

A parents and carers' guide to knife crime

What are the signs? What can you do?

What signs should parents look for if they suspect their child is involved in knife crime:

- Is anything missing from your knife block, kitchen drawer or garden shed?

Approximately 74% of knives used in crime are domestic kitchen knives.

- Does your child have any unexplained injuries that they are trying to hide from you? How could these have happened and why is the child trying to hide them?
- Does your child appear nervous or fearful when they are going out? What could they be scared of and why?
- Is there a reluctance to say where they are going and who they are going out with? Could this be to somewhere they know you wouldn't approve of within a peer group who are a negative influence?
- Be aware of what online activity your child is involved in. Most people now research things online first, before they do anything. Has your child been searching online for questions about knives or places to buy them?

Consequences of carrying a knife

There are many potential consequences, some more serious than others.

If a young person is caught with a knife at school they run a real risk of being permanently excluded as well as getting a criminal record.

The young person could hurt someone else and be hurt themselves – badly and even fatally.

This could limit career options, holiday destinations, relationships with family and friends.

If a young person uses a knife in an offence, for example a street robbery, then as well as a criminal record, a prison sentence is highly likely, regardless of if this is a first offence.

If a young person stabs someone then there is the potential for life imprisonment, regardless of whether it is a fatal stabbing or not.

There is no safe place to stab someone – any part of the body could result in a fatal or life changing injury.

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Protection, fear, the – false – belief everyone else is carrying, peer pressure from friends.

How can you help keep your child safe?

As parents and carers we play an important role in protecting young people but it can be difficult to know how. The most important way is to maintain a close relationship with your child and keep talking. Having that close relationship will help you recognise any changes in their behaviour and their activities. Don't be afraid to have a conversation about knives at an early age.

Why do young people carry knives?

There are many reasons why young people may carry a knife. The most common reasons are

- Peer pressure from friends and associates, because they believe everyone is doing it or to be accepted by the group
- For protection or out of genuine fear due to being targeted or bullied. There is a strongly held belief amongst young people that carrying a knife makes them safer. Actually, carrying a knife makes them far more likely to be stabbed themselves
- Rebelling against parental/family principles or risk taking behaviour – sometimes young people want to establish their own identity and do things that are against the beliefs of their family
- A desire to be seen as bigger, stronger or tougher than the next person. To be the leader you have to bring something that no one else does, that could be carrying a knife or some other weapon that makes them stand out from the crowd

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ESSEX

VIOLENCE & VULNERABILITY

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What can you do?

Talking and listening

The most important thing is to encourage your child to talk to you and to both listen to each other. Share with them your concerns and highlight the risks of carrying a knife so that they can understand. Encourage them not to associate with people who carry knives.

Get to know your child's friends

When young people start to feel pressure to use drugs, drink alcohol or carry knives, it can come from their friends.

Know what they are doing online

Communicate with your child about the potential negative consequences of online activity, including what he or she may post online.

Spend time online with your child. Ask them to show you his or her favourite online activities, sites and online contacts. Show an interest in their online world – what they watch, what they play, what they listen to.

Peer pressure

Help the child practice simple ways to respond to peer pressure. For example, if your child was challenged by a peer who says, 'if you were my friend you would' your child can respond with, 'if you were my friend, you wouldn't ask.' Then he or she can walk away.

Find out what they know

Find a way to talk about knives directly. If it helps, use reports in the news or storylines on television programmes as a starting point. Your child may know more than you think and will have opinions.

Offer encouragement, don't judge

Remember that they are growing up in a different time from you, facing unique challenges. Discuss their hopes and aspirations as well as their fears and worries. Praise them for their achievements and make sure they know you are always there for them.

Take time out together, make time to eat meals together and have fun together.

Your child could go to jail for up to 4 years if they're found in possession of a knife.

Help is available

For further information regarding knife crime please visit the suggested organisations below:

- The Ben Kinsella Trust – a website set up after the murder of Ben Kinsella to educate society about knife crime – www.benkinsella.org.uk
- Fearless, guidance about all kinds of crime that affects young people. Aimed at professionals, parents and young persons – www.fearless.org
- No Knives, Better Lives – a program devised by the Scottish Government to educate about knife crime. Suitable for professionals, parents and young persons – www.noknivesbetterlives.com
- NSPCC's helpline offers advice to parents, carers and professionals – **0808 800 5000**
www.nspcc.org.uk
- Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit
www.essexvvu.co.uk