

# A Guide for Parents and Carers on Knife Harm

Facts to help you feel more confident when talking to your child about knife harm, as well as practical help, guidance and where to find support.

In 2023, the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA) engaged with parents and carers to better understand their views around community safety and help and support available to them on keeping their child safe. The survey highlighted that 70% of respondents did not feel confident in starting a conversation with their child around knife crime and that guidance would help to make them feel more confident.

This guide was produced in collaboration between the Ben Kinsella Trust and the VRA.



The **Ben Kinsella** Trust



**Violence  
Reduction  
Alliance**  
Stoke-on-Trent  
and Staffordshire



# If you're worried your child is involved in knife crime

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It can be extremely worrying to think that your child is involved in something as dangerous as knife crime. Your child may not be carrying a weapon themselves, but could be associated with people who are. The natural reaction is to panic - but this won't resolve the situation and could push your child away.

Most young people who choose to carry a knife do so out of fear. Even if they don't admit it, a young person involved in weapons will be frightened, and continuously looking over their shoulder. They will be waiting for the police to stop and search them, or to be confronted by others, and in the end will be grateful for a 'way out' of that lifestyle.

**MYTH:** Young people in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent think carrying a knife is 'normal'

**REALITY:** 89% of young people in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent **do not** think it is normal to carry a knife in their home area.

**MYTH:** Most young people carry knives

**REALITY:** 99% of young people **do not** carry knives



# What can you do?

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## Learn about the law

- Carrying a knife, bladed article or offensive weapon in a public place is illegal. This includes any article made, adapted, or intended for causing injury.
- Carrying a knife includes in your hand, a pocket, in the boot of your car or if someone else is carrying a knife for you.
- Forgetfulness, ignorance to the law or general self-defence (protection) are not reasonable excuses if you are caught carrying a knife.
- Police are legally allowed to use their powers to stop and search someone if they believe a weapon is being carried.

## Make your child aware of the consequences

- Carrying a weapon increases the risk of them being injured themselves.
- They could go to jail for up to 4-years if they're found in possession of a knife or 5 years for a gun, even if they're carrying it for someone else.
- In a worst case scenario, they could end up using the weapon and seriously hurting someone.
- There are tips and advice on how best to start this conversation with a young person about knives and knife harm below.
- Having a criminal record could stop your child gaining entry into a university, getting a job, and could even place restrictions on them travelling to some countries.

## Talk to the parents of your child's friends

- If you're worried, parents of your child's friends probably are too. They may see your child in different places, hanging out with different friends and could help you get a better understanding of the situation.
- By working together, you could raise awareness of the issue.

# Practical tips on identifying knife crime

- Know what knives and how many you have in the kitchen and in toolkits at home.
- Monitor any unusual online purchases arriving at your home.
- Online retailers and delivery companies should ask for age verification when they deliver or when they ask you to collect age restricted goods.
- Keep engaged with your child or young person and their use of social media. Internet Matters have a wealth of information on how to keep your child safe online (<https://www.internetmatters.org/>).
- Think about searching their bag and room (is there evidence of drugs, extra money, or new clothes?). Think of other hiding spaces that may be used in your home and remember it might not be a knife but some other weapon.
- Know where they are and who they are with (do they have a new circle of friends and are they becoming less engaged with their family?).
- Encourage them to 'hang out' in safe areas wherever possible and talk to your child about places they can go if they are feeling vulnerable.

## How to dispose of a knife

- Before disposing a knife, make sure to wrap it securely to avoid injury.
- There are knife banks located across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent where members of the public can anonymously surrender their weapons with no repercussions. Find your nearest knife bank here: <https://violencereductionalliance.co.uk/ditch-the-blade/>.
- Alternatively, you can dispose a knife at your nearest Waste Recycling Centre (skip).



# There are many reasons for children to decide to carry a knife or weapon

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This list does not include every reason why a child may carry a knife but includes some of the most common reasons.

- They fear being a victim of knife crime – this could be from a specific threat, or a perceived fear, and are carrying the knife for protection. This is the most common reason that young people give us for knife carrying.
- General self-defence – the ‘just in case’ reason.
- They may feel marginalised or alienated.
- Peer pressure or being pressured into carrying it for someone else.
- They don’t know it’s wrong or they don’t know it’s illegal.
- To intimidate others (by way of protection).
- To earn respect or street cred.
- There may also be some involvement in other criminal activities



# The conversation

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Speaking to your child about knife crime requires a direct, and frank conversation. Here is some guidance you may find useful.

## Getting started

Find the right time. The conversation needs to take place wherever they feel safest, which could be inside the family home. Be available and ready to listen, as well as reassuring them that they can be honest with you and let them know you are not there to judge them.

Be prepared by finding out more about knife crime at No Knives Better Lives ([noknivesbetterlives.com](https://noknivesbetterlives.com)). They have more than 10 years of experience in Scotland of helping parents to talk with their children about knives.

## Listen

Don't expect or demand them to talk. If they do, be patient and try not to react straight away to what they tell you. Give them the voice in this conversation and don't rush to give advice that they may not be ready to hear. Be empathic.

## Stick to the facts

They might not think you know what you're talking about so a little preparation can really help here. #DitchtheBlade (DTB) is a local partnership campaign that seeks to educate young people on the dangers and consequences of carrying a knife. DTB aims to dispel myths around knife crime and instead provide young people with the facts such as, 99% of young people do not carry a knife. Find out more here:

<https://www.staffordshire.police.uk/ditchtheblade>

## Encourage them to share their fears

Create a non-judgemental and empathic relationship as this will enable your child to share their fears and feelings. This will help you to better understand their situation.

## Be positive

Show them that they are being listened to. Reassure them that the vast majority of young people don't carry a knife. If they are fearful of someone or something specific, tell them that it can be dealt with without the need for them to carry a knife.

## Be clear about false 'bravery'

Walking away from confrontation or a fight is the braver thing to do. If someone pulls a knife on them, the safest and wisest thing to do is to run away. Young people fear backlash from their peers, and fear being targeted by a wider group for not stepping up to a situation or individual. Remind them that this moment will pass, and attention will move away from them in time.

## Be realistic

If you start the conversation, be prepared to hear answers you might not like. Your child may feel you have no experience of knife crime or the challenges they face. Are there any examples from your own childhood that you can draw upon? Has there been anything in the news recently or something that's happened locally that you can refer to?

## The impact

Help them reflect on how their actions could affect the people who care for them the most. Using a knife is only the beginning. It could place others at risk of being brought into the situation against their will. If they were injured, who will be affected?

## Suggest alternatives

Find out about safe, fun activities for children and young people in your local area by searching the internet or your local council's website. Ask other parents and local community leaders about activities and safe spaces they know about in your local area.

Try something different. It doesn't have to just be a conversation; you know your children and what they respond to best. Try thinking beyond a 'chat' and try helping them understand the risks with knives.

Get help and support yourself. It may be that you learn some worrying things about your child and the things they're involved in. Try not to overreact but don't feel you have to deal with this on your own – help is available.

# Here are some facts to make you feel more confident when talking to your child

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## Getting caught with a knife

If you get caught with a knife, even if it was for your own protection, or you were carrying it for someone else, you will be arrested and prosecuted.

## Stop and search

Police can and will search you if they believe you are carrying a knife.

## Prison

If you get caught with a knife you can be sentenced to prison of up to 4 years – even if you have no intention to use the knife.

## Keeping safe

Some people say that they carry knives to protect themselves and ‘keep safe’. But hospital data shows that if you carry a knife you are much more likely to use it and to get stabbed yourself.

## Joint enterprise

If someone is injured or killed by a knife in your presence, you could be prosecuted even if it is not you who uses it. You could be sent to prison for murder in what is referred to as ‘joint enterprise’.

## Alcohol & drugs

Alcohol and drugs lower your inhibitions and increases the chances of taking a risk.

## Knife crime can kill

There is no ‘safe place’ to stab someone. If you stab someone and cause a wound in the arm or the leg, this can still be life threatening. A penetration with a small blade can be enough to cut an artery leading to death.

## Criminal record

If you have a criminal record you might not be accepted into a college or university, get a job, or travel to some countries, like the USA, Canada or Australia.

# Local services and support for young people and families

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If you believe somebody is in immediate danger, dial **999**.

## Youth Offending Service

If you are worried about your child or another young person you can contact your local Youth Offending Service (YOS) via your local council. The YOS is separate from the police and the courts and work with young people that get into trouble with the law. For further support contact your local safeguarding board below.

## Safeguarding Children Partnership Stoke-on-Trent

Between 8:30am - 6:00pm Monday to Friday, you can call the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CHaD) on **01782 235100** to speak to an experienced social worker about your concerns. Outside of these hours you can contact the Emergency Duty Team on **01782 234234**. If the child is at immediate risk, call **999**. For further information visit: <https://safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk/>

## Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board

Between 8:30am - 5.00pm Monday to Thursday or 8:30am - 4:30pm Friday, you can call Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support (SCAS) on **0300 111 8007**. Outside of these hours you can contact EDS on **0345 604 2886** or email [eds.team.manager@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:eds.team.manager@staffordshire.gov.uk). If the child is at immediate risk, call **999**. For further information visit: <https://staffscb.org.uk/>

## Catch22

Catch22 deliver bespoke interventions with children and young people who are at risk or victim of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), supporting them to recover and stay safe. You can call Catch22 on **07834341602** or email [catch22cce@catch-22.org.uk](mailto:catch22cce@catch-22.org.uk). For further information visit: <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/find-services/stoke-staffordshire-cce/>

## Staffordshire Police

If you believe somebody is in immediate danger always dial **999**. If you wish to report a crime that has already happened and you do not require an immediate response call Staffordshire Police on **101**.

## **Staffordshire Victim Gateway**

Alternatively, if your child has been victim of a crime you can contact the Staffordshire Victim Gateway for support. You can call the Victim Gateway on **0330 0881 339** or visit: <https://staffsvictimsgateway.org.uk/>

## **Pan-Staffordshire PSHE Education Service**

The Pan-Staffordshire PSHE Education Service recognises that schools and parents & carers cannot be expected to be experts in every area of life. To help increase confidence in topics and ensure the information shared is appropriate for the child, depending on their age and stage of development, the PSHE Education Service has developed a wide range of support and information on topics such as, knife crime. Visit: <https://pshestaffs.com/parents-carers/>

Find out about the statutory parts of PSHE, what your child will learn in school and how you can be involved in this process here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-schools>

# National services and support for young people and families

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## Crimestoppers

CrimeStoppers are an independent charity and are open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year; they do not record calls or track IP addresses. CrimeStoppers will then pass the information you have provided to the Police to help them investigate a crime. You can pass information to CrimeStoppers anonymously by calling **0800 555 111** or visit: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/>

## Fearless.org

Fearless.org has been developed by CrimeStoppers specifically for young people to report what they know, not who they are. Visit: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless>

## The Ben Kinsella Trust

The Ben Kinsella Trust are one of the leading anti-knife crime charities in the UK, set up following the tragic murder of Ben Kinsella in 2008. They work with over 4,000 young people a year through purpose built exhibitions and help thousands more through their free online resources. Visit: <https://benkinsella.org.uk/>

## Is This OK?

Is This Ok? is a free, anonymous and confidential service bringing trained professionals together to provide support to young people through a chat service. Visit: <https://www.isthisok.org.uk/>

## NSPCC

The NSPCC helpline provides information and advice to parents and others concerned about young people who may be involved or affected by gang activity. Their helpline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/gangs-criminal-exploitation/>

## Young Minds

Young Minds offer tailored information, advice and support to parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health. You can call their helpline for free on **0808 802 5544** or visit: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

## Childline

Your child can call Childline on **0800 1111** at any time if they are worried about their own safety or visit: <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

# Glossary of terms

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## **Offensive weapons**

An offensive weapon is any object that has been made, adapted or intended to cause harm. It is an offence to carry a knife or other offensive weapons without lawful authority or legal reason. It is an offence to have any article in a public place which has a blade or sharp point.

## **Physical possession**

This could be anywhere on your body or in your belongings, such as in your hand, pocket, or stuffed down a sock.

## **Constructive possession**

This could be in the boot of a car or carried by someone for somebody else.

## **Public place**

Any road, premises or place to which the public have or are permitted to have access, whether through payment or otherwise.

## **Made to cause injury**

This includes any item which has been made to cause injury to another person, such as knuckle duster, police baton, bayonets etc.

## **Adapted weapon**

This is anything innocent that has been adapted to cause injury, such as a broken bottle, discarded chair leg with nails etc.

## **Intended weapon**

This could be any item intended and/or used as a weapon, including (but not limited to) umbrellas, pens, etc.

## **Blade/s**

Any bladed article can be classed as a blade, this includes kitchen knives, scissors, craft knife or any other article with a cutting edge or blade.

## **Sharply pointed**

This includes any object with a sharp point, such as, needles, nails and screws etc

# Voice of Young People in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

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“Even though I knew I could get hurt I didn’t know how to break away...”

**16 year old girl,  
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**

“I am not a bad person, but I wanted to feel like I was cool like everyone else.”

**14 year old boy,  
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**

“My brother and I were nearly dragged into a place that could’ve destroyed us all.”

**14 year old boy, Staffordshire**

“I feel better now that things are out in the open.”

**16 year old girl,  
Staffordshire**

For more information on the Violence Reduction Alliance visit:  
<https://violencereductionalliance.co.uk/>



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