rather than appealing to different people’s ideas of ‘fairness’ and implying ‘competition’ with other applicants who some may see as more deserving.

INSTEAD OF...

“Family days are a chance for prisoners to spend quality time with their loved ones in a relaxed and child-friendly setting. They help to maintain relationships which give inmates something positive to focus and build on.”

TRY...

“Family days are a chance for **people in prison** to spend quality time with their loved ones in a relaxed and child-friendly setting. They help to maintain relationships, providing something positive to focus and build on.”

WHY?

We can avoid labels like ‘prisoners’ and ‘inmates’ by using alternative terms or rephrasing slightly to avoid labelling altogether.

2.

**Focus on making
progress for our society**



2. Focus on making progress for our society

Use the idea of societal progress to highlight why it's important to support people leaving prison with jobs and relationships, and how the current system needs to be updated.

The idea of societal progress positions the need to support people leaving prison as a matter that we all have a stake in. It takes the issue beyond the individual.

HOW TO DO IT

- **Expand people's understanding** of why people leaving prison should be supported by saying it's essential if we are to move forward and make progress as a society.
- Use the idea of progress to **highlight issues with the current system**, talking about issues as 'out of date' and 'holding our country back'.

This is an example of a 'values frame'. Values frames tap into the deep shared beliefs that guide our thinking and behaviour. They establish a common ground around an idea that we hold as important.



2. Focus on making progress for our society

What this could look like

Examples				
	<p>“Supporting people to get jobs when they leave prison is essential if we are to progress as a country. People need to be able to earn money and support themselves, rather than being locked into joblessness and poverty. We can’t keep reinforcing these issues – we need to move forwards.”</p>	<p>“Maintaining relationships with family while in prison is a key factor in helping people to adjust and contribute to society when they leave. But right now, too many prisons are lagging behind and failing to provide access to in-cell telephones – effectively cutting people off from positive connections.”</p>	<p>“Innovating and improving should be at the heart of our society. It benefits us all. That’s why education and training is so vital for people in prison – enabling them to lead a better life when they leave.”</p>	<p>“Expecting people to get a job and turn their lives around after prison, without providing access to education and training during their sentence, is an outdated approach which we see failing time and again. If we are to move forward as a nation, we need our prison system to take fresh approaches that set people up for success.”</p>

Flexing the tone

We can use different language to get this idea of progress across and use it to both make the positive case for solutions and be critical of a lack of action and poor policies. Here are a few examples of how you can flex this idea.

POSITIVE TONE

	CRITICAL TONE
Moving forward	Outdated
Making progress	Lagging behind
Keeping pace	Falling behind
Positive changes that help us grow	A lack of innovation that holds us back
As a society, we believe in new ideas to improve how things work. Making our prison system fit for the 21 st century should be no different.	We are a country of innovators, but our prison system has been left in the past. We need to change this.

2. Focus on making progress for our society

What this could look like

Progress vs prosperity

We found that focusing on economic prosperity did not build support for changes in the way that talking about societal progress did. So, lead with progress or pragmatism rather than making a purely economic argument.

FOR EXAMPLE:

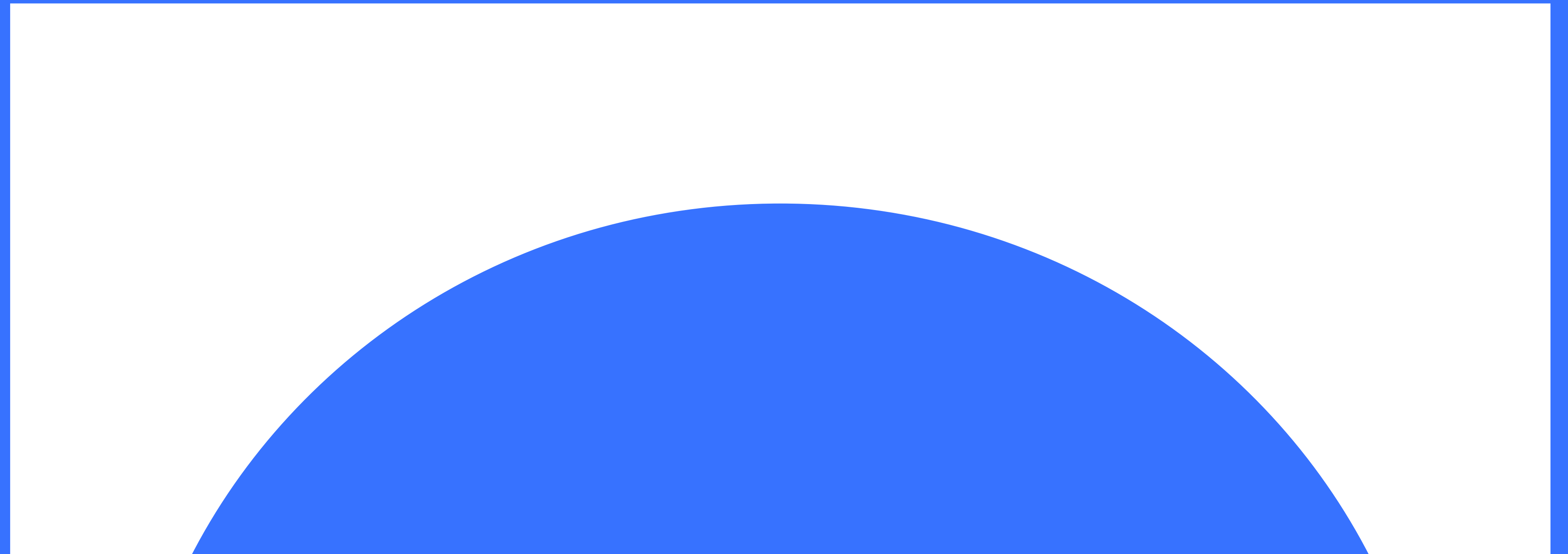
“**Our outdated system** leads to too many people leaving prison without the skills and opportunities for employment that they need. **It’s holding our country back.** Investing in education and training will mean people leaving prison can **contribute to our society** and our economy and, ultimately, will save money by reducing reoffending.”

By framing an economic argument using either the idea of progress or pragmatism, you can strengthen your point and show why this really matters.



3.

Use the metaphor of 'bridges'



3. Use the metaphor of 'bridges'

Use the metaphor of a bridge to explain what supporting people leaving prison looks like and build understanding that we, as a society, are responsible for making that happen.

The idea of connecting one place to another with a strong, supportive foundation helps people understand multiple aspects of the issue:

- People leaving prison need connections to society via employment/relationships.
- Leaving prison can be a hazardous experience without a clear pathway.
- Deliberate support constructed by people with resources and expertise is necessary to get people leaving prison where they want, and need, to be.

Metaphors give us new, yet familiar, ways to think about an issue. Explanatory metaphors provide a strong mental image, make abstract or complex concepts simple and concrete, and can provide a comparison which helps build people's understanding in a very immediate way.

HOW TO DO IT

- **Compare** leaving prison to crossing a river.
- **Focus on solutions** – the bridges (support) that must be put in place to help people find jobs and maintain relationships – to bridge the gap between prison and the rest of life.

FOR EXAMPLE:

“Leaving prison is like crossing over a wide river, and people leaving prison need bridges – such as employment opportunities and supportive relationships – to make their way to stable ground.”

3. Use the metaphor of 'bridges'

What this could look like

Tips

Resist the temptation to dial up the jeopardy by focusing on how dangerous or difficult the crossing is, as this can fuel fatalism and detract from the solutions we're trying to promote. People already understand that leaving prison is hard, but they lack an understanding of solutions.

Establish roles using the metaphor. Think about who is responsible for building and maintaining the bridges, and about the agency of people 'crossing over'.

INSTEAD OF...

"Leaving prison is like crossing a perilous river where, too often, people are left to sink or swim. We can't expect anyone to lead a good life after prison without supports like employment opportunities to bridge the gap."

TRY...

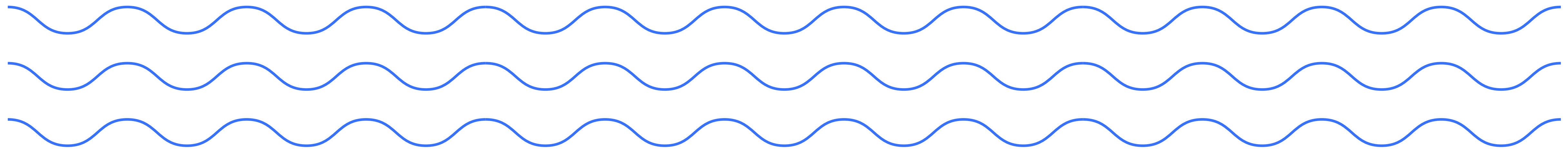
"Supportive relationships are like strong and stable bridges for people leaving prison. And, **just like bridges, these relationships need to be maintained.** Access to family visits and communication help keep relationships strong. That's why **we need our government to put these resources and programmes in place** and bridge the gap."

TRY...

"When people leaving prison are supported with education, training and job opportunities, it helps to **bridge the gap** – offering stability and support to help them on their way."

OR...

"When parents in prison have the opportunity to learn about parenting and communication skills, it strengthens positive relationships which act as a **strong and stable bridge** when they leave."



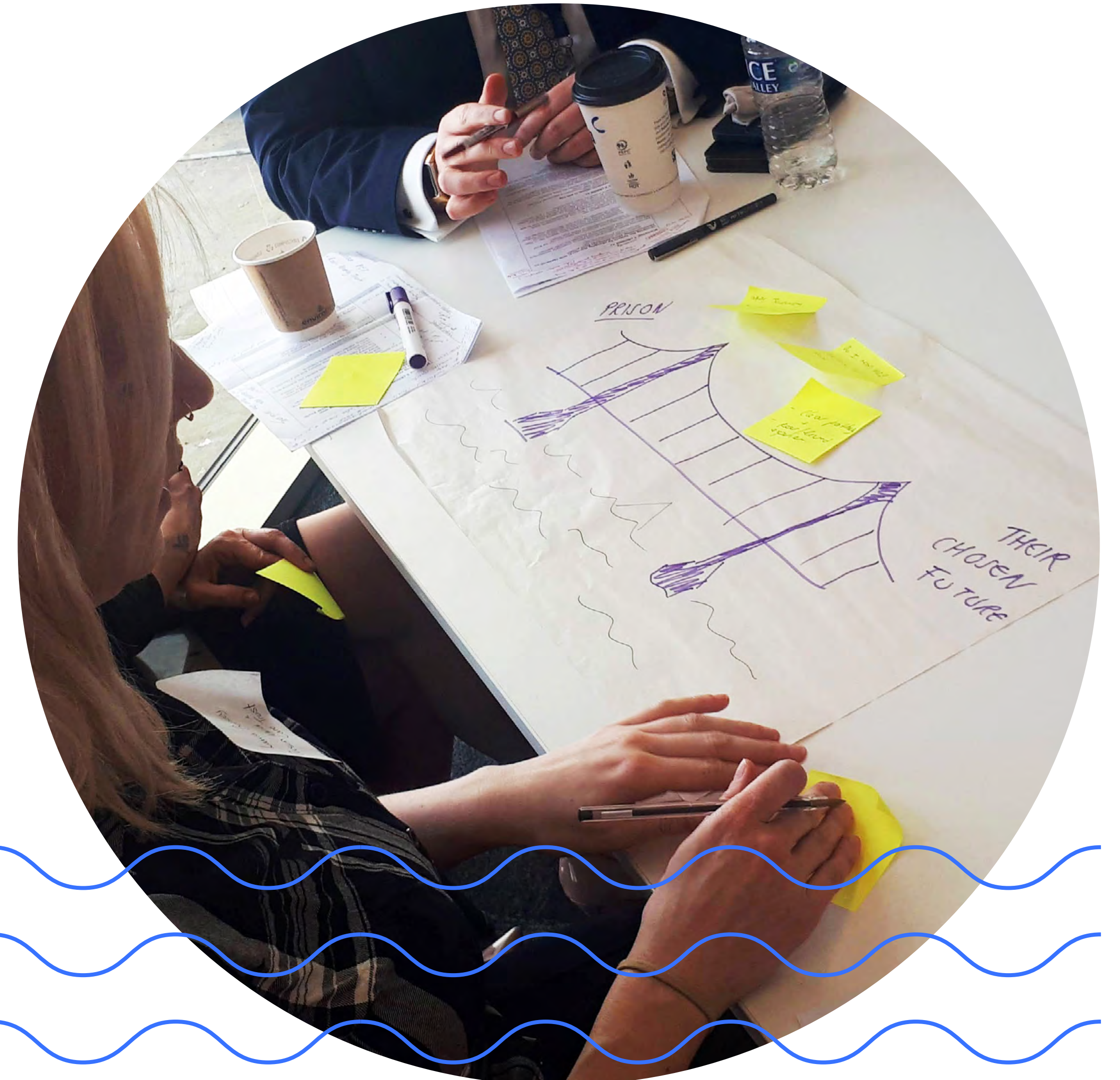
3. Use the metaphor of 'bridges'

What this could look like

Try it with your team

In pairs or small groups, think about applying this metaphor to jobs or relationships for people leaving prison.

- Draw a bridge
- Think about the different elements.
What supports might need to be in place?
Where are people crossing 'from' and 'to'?
What hazards are under the bridge?
- Annotate your drawing with the different elements,
and discuss.



4.

**Appeal to pragmatism
and emphasise
practical solutions**



4. Appeal to pragmatism and emphasise practical solutions

Use the idea of pragmatism – taking a practical, problem-solving approach – to expand understanding of what’s wrong with the current criminal justice system and build support for specific solutions.

This idea of pragmatism establishes common ground from which we can take people through solutions step-by-step and build understanding of why it makes sense to support people leaving prison.

HOW TO DO IT

- **Highlight** how the current system is not working as it should by appealing to pragmatism.
- **Make the case** for common-sense changes to the current system **by explaining** what practical actions need to be taken to support people leaving prison in finding and keeping jobs and maintaining relationships.
- **Present solutions** as practical answers to problems. And **connect** these changes to the benefit to all of society – for example, reducing reoffending.



4. Appeal to pragmatism and emphasise practical solutions

What this could look like

Flexing the frame

We can invoke this idea of pragmatism in different ways, using different language. And we can flex our tone for different audiences, channels and outputs.

“It’s illogical that we expect people leaving prison to turn their lives around while also actively reducing their job opportunities through blanket bans. A **more common-sense approach** to recruitment is needed such as...”

- We can be critical of current processes by calling out what doesn’t make sense and showing why that’s the case.
- We can offer solutions to improve processes and explicitly frame these as practical, logical, and so on.

“We know that supportive relationships can make all the difference for people leaving prison, **but it can be hard** to stay connected while serving time. **Practical solutions** include making sure families are able to visit people in prison and spend meaningful time together.”

- By setting out what supports people need, and showing how they are not always in place, we can show the need for a more practical approach.
- Presenting specific supports as practical helps to make the case for them.

“Poverty creates huge stress, so **it simply doesn’t make sense** that we expect people to turn their lives around after prison, without support to find jobs that can lift them out of poverty. As well as opening up more job opportunities, we need **practical support** like mentorships to set people up for success.”

- We can use pragmatism to help people better understand structural drivers of crime like poverty and inequality, and show how the right solutions can help to address them.

TIP

Talk explicitly about the solutions and support which would make our system work better. This helps to show people what change looks like, rather than just telling them, and is a good way to counter fatalism with a sense of efficacy and can-do.

Some useful words and phrases

Practical / Impractical

Problem-solving

Pragmatic

Logical / Illogical

Common sense

Sensible

It makes sense / It doesn’t make sense

5.

Tell stories that show how solutions work



5. Tell stories that show how solutions work

Tell stories which show the positive impact of supporting people leaving prison with jobs and relationships – to build people’s understanding of what’s possible with the right support.

HOW TO DO IT

- **Share stories** which show the difference jobs and relationships make to people leaving prison.
- **Use a step-by-step structure** to lead people through the story and make the causes and effects clear.
- **Include solutions** and demonstrate the **positive impact** they have (or could have) on people’s prospects after prison.
- **Highlight systemic solutions (and failures)** to avoid individualised views of grit and determination being the key to rehabilitation. Avoid ‘hero’ narratives.



5. Tell stories that show how solutions work

What this could look like

Examples

“Alex’s story shows us how **the right supports and opportunities** can make all the difference to people when they leave prison. While in prison, Alex started meeting regularly with **a mentor who took the time to understand his strengths and areas where he needed some support.** They helped Alex to start making a plan for release.”

“On the day Alex left prison, his mentor was there to meet him and give him encouragement. They helped to set up training for Alex but also made sure he had the solid foundation of a home and access to transport and a phone. **Without these essentials, it would have been hard for Alex to do simple things like get to work on time and contact an employer.**”

“Alex’s mentor was able to help him work out when he was ready to start a job, and continued to support him as he adjusted to working life. **Thanks to this ongoing support,** Alex is doing well and feels like he’s got a new-found stability in his life.”

- By baking in context from the beginning, we can tell a much fuller story which shows how the system needs to work, rather than the emphasis being on individuals.
- By talking about specific solutions and the positive impact they have (in this case, mentoring) we can counteract fatalism and show what’s possible.
- As well as highlighting positive impacts, we can remind people what the impact could have been if they weren’t in place.
- Language like ‘Thanks to’, ‘As a result’, ‘As a consequence’ is a simple way to nod to cause and effect.



TIP

Avoid hero narratives

Stories of individuals ‘making it’ against the odds can be problematic as they reinforce the idea that how people do after prison is just down to individuals rather than the system itself and the supports that are in place.

5. Tell stories that show how solutions work

What this could look like

Positive vs negative

In our research, stories which demonstrated positive outcomes were more effective for getting people thinking about specific systemic solutions and building a sense of efficacy. However, we can still tell, and support others to tell, effective stories about the lack of support and opportunities.

To make these stories more effective in building the case for change, we need to talk about what solutions would have changed the story from negative to positive.

INSTEAD OF...

“Mia had always found strength in being a good mum, but struggled to keep in touch with her son while in prison and felt increasingly disconnected. When her time came to leave, Mia was anxious and withdrawn, and this took a toll – making it much harder for her to adjust to life out of prison and rebuild positive connections with family and friends.”

TRY...

“Mia had always found strength in being a good mum, but **due to a lack of access to phone calls, and family-friendly spaces** for visits, it was very hard for her to keep in touch with her son while in prison. **Having access to these supports would have been a vital way to stay connected**, and hold onto a positive part of her life, ready for when the time came to leave prison.”

Alternatives to ‘second chances’

Our research suggests that talking about people leaving prison as being given a ‘second chance’ is problematic because it feeds into the idea that some people ‘deserve’ a second chance while others don’t. It also individualises what needs to be done to support people in and after prison.

Instead, try talking about ‘opportunities’ and ‘potential’. Some useful phrases, and others to avoid:

“Giving people a second chance”



“People need access to opportunities”



“Take a chance on...”



“<X support> can unlock people’s potential”



“You might think it’s a gamble but...”



“We need to unlock people’s potential, not waste it”



“Give people the chance to prove themselves”



“We need to set people up for success”



“They deserve a chance”



“Having the opportunity to...”



“Give them a fair chance”



“<X opportunity> helps people reach their potential”



Think about visuals

The images that we use in our communications play a huge part in how our messages are received. They're often the first thing people will notice – setting the first impression that impacts how people understand and remember what we have to say.



Think about visuals

What this could look like

Based on our research and recommendations, here are a few tips to bear in mind when selecting or commissioning photography. The example images here are for illustration only, and these tips can be applied to images in your own brand or organisational style.

AVOID

- Photos where people's heads are 'cut off' by the composition, or where we only see the backs of heads. Images like these can be dehumanising and fuel a sense of othering.
- Only using images which represent the problem (such as poor prison facilities, people in prison who are clearly disengaged due to a lack of opportunities and so on).
- Images which may reinforce stereotypes about people in prison and what life is like for them afterwards.

ADVANCE

- Images which feel natural and show people engaging face-to-face. Consider other ways of protecting identities if needed, such as using imagery featuring models rather than real situations, or taking other approaches such as illustration.
- Show solutions in action (such as good facilities, people engaging in education and training, family visits, life after prison and so on).
- Representing a range of people and showing the diverse opportunities which should be available to them afterwards (different work environments and relationships such as family and friends).



Bringing it together

Some examples of how you can bring the principles together in different types of communications. The five principles are designed to work together, and can be dialled up or down according to your audience and aims. The examples here and throughout this toolkit illustrate how they can be applied to a range of materials and flexed to suit.

IN SHORT COPY, SUCH AS A TWEET OR STATEMENT

“Leaving prison is like crossing a river, and **people need bridges** like jobs to help them make it to stable ground. Supporting **people leaving prison** with opportunities to get training and find jobs is a **practical** step that will **move us all forward** as a society.”

- Using the bridge metaphor to build understanding of the supports that need to be in place.
- Putting people first to humanise the conversation.
- Describing solutions as ‘practical’ to invoke pragmatism.
- Showing how this affects us all by making this a matter of progress.

“We need to fix our **outdated** criminal justice system so it does a better job of rehabilitation. **It makes sense** to help **people in prison** to stay connected with their loved ones, so they have good support when they leave. By setting people up for success, we can **make progress and move our country forward.**”

- Describing the system as outdated and showing the need for progress.
- Making a pragmatic point, by saying and showing why this makes sense.
- Putting people first to humanise the conversation.

Bringing it together

Some examples of how you can bring the principles together in different types of communications. The five principles are designed to work together, and can be dialled up or down according to your audience and aims. The examples here and throughout this toolkit illustrate how they can be applied to a range of materials and flexed to suit.

IN LONGER COPY SUCH AS A REPORT OR WEB CONTENT

“Before going to prison, Will had played an active role in his daughter’s life; he loved taking her to the park and playing together. He really enjoyed being a dad, but he was worried that being in prison would mean he could no longer be part of her life.

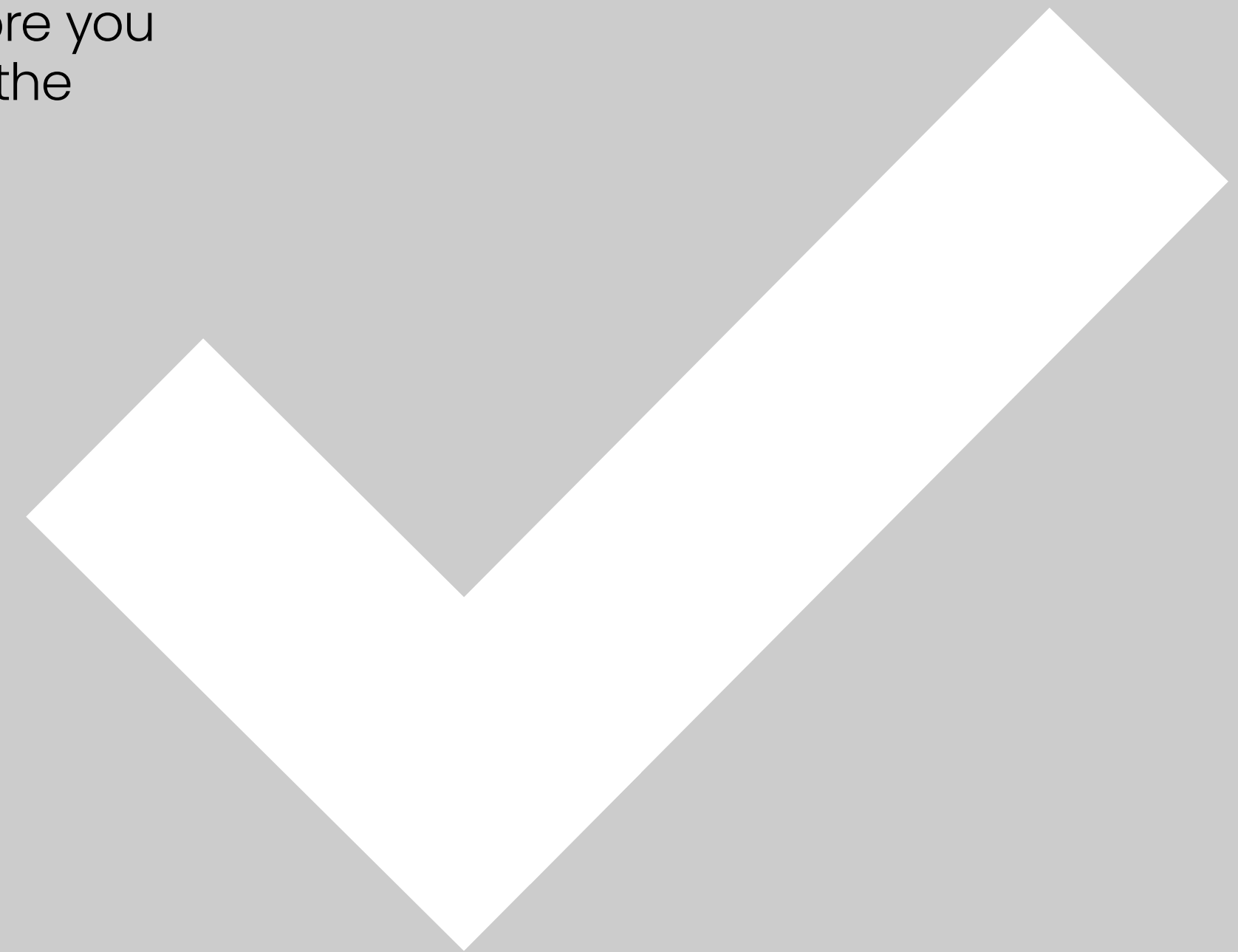
While in prison, Will had support from a Family Engagement Worker who **put practical measures in place** to help him maintain his relationship with his daughter. He was able to take part in a **parenting course** where he learned more about his daughter’s development, literacy and learning. He also attended **special family days**, where he was **able to spend time with his daughter and put what he’d learned into practise.**

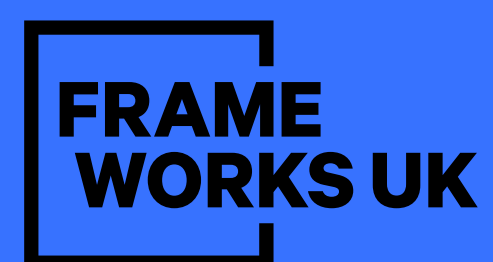
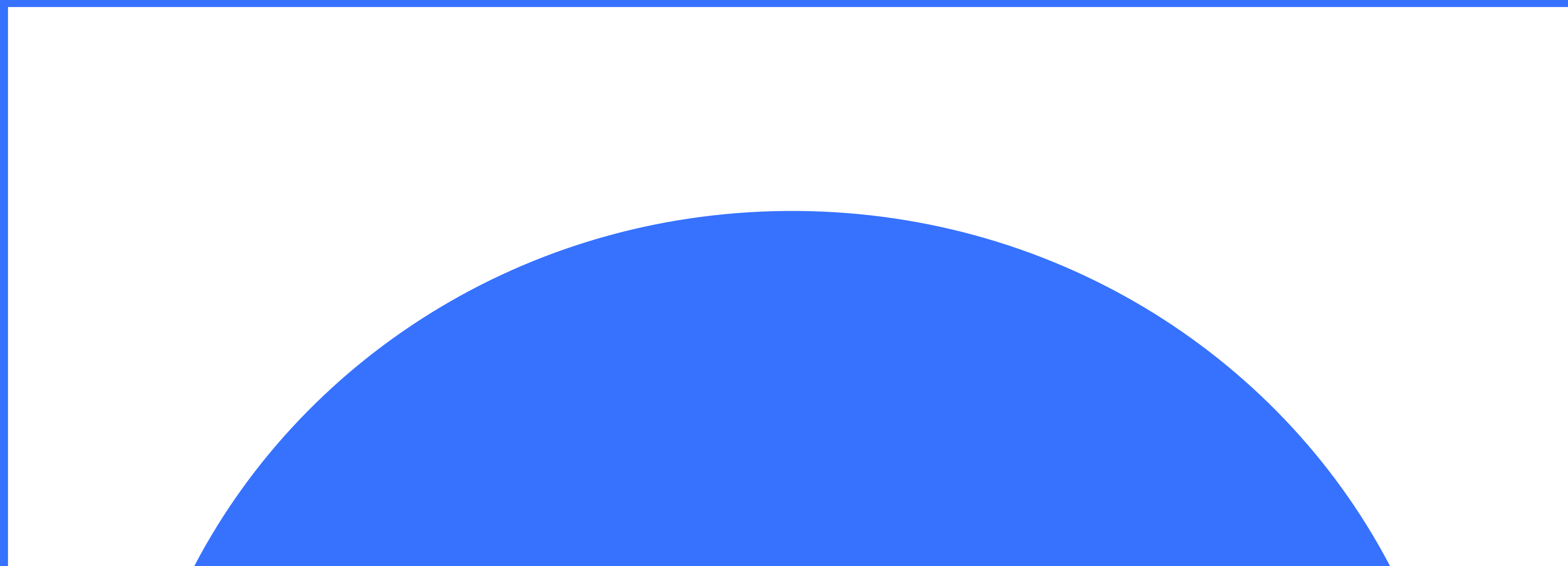
These opportunities **bridged the gap** – meaning Will was able to maintain his father-daughter connection while in prison. And, when he left, he had a strong relationship to focus on and keep building. Will has adjusted well to life after prison and looks forward to many more trips to the park with his daughter.”

- Telling an individual’s story but within the context of the system.
- Talking about practical solutions.
- Including context about the supports which were available to show how solutions work and the impact they have.
- Using the bridge metaphor to build understanding.

Some final tips

-
- **Repetition and consistency are essential.** If you feel like you're using the same frames again and again, you're doing it right.
 - Think of these principles as scaffolding for your communications. **You can flex how you use them:** use different tones for different audiences, and different creative executions.
 - **Remember, you are not your audience.** They are not hearing these messages as often as you are and will tend to not have the same understanding of the issues and solutions.
 - **Avoid acronyms, jargon and technical language as much as possible,** in favour of plain language. For example, spell out acronyms in at least the first instance, rather than assuming people will understand them.
 - **Get stuck in!** The more you use these principles, the easier you'll find it.





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