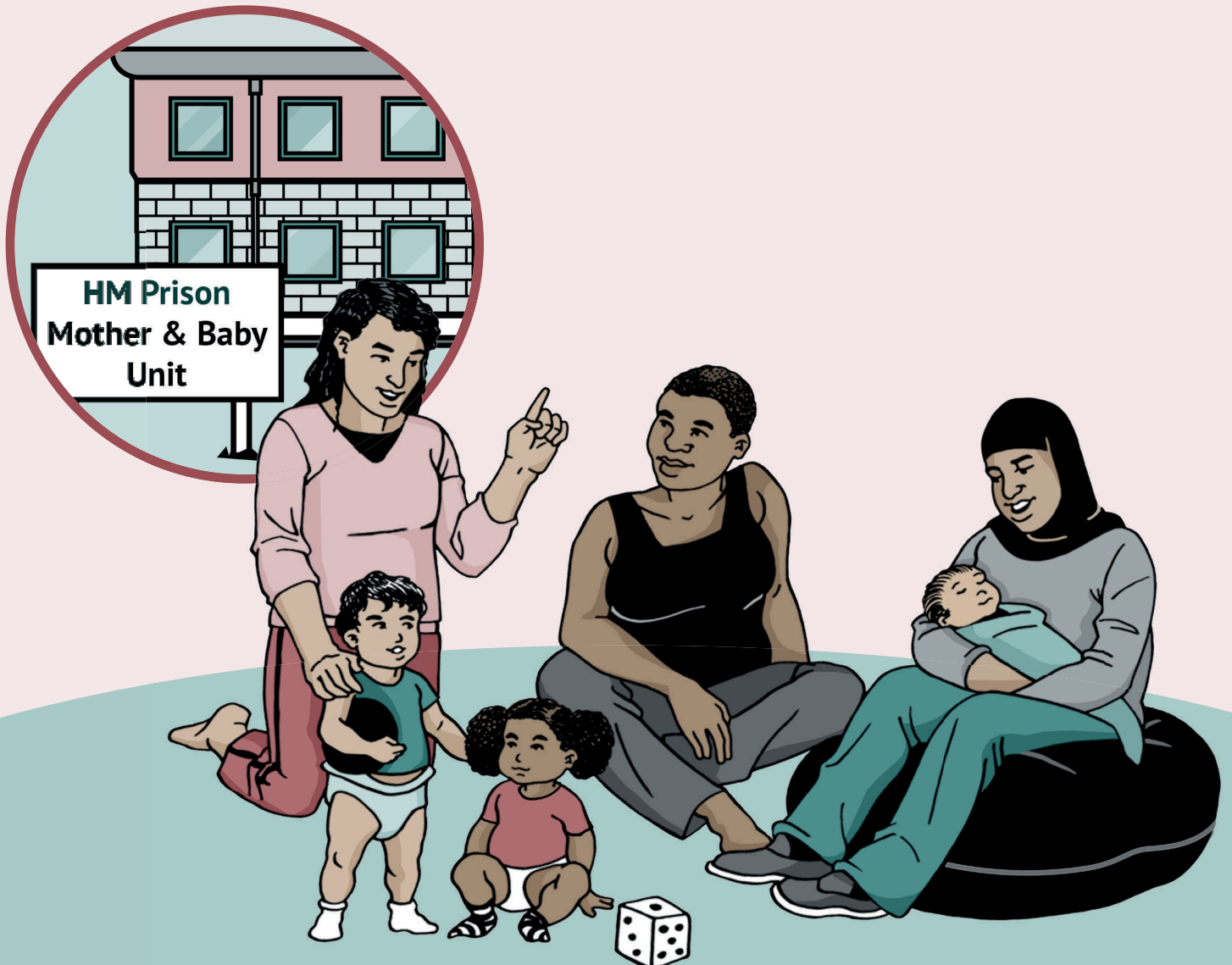


Mother and Baby Units (MBUs)

Easy Read Self Help Toolkit



About this document



This document was made by CHANGE, a charity led by people with learning disabilities.

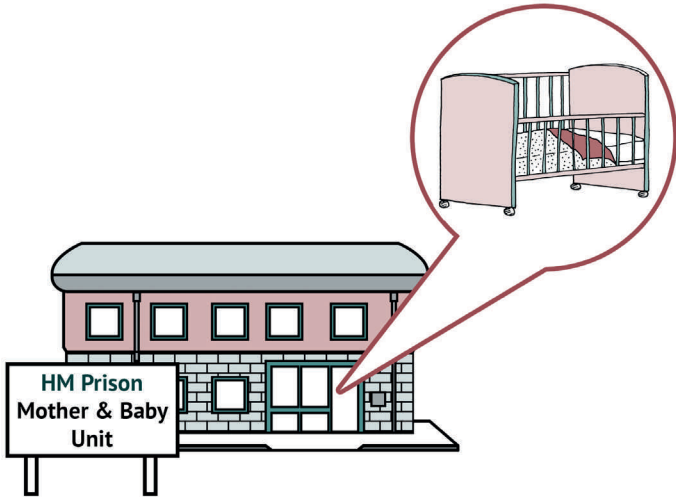


This document uses easy words and pictures to tell you about MBUs.

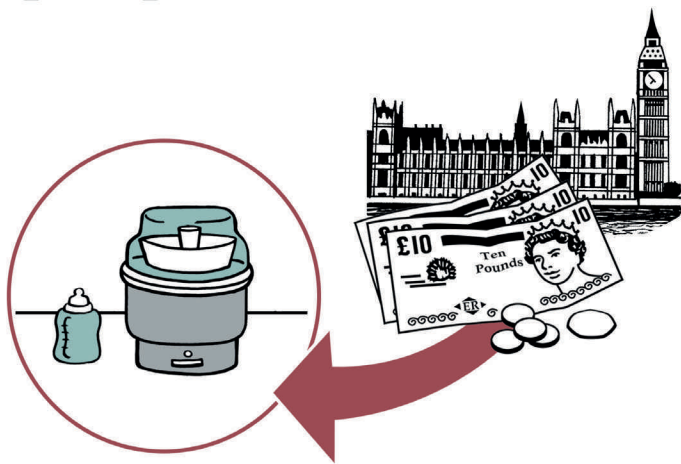


You might want to read through it with someone else to help you to understand it more.

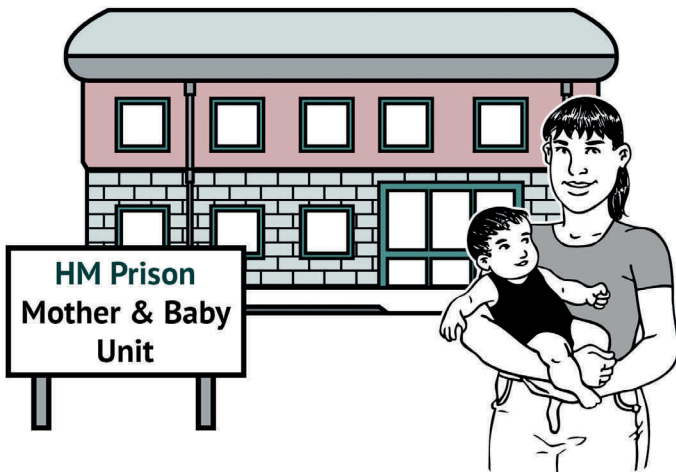
What is a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU)?



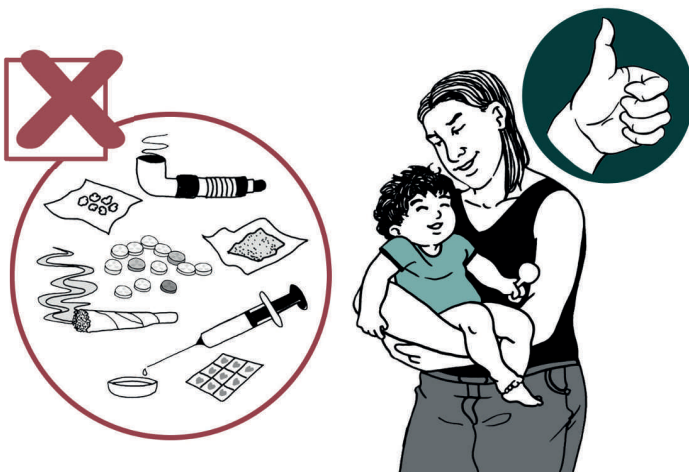
A woman prisoner may be allowed to have her baby with her in prison. If she does, the prison provides some items she needs to care for her baby.



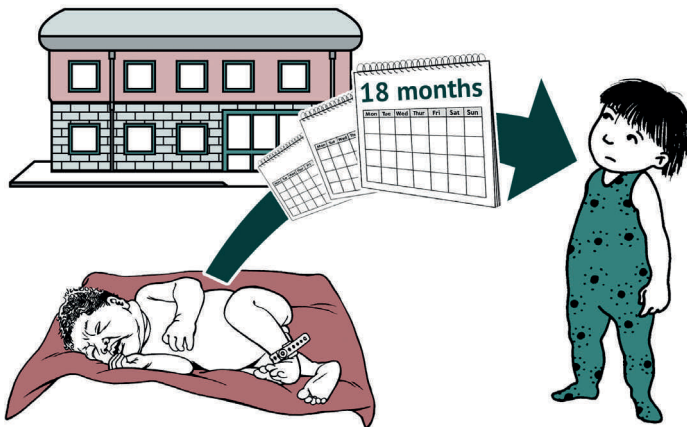
The prison provides basic items. Other items can be bought with child benefit payments.



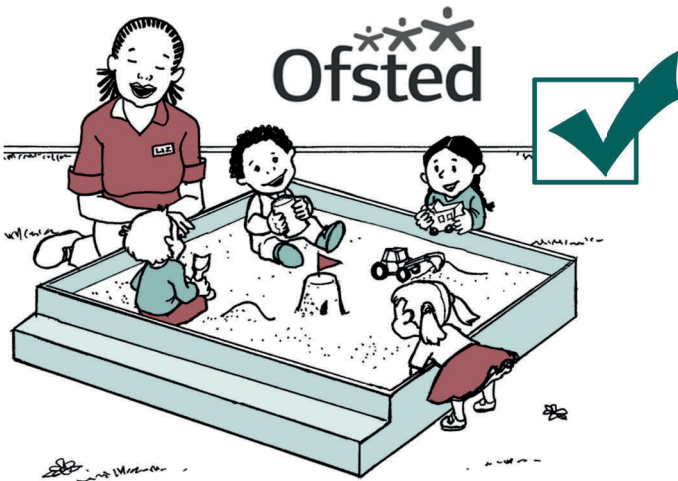
A Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) is a part of a women's prison where a mother can live with her baby.



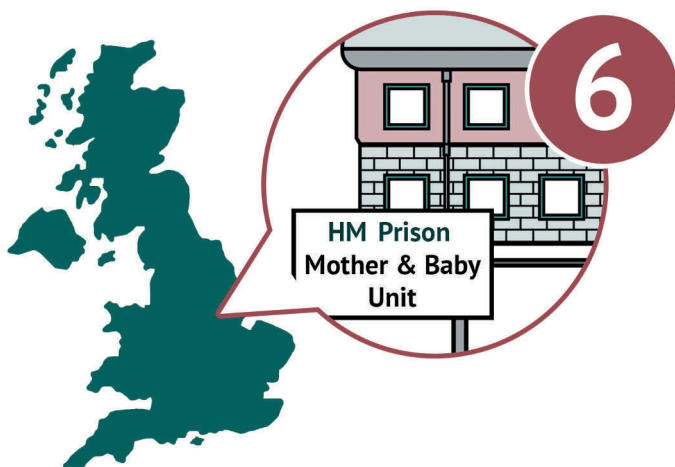
It is a drug free space which is peaceful and calm so the baby can develop healthily.



In MBUs, mothers can care for their children up to the age of about 18 months.



They have trained nursery nurses and prison officers. They should be registered with OFSTED.



MBUs are small units. There are currently six prisons with MBUs in the UK.

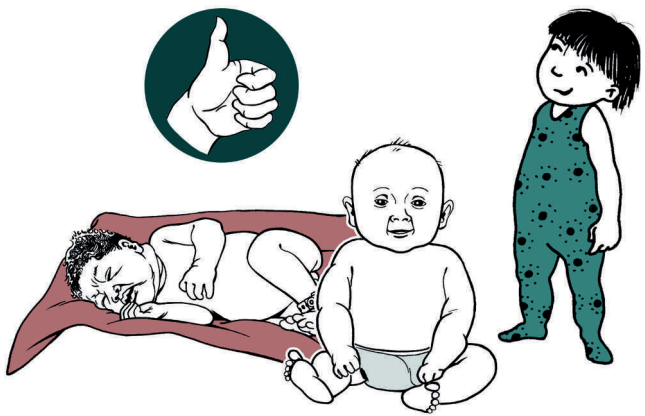
What is the purpose of a Mother and Baby Unit?



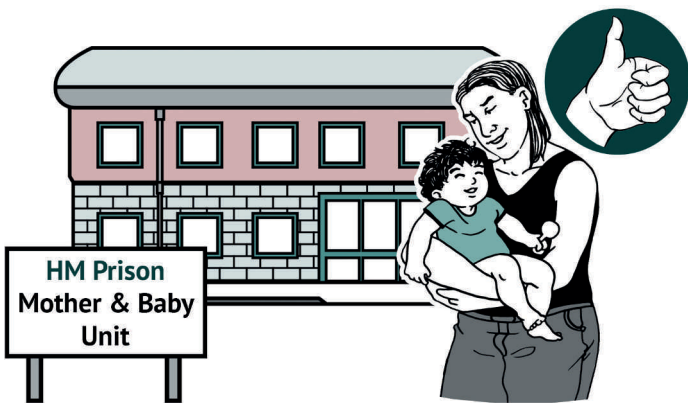
The Prison Reform Trust has found that many of the women that are sent to prison are mothers. 17,000 children are separated from their mothers each year.



This has an awful effect on these children's chances in life.



MBUs are there to provide a comfortable, safe and stimulating space for children.



The MBU should help mothers care for babies. The MBU encourages mother and baby to be together so they can bond properly.

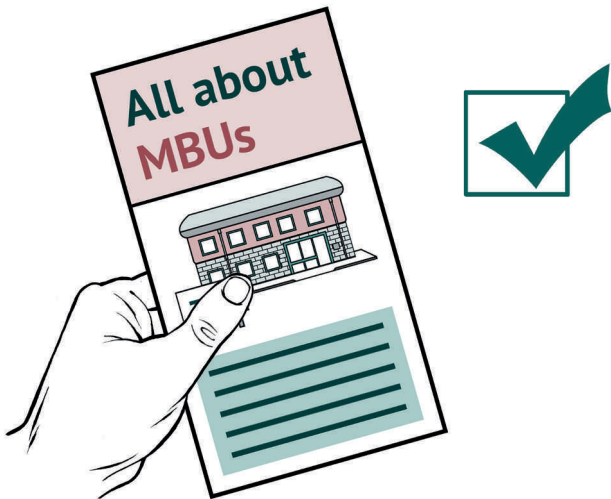


This is so the mother and child can do well in the community after prison.

Am I and my child eligible?



When you go to prison you should be asked at reception whether you are pregnant or have a child younger than 18 months of age.



If so you may be able to get a place at an MBU. You should be given a booklet called All about MBUs.

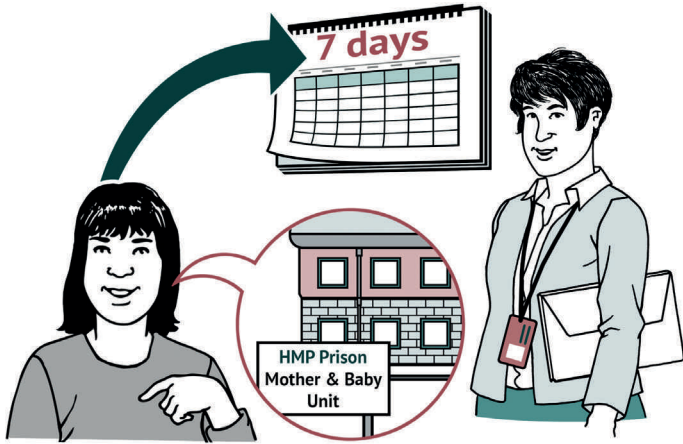


You are able to get a place if you are in prison, on remand, or have been convicted and sentenced.

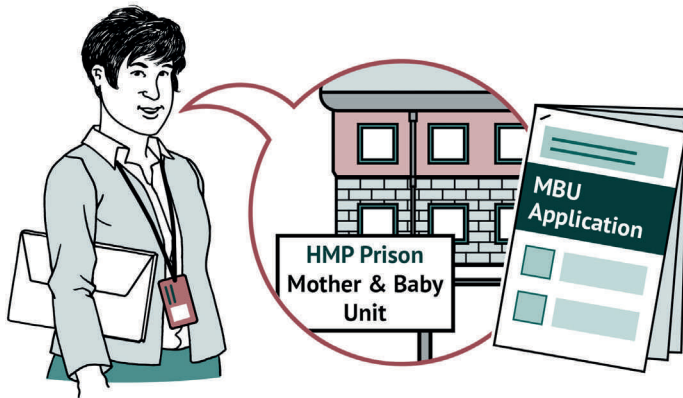


You do not have to be a British citizen.

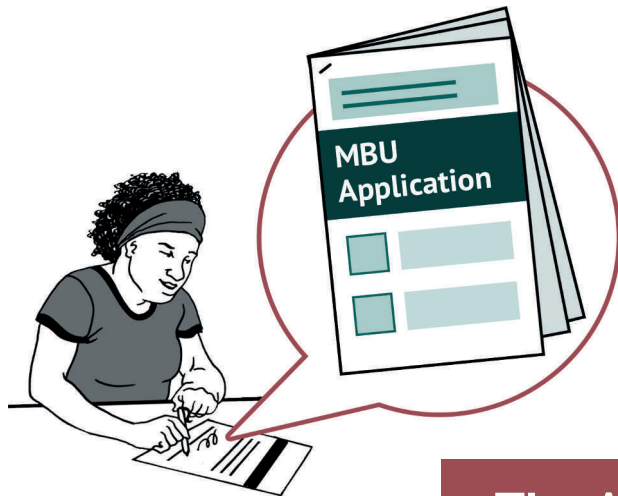
How and when can I apply for it?



Once you have asked for a place you must be referred to a Mother and Baby liaison officer within 7 days.

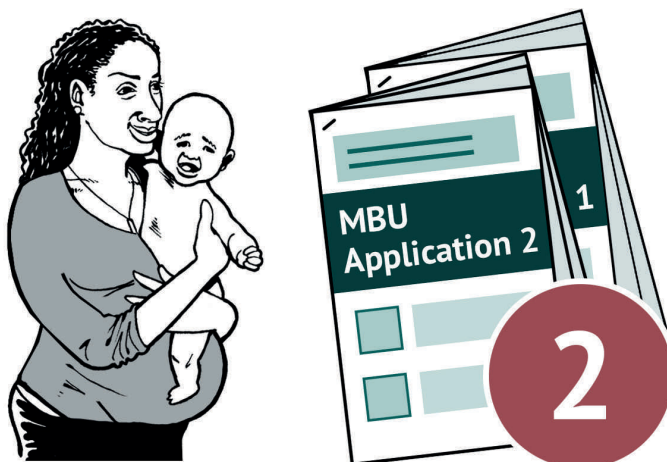


The officer must give you information on how to apply. She or he will let you know about the best MBU for you and your child.



You then must fill out an application form. This will be looked at very carefully.

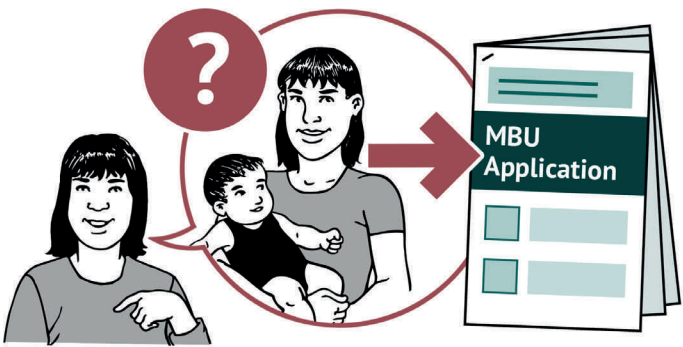
The Application form



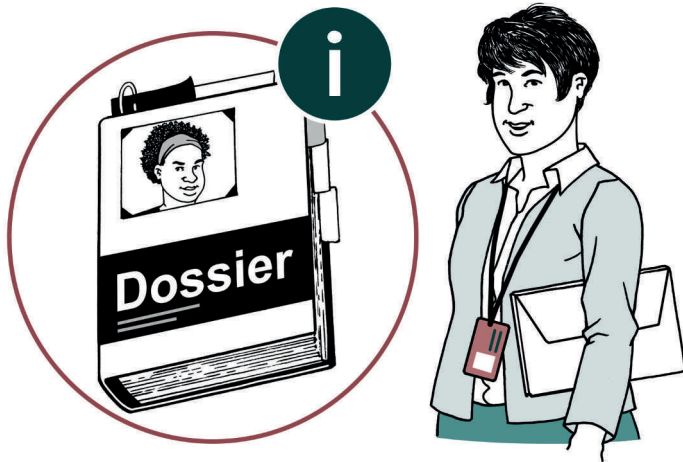
- If you are pregnant and have another child younger than 18 months, or 2 children younger than 18 months, and you want both to live with you at the MBU you must fill out 2 separate forms. One for each child.



- You must fill out information about you and your child including details on the father, special needs, social services, and if the child is on the protection register (a list of children at risk of being harmed).

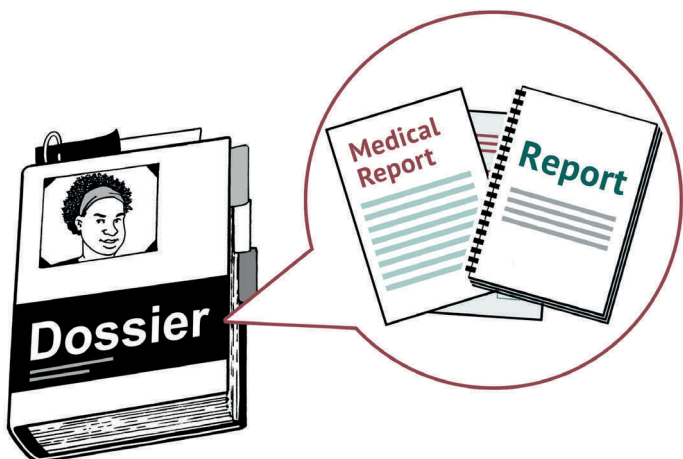


- You must say why you want your child to live with you.



- At the same time the officer will collect information about your case in what is called a Dossier (report).

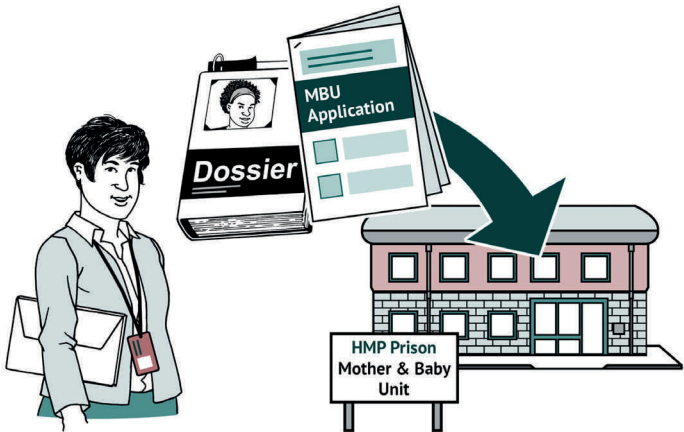
The Dossier



- The dossier will contain information such as reports from social services, the local authority children's services, and medical reports.

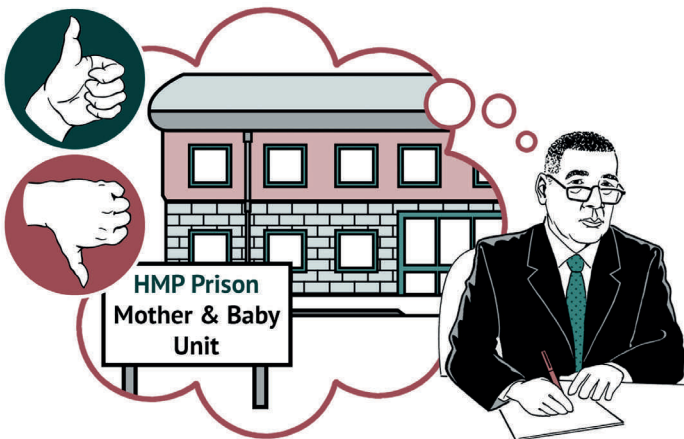


- You will have to give permission for medical information about yourself to be released to the prison, e.g. GP records.



Once your application and the dossier have been completed the officer will send them to the MBU to be looked at.

Who decides?



The governing director of the prison will make the final decision.



But the governing director of the prison will rely on advice from an admissions board.



Once the application arrives at the MBU, the prison will put together an admissions board to look at your case.

The board will be made up of a chair person, the manager of the MBU, the line manager, and your offender manager.



After looking at the application and the dossier the board will hold a hearing.



The chair of the board must be an independent person such as a person with a children's services or legal background.



It is likely that a social worker will be there to give information about what is best for your child.

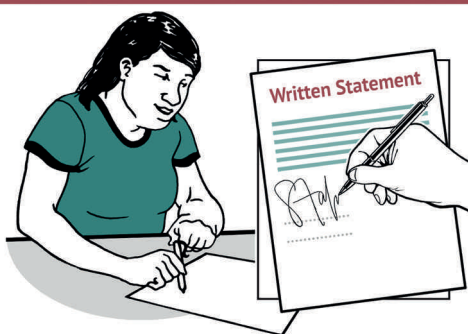
Your role



You must be able to go to the hearing. If not, then a video or telephone link should be set up.



If the prison can't set up a video or telephone link, then you can make a written statement.





If you go in person your Personal Officer can go with you.

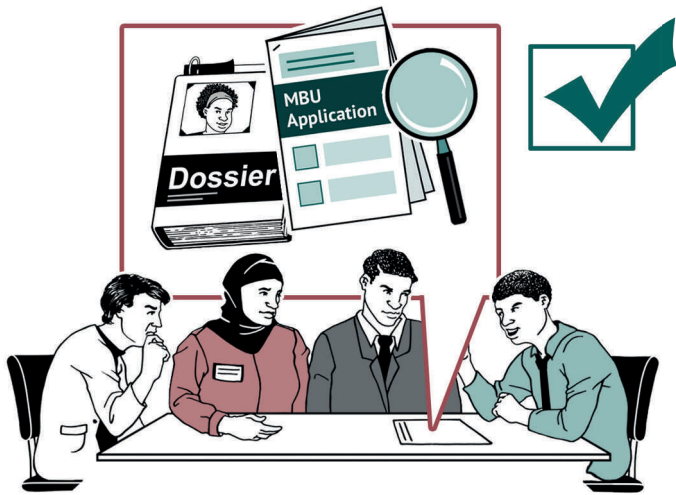


If English isn't your first language then translation services must be provided.

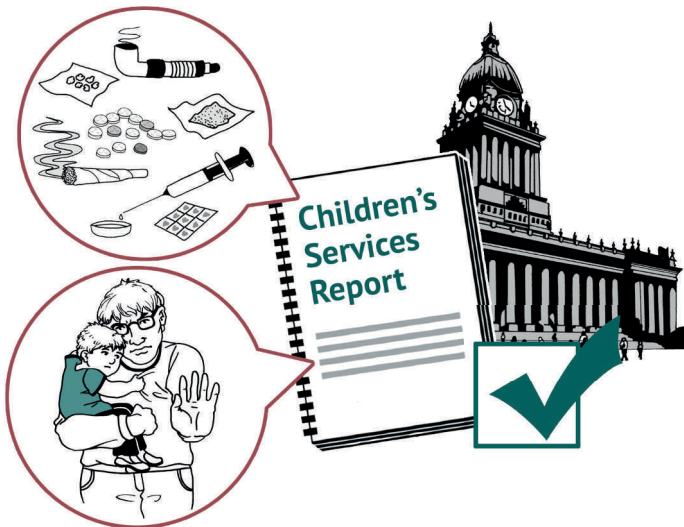
How is the decision made?



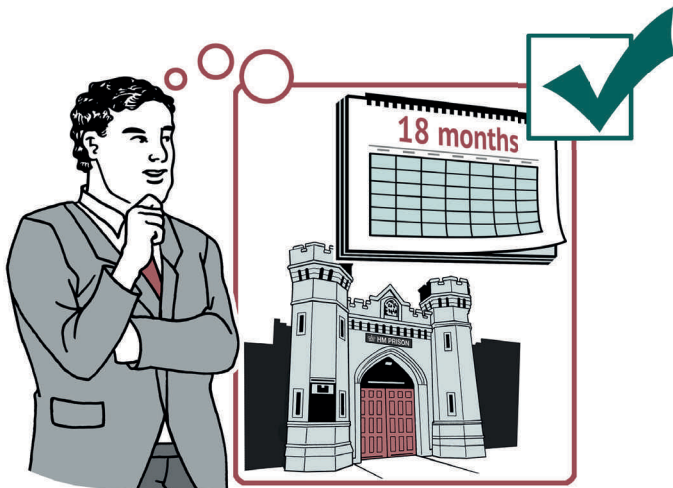
The decision the board makes must be about what is best for your child. They must also think about what is best for all the other mums and babies on the MBU.



The board must think about the decision very carefully and look at all the evidence heard at the hearing, in the application, and dossier.



The board will read a report from the Local Authority's Children's Services. This will be about things like safeguarding (protecting children from harm) and drug use. When they have read this they can make a decision.



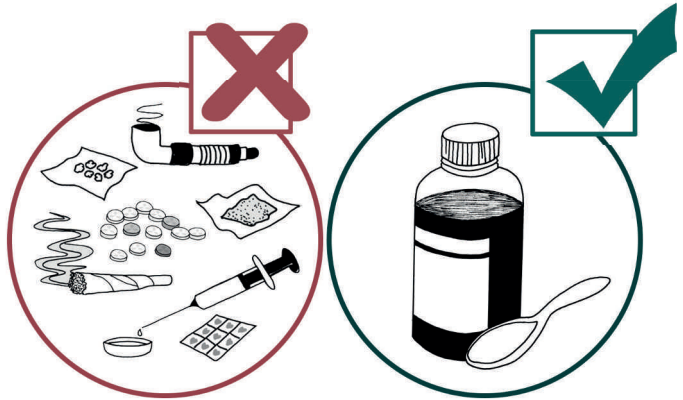
The board must think about the length of your sentence and type of offence. Most women who are accepted will be released before their child is 18 months.



If you have a long sentence the board must think about when it is best to separate you and your child. Now or later if you get a place on the MBU.



Before you are allowed to go onto an MBU the board must be sure that you can follow the rules. For example the MBU can not be worried about your behaviour and you will have to pass a mandatory drug test.

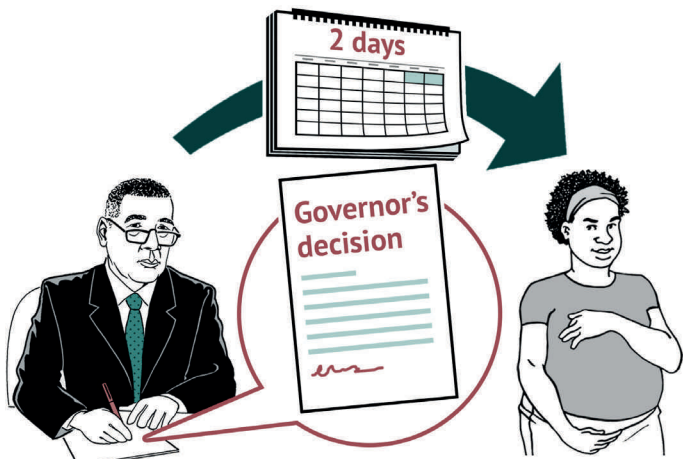


Drugs are not allowed on MBUs but the board must not exclude you just because you are prescribed methadone.

What happens next?



Once the board has made its decision they must tell the Governor within 24 hours of the hearing.

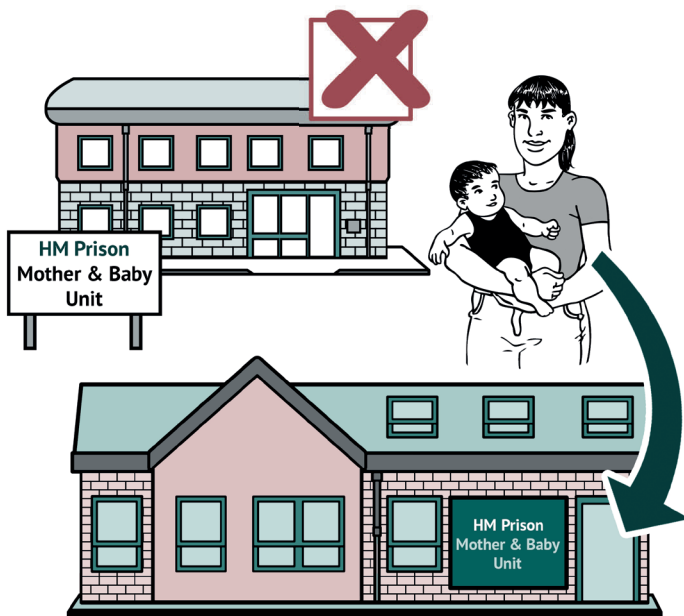


Once the Governor has agreed they must tell you of the decision. This must be in writing and within two days of the hearing.



The board can make five types of recommendation; Temporary admission; Emergency temporary admission; Full admission; Conditional refusal; or Full refusal.

What if my application is accepted?

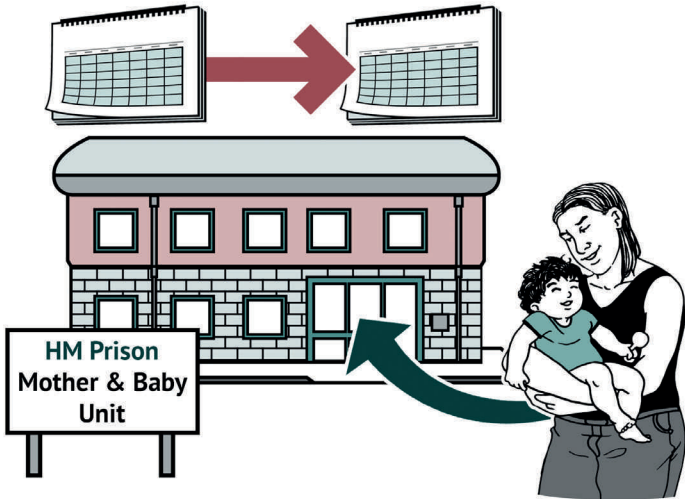


You may be given a place but you may not go to the MBU you asked for as it may be full. You may go to another MBU.



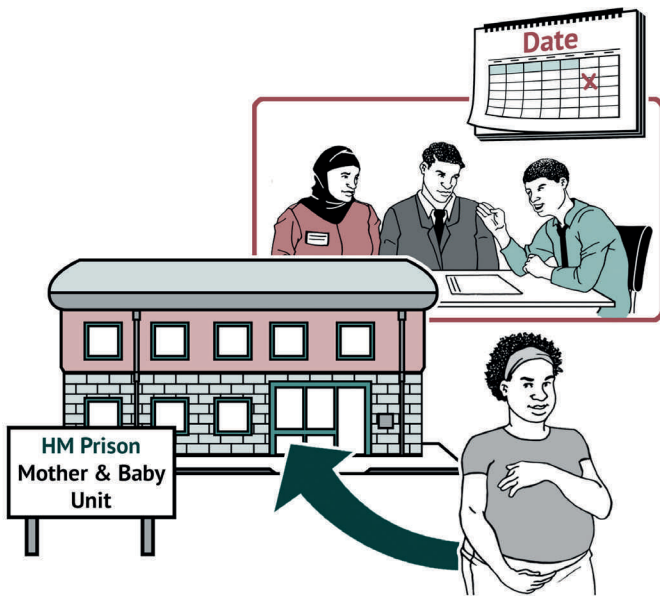
You will have to sign a piece of paper to say that you have been given a copy of the decision.

What is Temporary Admission?



If you are on remand, awaiting trial, or have been convicted but not sentenced you may be allowed to go to the MBU for a short time. This is because your situation may change.

What is Emergency Temporary Admission?

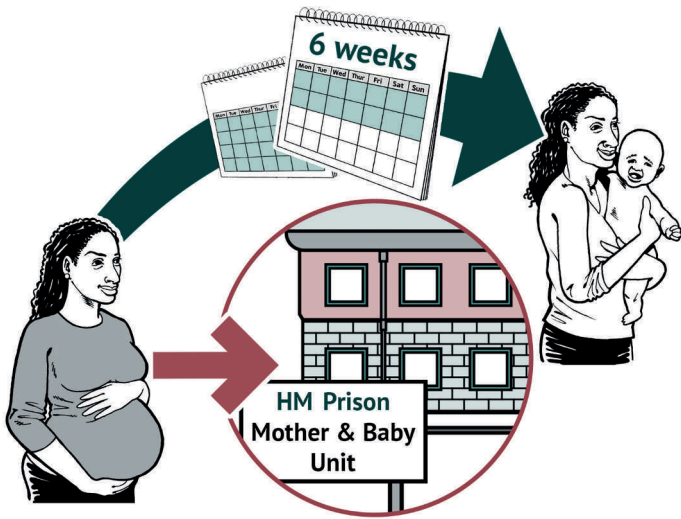


If you are late on in your pregnancy then you may be sent to an MBU before the board has met and a decision has been made. The board will then decide if you can stay on the MBU.

What is Full Admission?

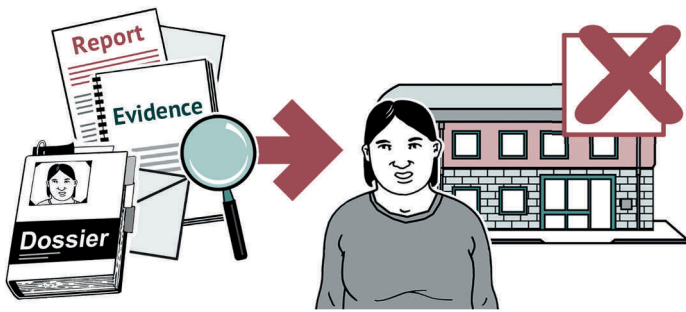


Once convicted and after the board has decided to give you a place on the MBU, you will have to sign a Compact. This means you agree to the rules.

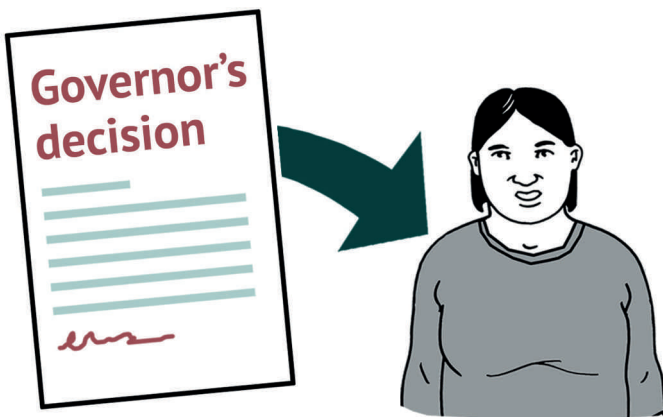


If you are pregnant when the offer is made, generally you can go on to the MBU six weeks before you are due to give birth.

What if my application is refused?



If the board refuse your application their decision must be based on evidence and recorded properly.



You must be given a copy of the decision.

What is a Conditional refusal?



The board may say that you can go onto the MBU if you can fix some problems you have. They will tell you how much time you have to do this.

What is Full refusal?



If you are refused a place and you were not there in person or by video, phone link, or written statement then you can ask for the board to have another hearing so you can put your case in person.

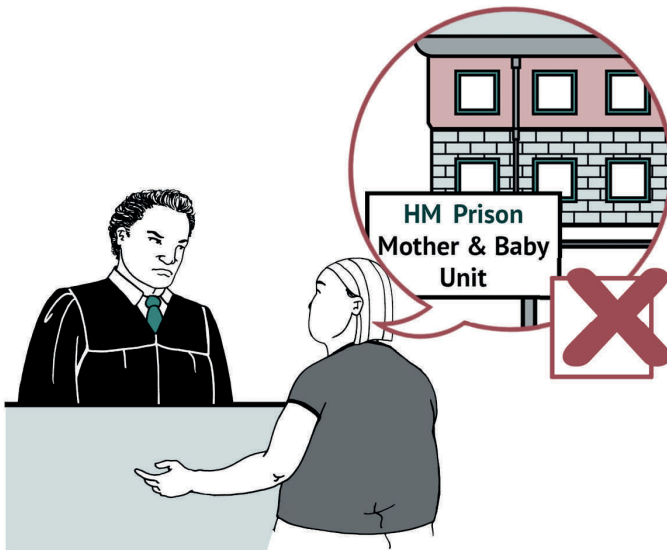


If you participated at the hearing and you are refused a place you have the right to appeal.

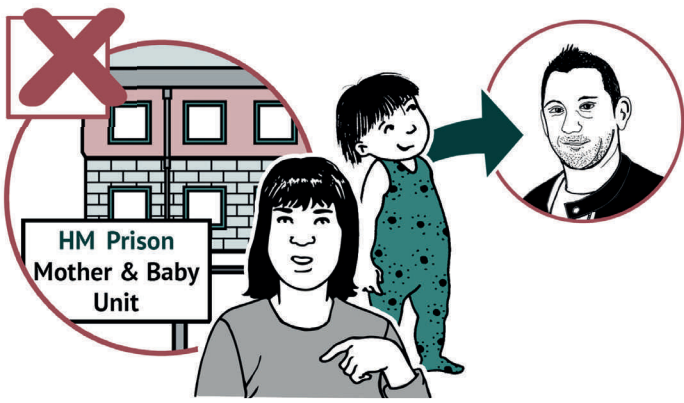


We recommend you seek legal advice.

What if my appeal is refused?



If you are refused a place and your appeal is unsuccessful, you may be able to challenge the decision in the courts. You should seek legal advice.

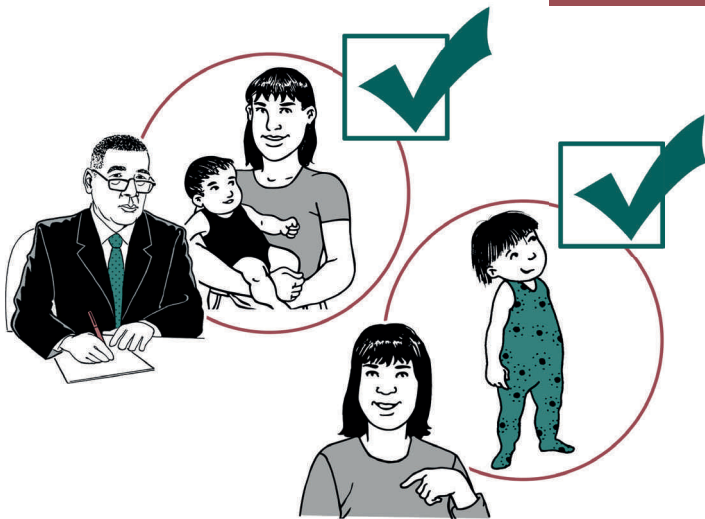


If the decision cannot be challenged in the courts, you must arrange for your baby to be looked after by family or friends in the community.



This has to be approved by Children's Services. If that is not possible, Children's Services will make arrangements.

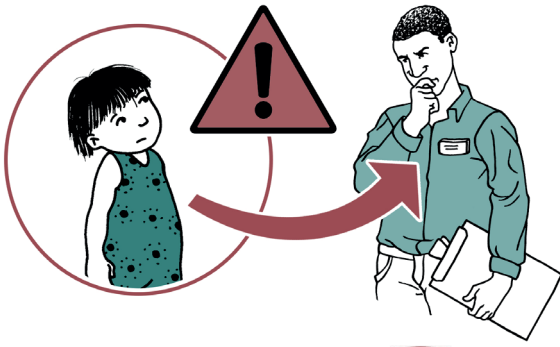
Who will be responsible for my child when we are on a MBU?



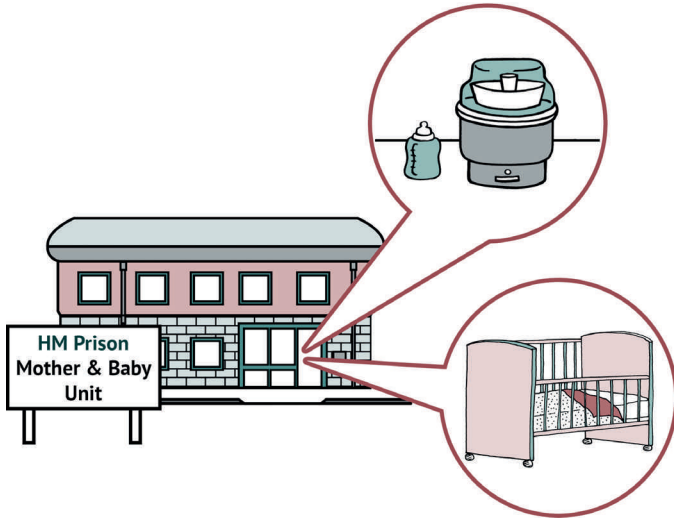
The Governor of a prison has a duty of care for both you and your child whilst you are in an MBU but you are responsible for your child.



A care plan will be made for your child and this should be done within the first four weeks. You should take part in this.



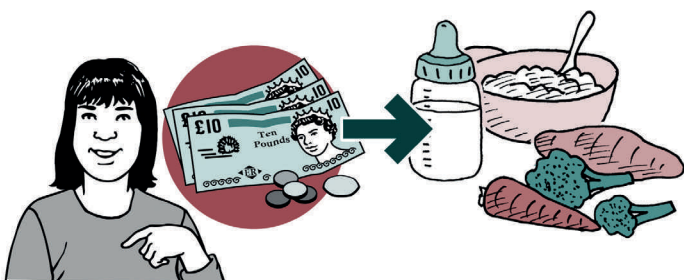
A social worker may also take part in making the care plan if your child is thought to be in need.



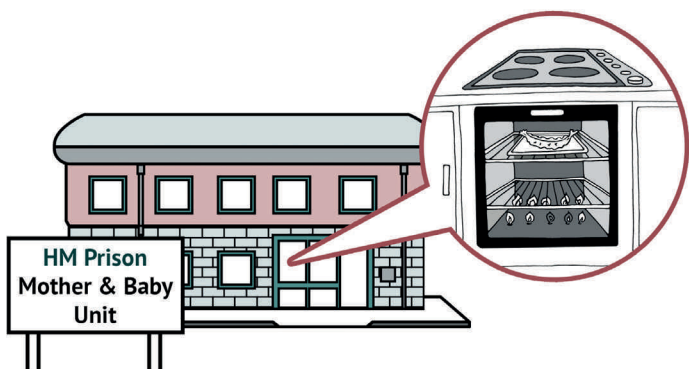
The MBU will have the basic items you need to look after your child, like a cot. Anything else you want you will have to get yourself.



You will be entitled to Child Benefit payments. You will be expected to use this money to pay for any other things you need.



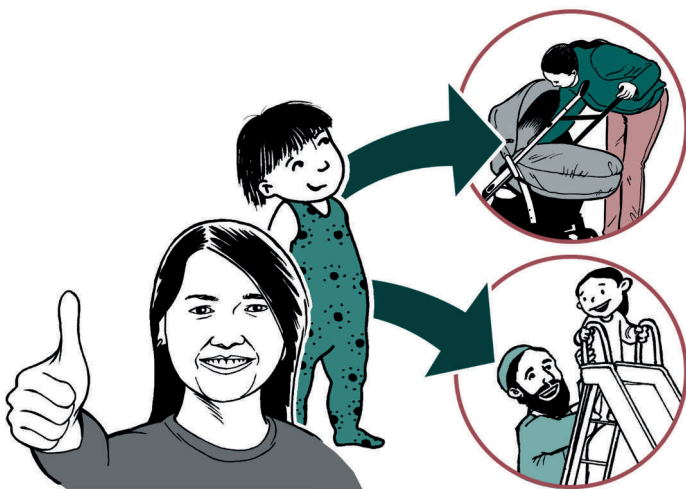
You are expected to buy food for your child. The prison provides food for you.



The MBU should have what you need to cook food for your child.



Your child should see the outside world and other family members. You child can go on visits and trips. Nursery staff may take your child out of the prison on visits and trips.



You will be asked to name two people that you would like to care for your child when he or she is outside the prison. These people will be checked by Children's Services.

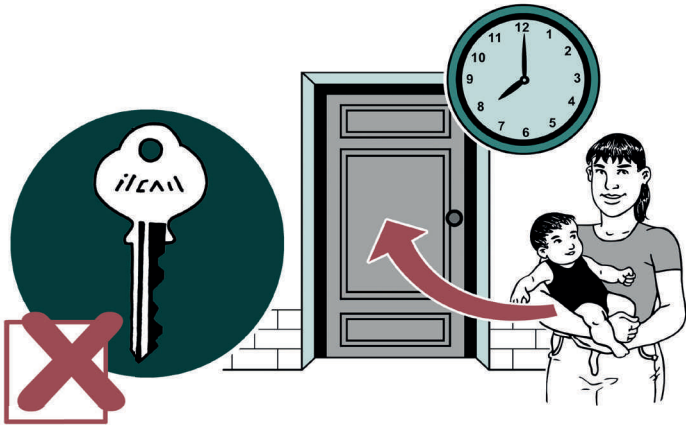


A high standard of behaviour is expected on an MBU. Your place will be reviewed every 8 weeks.

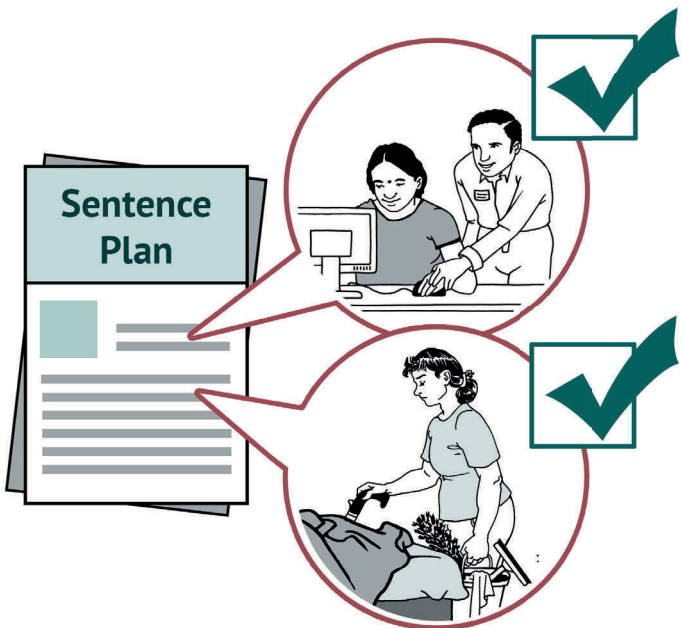




The MBU is different to the normal part of a prison; it is child focussed.



You will not be locked in your room but you will usually have to stay behind your door from a certain time.



Although the MBU is more relaxed than normal prison life you still have to follow your sentence plan and work, take courses, and learn new things for release.



Your child will be looked after by trained staff whilst you do this.

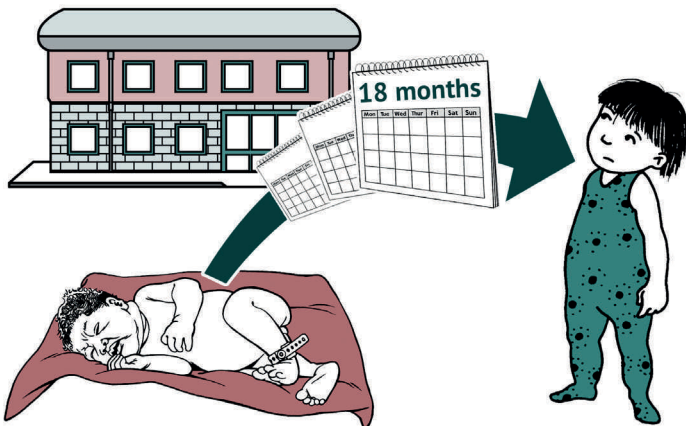


After the birth of your baby you will be able to have six weeks off from your responsibilities in prison and then if you are fit you can return to work and classes.

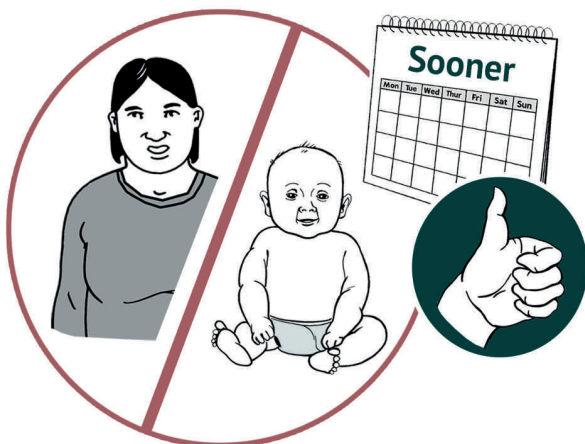
How long can my child stay in a MBU?



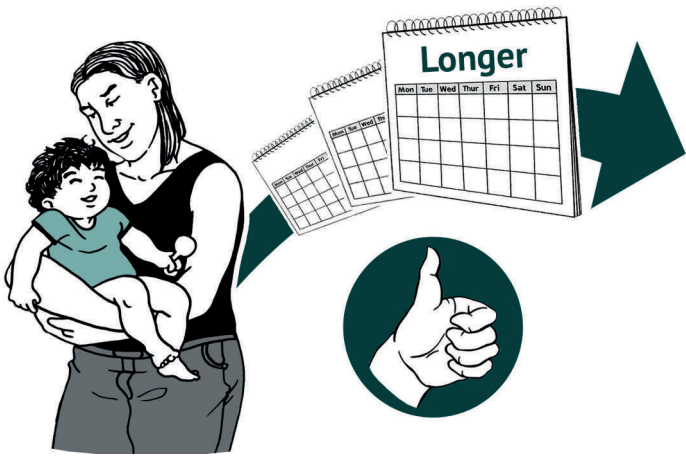
The Care Plan which is written when you first go onto the MBU will talk about what happens if and when you and your child are separated.



Babies can stay in the MBU up to the age of about 18 months.



Your place at the MBU is regularly reviewed. It may be best for your child that you are separated from them before 18 months.

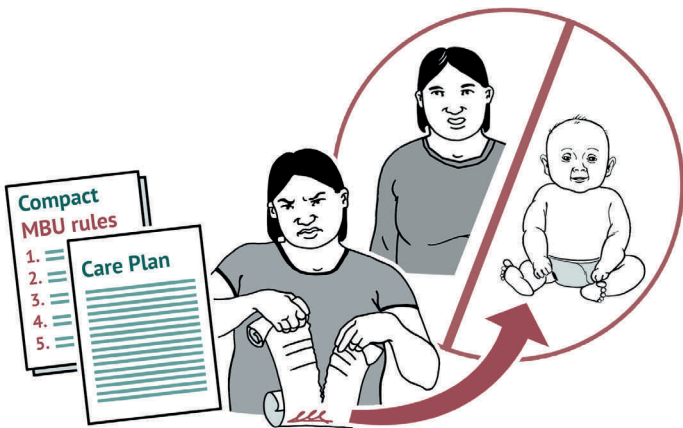


Or it may be best for your child to stay with you for a few months longer than 18 months.

Can I be removed from the MBU?



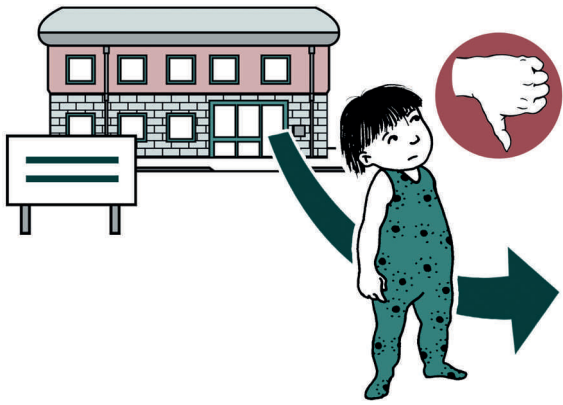
If you don't follow your Compact agreement or Care Plan, or found guilty of a charge then you may be removed from the MBU.



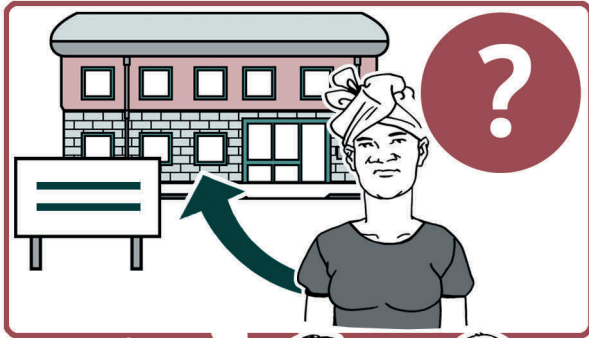
This means you would also be separated from your child.



You should get a warning first, before you are removed from the MBU.



Removal from the MBU is the last resort as it has an effect on your child.



If you are removed from an MBU then a separation board will be brought together to decide on whether you should go back to the MBU or not.

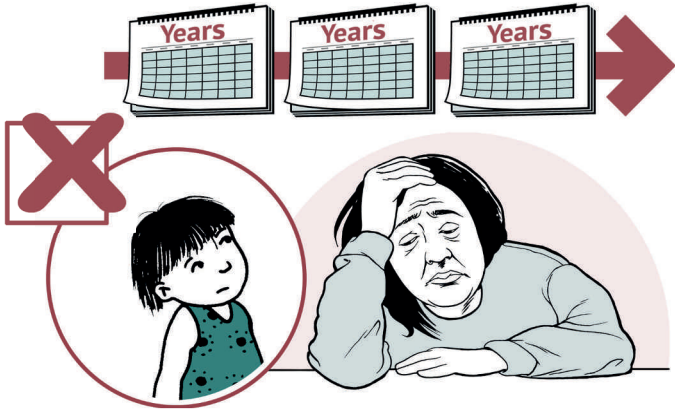


If you are removed from the MBU then your place will not be kept for you.

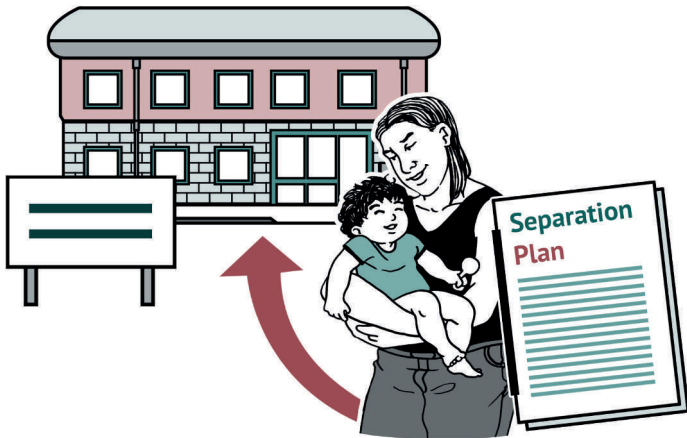
What happens when my child has to leave?



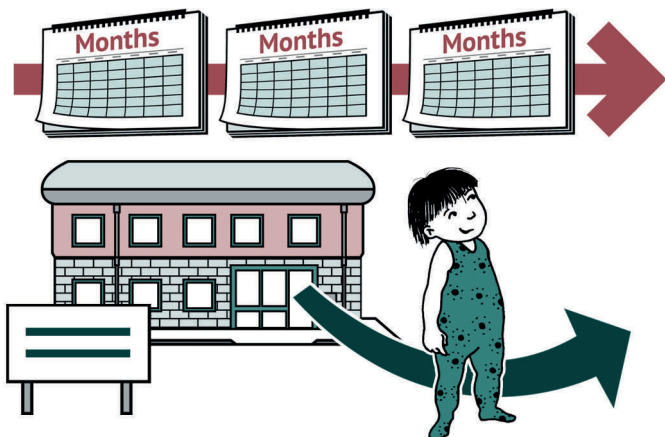
It is best if you and your child leave prison together.



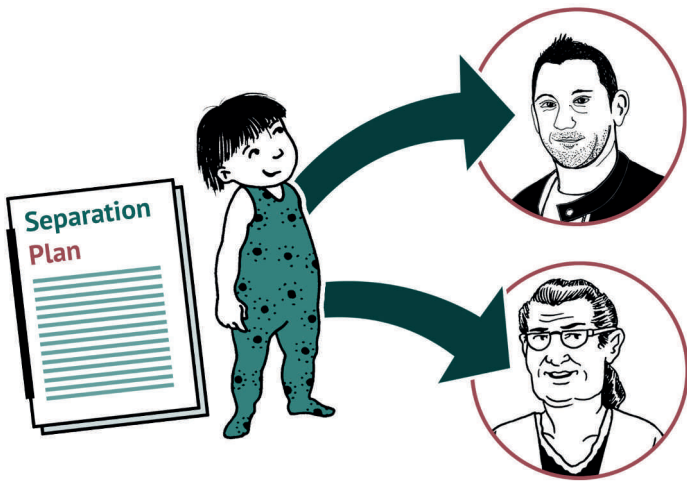
This is not always possible if you have a long sentence.



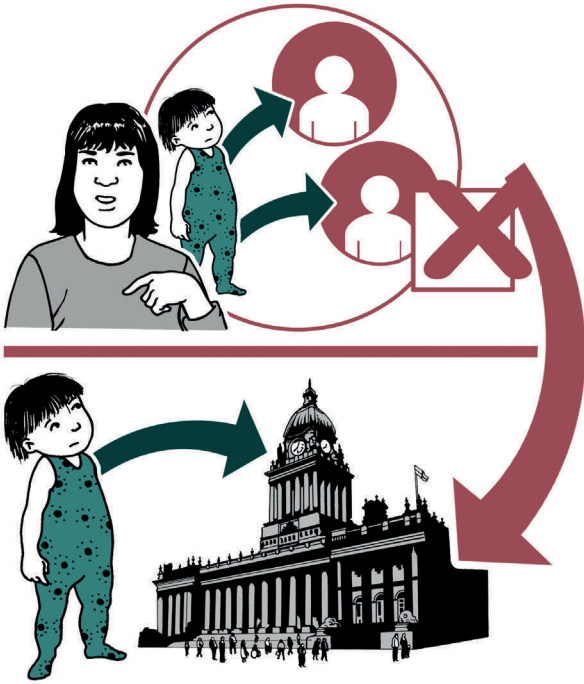
A separation plan must be put in place when you enter the MBU. It must be agreed by a team and you must be involved.



If your child has to leave then this should happen in stages over an agreed period of time.



As part of the plan you will have two people who will have been checked are suitable to care for your child if you and your child are separated.



If you are not able to nominate anybody then Children's Services will take your child into care.

What is a separation board and how does it make a decision?



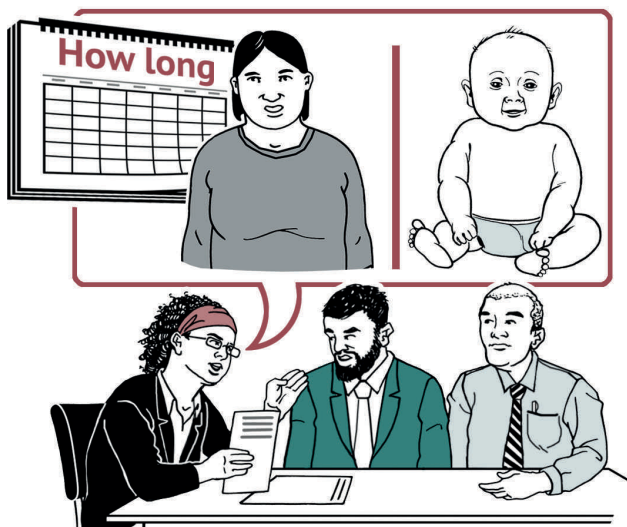
The separation board decides on whether you are separated from your child or not. Like the admissions board the separation board must have an independent Chair.



The board should include an Independent Chair, the Governor or MBU manager, Children's Service representative, and/or your Offender Manager in the community. You should also go to the meeting.



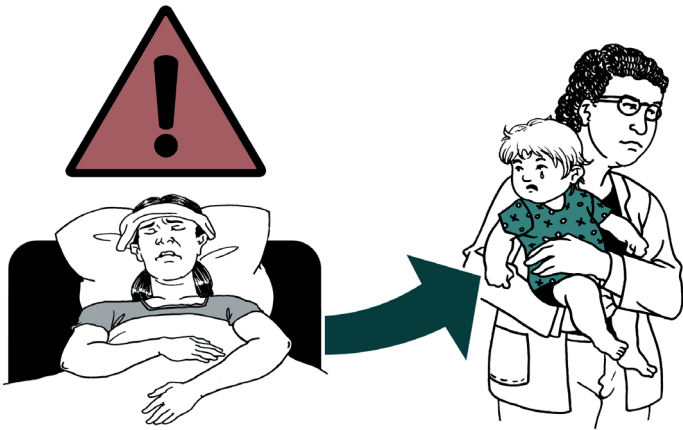
The board has to think about what is best for your child.



The separation board will decide on whether the separation is permanent.



If there is a difference in opinion on the board then this must be recorded. You will be given the final decision in writing.



In some cases an emergency separation may happen. For example if you become too ill to care for your child.

Can I challenge a separation decision?



You can challenge a decision to be removed from an MBU. You can do this by using the complaints system and you may be able to legally challenge in court too.



Your case will be sent to the Head of the Women's team at National Offender Management Service. You can seek legal advice.

PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS



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