



The **Ben Kinsella** Trust
Stop Knife Crime



Helping our children **stay safe:** a guide to knife crime and safety for parents and carers.

Information and practical skills to help you
feel confident when talking to your child
about making positive choices to stay safe.



You may be worried your child is affected by knife crime and violence

Parenting children and young adults is hard, sometimes it can be scary and overwhelming with news stories and social media influencing how safe we feel our children are and the risks they may face in today's climate. It can be extremely worrying to think your child may be affected by knife crime and violence.

They may not be carrying a weapon themselves but are spending time with people who are or seeing content online suggesting that knife carrying is normal. It isn't. Most young people don't carry knives.

If you discover your child is carrying a knife, a natural reaction as a parent or carer may be anger or panic. It is important that we take a breath and take time to consider what might be happening in our child's life that leads to harmful beliefs about knife carrying.

We all want to keep our children safe and understand that conversations about knife crime and safety can be difficult.

We also know that with the right support and advice from the adults they trust, young people want to, and do, make positive choices about safety.

This guide helps us understand why a young person may feel compelled to carry a weapon or knife. Whatever the reasons, it is likely to stem from feelings of fear and being unsafe.

Even if they don't admit it, a young person considering carrying a knife will be frightened and may not be able to consider the consequences of doing so.

They may be worried about being found with a weapon by teachers or the Police. They may feel they have no option but to carry a knife to stay safe in their community. They may be scared they will be involved in a violent situation and expected to 'use' the knife. Young people who carry knives often believe they are safer if they do. They are not.

We can help by having conversations with our children about their feelings of safety and dispel the myths that carrying a knife keeps someone safe.

This guide provides valuable information on keeping young people safe and equips parents and carers with practical skills, including tips on how to have meaningful conversations about the risks of carrying a knife. It also contains relevant resources and where to seek further help or support.

This guide is not here to tell you how to parent; just to share the approaches that work best when supporting children and young people.

What's the Law?

It is helpful to understand the law around knife and weapon carrying, so we can speak confidently with our children about what is legal and what is not.

Knives and blades:

It is illegal to carry a knife* or any bladed or sharply pointed article without good reason in a public place. A public place can be the street, a school, in shops and anywhere else the public have access. Exceptions to this include carrying the knife as part of your job, such as a tool for work; for religious reasons, such as the kirpan some Sikhs carry; or as part of any national costume.

However, claiming you forgot you had it, ignorance to the law or stating you carried it for protection, are not accepted defences. A court will decide if you have 'good reason' to carry a knife or a weapon if you are arrested and charged with carrying it illegally.

****Unless it has a folding blade three inches long or less, such as a pocketknife used by scout-style groups.***



Offensive Weapons:

It is illegal to carry any **offensive weapon** in a public place.

An offensive weapon is any article made, adapted, or intended for causing injury as detailed below:

Made: Made to cause injury, such as a zombie knife or knuckle duster.

Adapted: Something innocent that has been adapted to cause injury, such as a broken bottle or a cricket ball inside a sock.

Intended: Anything else, such as an umbrella or a car-key that is intended by the person to cause injury to others, even if that person is carrying it for perceived 'self-protection'.

'Carrying' a knife or offensive weapon includes in your hand, a waistband, your bag, in the boot of your car or if someone else is carrying a knife for you. It is also illegal to carry a knife for someone else.

It is illegal to use **any** knife or weapon in a threatening way.

It is illegal to sell most knives or weapons to anyone under 18, this includes online sales.

Knives and offensive weapons in private premises:

There are some knives and weapons that are illegal to possess, even if they are kept in private premises, like the home. Some of these prohibited weapons are zombie knives, zombie-style knives, ninja swords, flick knives and disguised knives (such as everyday items like lipsticks, hairbrushes and phones that contain concealed blades).

A list of illegal knives can be found here:

www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives



Help your child understand the consequences

- **Carrying a knife increases the risk of them being seriously injured or killed themselves.** A person is statistically more likely to be hurt with their own knife, as it can be used against them, and this accounts for a large proportion of knife-related injuries.
- **Knife-carrying can lead to feelings of 'false bravery'** which means they may find themselves in increasingly dangerous situations.
- **If they are known to carry a knife by their peers, they may be targeted by others.** If a knife is present in any situation, it means serious violence can also escalate extremely quickly.
- **They could go to prison for up to four years if they're found in possession of a knife,** even if they're carrying it for someone else.
- **They will get a criminal record,** which could stop them going to university or getting a job, and places restrictions on countries that they can travel to, such as the USA, Australia and Canada.
- **In the very worst circumstances, they could end up using the weapon and seriously hurting someone or killing them.** If they kill someone with a knife, they could be **jailed for at least 25 years.**
- **In summary,** young people are less safe if they carry a knife.





Signs and behaviours that may raise our concerns

Often as parents and carers, we can sense when something is troubling our children. Sometimes our children will communicate with us that something is wrong through their behaviour rather than through words. By trusting our own instincts and paying attention to changes in our child's behaviour we can help keep them safe. Our child might be:

- **Experiencing sudden changes in behaviour** i.e. more aggressive or more withdrawn.
- **Very secretive** with friendship groups.
- **Using social media and mobile phones excessively** and becoming angry if they aren't allowed to.
- **Using violent language** or slang that is not familiar.
- Returning home with **injuries**.
- **Scared** to leave the home or go to school.
- **Violent** towards siblings, parents, carers and other family members.
- **Going missing** from home or school.
- **Using alcohol or illegal substances**, such as cannabis or nitrous oxide to manage the stress.
- **Associating with older young people** or young adults.

Practical ways to keep your child safe

- **Know what knives you have** in the kitchen and in any toolkits at home.
- **Dispose of any unused knives or blades in knife surrender bins.** They can often be found at local police stations or in central parts of the community.
- **Monitor any unusual online purchases** arriving at your home.
- **Consider searching their room or bag** for hidden knives.
- **Talk to your child** about what they are experiencing and seeing online.
- **Be familiar with social media apps** and select the safest security settings with your child.
- **Know where your child is spending time and with who**, between leaving school in the afternoon and returning home. It is between these hours that violence is known to rise between young people.
- **Replace household knives with safer rounded tip knives.** You can find more information here: Let's Be Blunt Campaign – www.letsbeblunt.co.uk

Talk to other parents and carers:

If you're worried about your child, it is likely the parents or carers of your child's friends share your concerns.

They may see your child out and about in the area or spending time with different friends and could help you get a better understanding of the situation. By talking with each other, you could raise concerns before they become harmful and support each other in keeping children and young people safe.



There are many reasons a young person may carry a knife or weapon

The following are just some of the reasons a young person may carry a knife or weapon. It is important to remember that the decision to do so is often through them feeling scared or unsafe.

- **They fear being a victim of knife crime** – this could be from a specific threat from someone, or a perceived fear of feeling unsafe, and are carrying the knife for protection. This is the most common reason that young people give us for knife carrying.
- **Protection** – they may feel they need to protect themselves in their area and carry it ‘just in case’.
- **They may feel marginalised** or isolated and feel unsafe.
- **They may fear sexual violence.**
- **Peer pressure** to carry one or being pressured into carrying one for someone else.
- **They may be forced to carry it for someone else**, for example a peer or gang member.
- **They don’t know it’s wrong or illegal.**
- **To intimidate others** and to feel ‘bigger’ or ‘safer’.
- **To earn respect** or clout from their peers.
- **Boredom** and a need for ‘excitement’.
- **There may also be some involvement in other criminal activities**, such as robberies or sexual violence.
- **Knife carrying and violence is normalised and glamourised on social media.**

It is vital that we consider how young people feel when they are out and about in the area they live and go to school or college. They may be seeing violence online, hearing about peers carrying weapons (even if it’s not true), seeing local young people behave in an intimidating way and they expect violence when they leave the house. It is so important to talk to our children about how safe they feel and what they do to keep themselves safe.

Speaking to your child or a young person about knife crime and safety is an important element of keeping them safe.

The following tips can help when having conversations about tricky topics:

- **Find the right time.** The conversation needs to take place wherever they feel safest, emotionally and physically. If they are angry, upset or dysregulated, help them to feel calm and safe before moving on to the bigger topics.
- **Take the time and be ready to actively listen.** Reassure them they can be honest with you and let them know you are not going to judge them.
- **Listening well means not interrupting** when we hear something that we don’t like or that worries us. We can give them advice when the time is right.
- **Walking away from conflict 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 this moment will pass, and attention will move away from them in time.
- **Help them consider the consequences of carrying/ using a knife**, not just for themselves but for their family and friends. It could put people at risk of retaliation attacks.
- **Be prepared to hear answers you might not like.** Our children are growing up in a very different environment from the ones we did.
- **The conversation may not go as planned the first time.** That’s ok, you can try again another time.
- **It doesn’t have to take place at a particular time or place for it to have impact;** look for opportunities for smaller chats such as whilst watching a TV show, in the car, or going for a walk.

Your child may tell you things that are worrying or scary. Stay calm and know you don’t have to deal with this on your own. There are some useful organisations at the end of this guide who are there to help.



You can also increase your understanding of knife crime experiences by listening to our podcast series, **Real Stories, Real People** – [realstoriesreal people podcast](https://linktr.ee/realstoriesrealpeoplepodcast) – Listen on linktr.ee/realstoriesrealpeoplepodcast



Empowering our children to stay safe

We aren't here to tell young people what to do, we know that often has the opposite effect. We are here to listen, guide and empower them to make positive choices around safety. We can do this by encouraging our children to consider three things.

We call these the **Safe 'T's**.

safe 'T's

Trust instincts **Take** a breath **Talk** to a trusted adult

Trust Instincts

We have a large nerve called the 'vagus nerve' that connects our gut and brain. It sends messages in both directions. This communication system is called the Gut-Brain Axis.

When we are in a situation that threatens our survival, our gut will send messages to our brain. We may have feelings of butterflies, or our stomach may churn. We may have sensations we cannot even describe.

By the time that message gets to our brain, it may start to override our gut-instincts.

We may tell ourselves 'you've got this wrong', 'you're being dramatic about this', or 'you always make a big deal out of nothing'.

This reasoning can get in the way of our gut instincts from keeping us safe. Our bellies are our best friends, trust your gut.

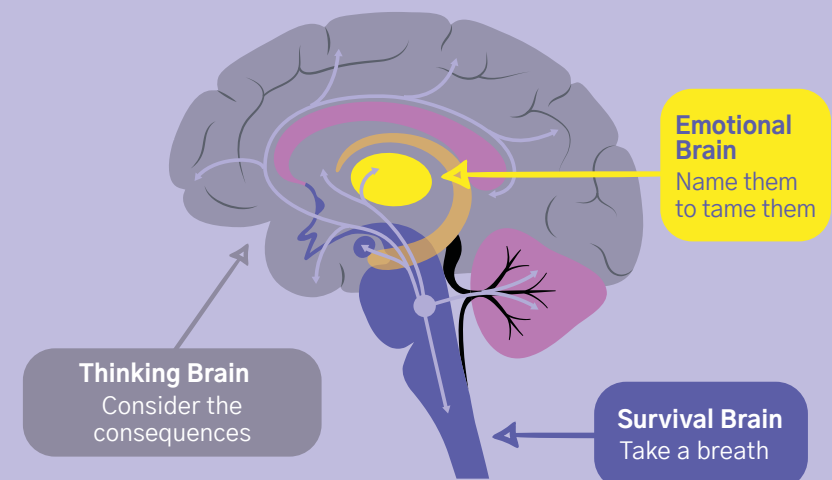
Take a breath

Our child may have been triggered or provoked by something or someone in person or online – a threat, being humiliated by a peer or being sent an abusive message. At this point they are likely to be operating within their 'survival brain'. Whilst we are in this area, we cannot access our 'thinking brain' which helps with decision making, problem solving and understanding consequences.

There is never a situation where we don't have time to **take a breath**. This gives us the ability to calm our fight or flight response that activates in our survival brain. Taking a breath allows us to take a moment to understand what we might be experiencing and feeling.

In the middle part of our brain, we feel emotions. You can ask yourself, 'what emotions am I feeling about what is happening and why?'. You might be feeling angry, upset, disappointed or frustrated. We can help our children to name their emotions in order to tame them. Once they have acknowledged their feelings to a trigger, they can access their 'thinking brain'.

The top part of our brain is our thinking brain. This is where we can consider the consequences and make positive choices that keep us safe. When you give yourself time to **respond** to conflict instead of **reacting** without thought, you can achieve more favourable outcomes.



Talk to a trusted adult

Young people tell us that it is often the thoughtful words, support and guidance of a trusted adult that empowered them to make the right choices in certain situations.

They are more likely to **seek the support** and **listen to the advice** from adults when they are treated as equals and with respect.

We can help our children write a list of who they trust to talk to when faced with challenging situations. We are likely to feel less isolated when we can see the names of people who will look out for us.

Helping young people to 'speak out' when something is wrong or harmful.

It is important to change the narrative of 'speaking out' when talking to young people.

They are not being a snitch; they are **helping their community, friends and family stay safe**. When someone reports information to keep others safe, they are being an **active bystander**.

We can help our children feel detached from the situation. This is not about them; it is about information they have that could **save someone's life and/or prevent harm**.

We can help young people **feel safe when sharing information**, by exploring the difference between 'snitching' and 'reporting'.

Snitching is done for negative reasons, such as to get someone else in trouble, to get yourself out of trouble or to hurt someone. Reporting information is done for positive reasons such as to keep yourself or others safe and because you know something is wrong or harmful. It might be a situation where our children have seen another young person with a knife, or they have seen someone make threats towards another person online.

Young people can also pass on information safely and 100% anonymously at www.fearless.org/



For more advice, visit the Humber Violence Prevention Partnership's Trusted Adults campaign at www.humbervpp.org

Key facts to share when talking to your child about knife crime

- **You are less safe if you carry a knife.** You are more likely to be seriously injured or killed.
- **There is no safe place to be stabbed on the body;** you can bleed out from the wound of a very small knife.
- **You can be stopped and searched by the police or teachers** if they suspect you are carrying a knife or weapon.
- **If you are found with a knife**, even if you are carrying it for someone else, **you will be arrested**, and you may be charged and have to go to court.
- **If you are convicted at court, you will receive a criminal record** which can prevent you from pursuing certain careers, education opportunities and travel abroad to certain countries.
- **You can receive up to four years in prison** for carrying a knife, even if you didn't intend to use it.
- **If someone is injured or killed by someone with a knife in your presence, you could be prosecuted even if you did not use the knife yourself.** You could be sent to prison for murder or manslaughter under a legal rule called 'joint enterprise' if you are seen as assisting or encouraging it to happen. Filming or photographing the event can be seen as encouraging it.
- **Alcohol and other substances**, such as cannabis (including edibles, like gummies) or nitrous oxide (balloons/laughing gas) can affect brain chemistry and **alter your ability to make safe choices**.
- **Reassure them that most young people don't carry a knife.**

Remember the Safe 'T's

Trust your gut instincts. If a situation or friendship feels wrong or harmful, then it probably is. Come home or find a safe space, such as a shop or public building until you can be collected by a trusted adult.

Take a breath and take yourself away from the person or situation, even if it is an online interaction.

Talk to your parents, your teachers, youth mentors and the police if you are worried about your safety.

If you are concerned about keeping a child safe, this shows how much you care and that you are doing a great job already. Keep going, keep learning, and keep growing.

Finding positive alternatives

Children and young people who are involved in positive extra-curricular activities, such as sports or creative programmes, may be protected from the effects of knife crime and violence.

Not only do these programmes meet young people's need for excitement, risk-taking and achievement, they can also offer pathways to other support such as mentoring, counselling and other opportunities not related to that activity.

Youth programmes can also improve children's social skills, emotional regulation and provide connections with others in a safe and positive environment.

Many local authorities and youth organisations offer free or subsidised activities for young people. You can find what is available in the area you live on local authority websites, your child's school or online community pages.

To find activities near you, visit Youth Connect at www.youth-connect.co.uk



You are not alone

There are many helpful organisations that offer support to young people and their families. Here are some of the services we recommend.

Ben Kinsella Trust

Free learning resources and information for parents, teachers, practitioners, and young people. www.benkinsella.org.uk/resources/

We also offer workshops for parents and carers. www.benkinsella.org.uk/knife-crime-training-for-parents-and-carers/

Fearless

Fearless is a service that allows young people to pass on information about crime 100% anonymously. www.fearless.org/

Crimestoppers

Is an independent charity that gives you the power to speak up to stop crime, 100% anonymously. www.crimestoppers-uk.org

The Police

Details of your local team and the work they are doing can be found here – www.police.uk. You should call 101 to report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response.

NSPCC

Their 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 24/7. www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline

Your child can call Childline free on 0800 1111 at any time if they are worried about their own safety. www.childline.org.uk

The Children's Society

Working alongside young people, their families and community they provide specialist support that empowers young people to make positive changes and rediscover their hope. www.childrenssociety.org.uk

The King's Trust

Support for families and young people (11–30 years old). www.kingstrust.org.uk

Family Lives

Gives advice on all aspects of parenting and is open 24/7. Freephone 0800 800 2222 or visit www.familylives.org.uk

National Bullying Helpline

They offer a free confidential helpline service for anyone experiencing bullying and needing advice. www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk

Ivison Trust

A national charity that works to keep children safe from exploitation by supporting parents, disrupting exploiters and working in partnership with police and family services. www.ivisontrust.org.uk

Young Minds

A national mental health charity that offers information and support to young people, their parents and carers. www.youngminds.org.uk

Kooth

Kooth offers free, safe and anonymous support for anyone aged 13+ who needs help with their mental health. www.kooth.com

Smartphone Free Childhood

A grassroots movement bringing parents together to stand up for healthier, happier childhoods. www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

Local organisations that offer help and support can be found here – www.humbervpp.org/help-support

The Ben Kinsella Trust



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