



# **Knife crime and Exploitation**

**a guide for parents & carers**

**We all want our children to grow up in a safe and loving environment and become happy, confident adults. To get there they need to be surrounded by positive influences, good advice and the knowledge that if they ever need help and support there will be someone to talk to.**

**As a parent/carer, it's you who they'll look to for help. And, as they're your child, it's up to you to talk to them when you think they might need a nudge in the right direction to share information or try to find out more about something that doesn't seem quite right with them at the time.**

**You can play a vital role in stopping 'Knife Crime' becoming a part of your young people's lives. Knowing the Law and talking to your child about the dangers can help keep them safe. Knife crime in East Sussex is low compared to other parts of the county but it still happens.**

**Media attention has raised the awareness to the issues surrounding knives and exploitation in relation to County Lines, but it is up to us to improve young people's understanding about 'keeping safe and provide them with the right information to help them make the right choices!**

**This leaflet provides information and guidance around knives and exploitation - what to look for and what to do if you suspect your son or daughter may be at risk.**

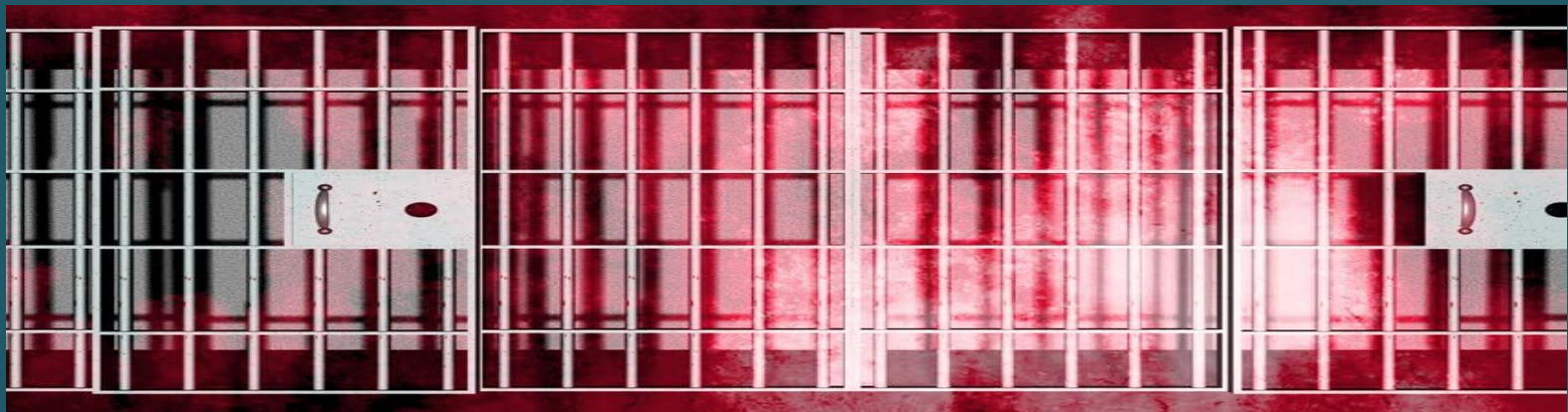
# WHAT IS KNIFE CRIME?

Put simply, knife crime is a crime that involves a knife.

Knife crime includes:

- carrying a knife
- trying to buy a knife if you are under 18
- threatening someone with a knife
- owning a banned knife
- injuring or fatally wounding somebody with a knife
- intent to injure or harm somebody with a knife
- a robbery or burglary where a knife was carried as a weapon

Setting aside the damage inflicted by a knife on a life, the potential legal consequences for those who carry, and use in acts of violence, a knife are severe. For simply carrying a knife in a public place or on school premises, the maximum penalty if convicted is four years in prison. Those found on more than one occasion to be in possession of a knife face a minimum sentence of six months.



# KNIFE CRIME

Here are some facts to help you feel more confident when talking to your child:

## *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.

## *Keeping Safe*

Some young people carry knives to protect themselves and 'keep safe'. But if you carry a knife you are much more likely to use it and to get stabbed yourself.

## *There's No safe place*

There is no 'safe place' to stab someone. A wound in the arm or the leg can still be life threatening. Young people have died from wounds to the leg because an artery was severed.

## *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.

## *Searches*

Police can and will search someone if they believe they are carrying a knife. Police and school staff can search young people for weapons at school.

# SPOTTING THE SIGNS

Have they become withdrawn from the family and/or school?

Is their school or college reporting worrying changes in behaviour, academic achievement or attendance?

Have they lost interest in positive activities such as sports clubs?

Do they stay out unusually late without giving a reason and are vague about their whereabouts?

Have they stopped seeing old friends and started hanging out with a new group?

Are they secretive about the contents of their bag?

Are they defensive if you ask what is in their possession or if they are hiding anything?

Has their attitude changed about carrying knives/weapons? For example, justifying it by saying people carry them for self-defence?

Have any items gone missing from the kitchen, tool box or garage?

Have you found a weapon hidden amongst their possessions?



# EXPLOITATION

Child exploitation comes in many forms and can be criminal or sexual in nature.

County lines is the term used for groups or gangs who use young people or vulnerable adults to carry and sell drugs from borough to borough, and across county boundaries. It is a tactic used by groups or gangs to sell drugs in an area outside of the area they live, reducing their risk of detection.

This issue is affecting many areas across the UK and its impact can be seen in East Sussex and in many of our towns.

County line enterprises almost always involve exploitation of vulnerable people: this could involve both children and adults and is always a safeguarding issue.

The gang/group will put vulnerable individuals between themselves and the risk of detection, asking them to carry and sell drugs, and/or to sell drugs at the other end of the line.

The impact of this is that young people become indebted to gang/groups and are forced into labour and sexual exploitation to pay off debts.

The young person may feel they have gained 'friends' or 'family' and that these people care for him or her. The young person may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs. They may also feel a sense of 'status' and 'power' that they haven't had before.

# **SOME INDICATORS FOR PARENTS/CARERS TO BE AWARE OF CAN INCLUDE:**

- **Frequent missing episodes and been found out of area**
- **Found with large quantities of drugs or weapons**
- **Unexplained amounts of money, mobiles, credit, clothing, jewellery, new hair cut or other items/gifts**
- **Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or dishevelled**
- **Change in behaviour; more secretive / withdrawn/isolated from peers or not mixing with usual friends**
- **Unexplained absences from, or not engaged in school/ college/ training/ work**
- **Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school Including use of sexualised language and language in relation to drug dealing and/or violence**
- **Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens to them**
- **Increased interest in making money**
- **Reports being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults**
- **Increasing use of drugs or alcohol**
- **Having multiple mobile phones, sim cards or use of a phone that causes concern - multiple callers or more texts /pings than usual**
- **Possession of hotel keys/cards or keys to unknown premises**

# HAVING THE CONVERSATION

You can really help with knife crime prevention by talking through the issues with your child/ children.

- Making sure you know what knife crime is and that they understand how upset you'd be if they got caught with a knife or got injured can have a big impact.



- Your child might not tell you much (they might tell you the exact opposite), but what you say, think and feel is important to them.
- They might not think you know what you're talking about so a little preparation can really help here.



- 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?
- Is there someone else that your child trusts who could help you to have the conversation?
- 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.

**Crimestoppers - If you suspect someone is carrying a knife or other offensive weapon or have information about a crime, you can report it safely and anonymously to Crimestoppers. Call: 0800 555 111 at any time or visit the Crimestoppers website**

**Help in your local area -Contact East Sussex County Council for [Local parenting support](#)**

**Families can help each other - Speak to the families of your child's friends. If you're worried, chances are they have concerns about their child too. Working together can be a valuable way to look out for each other and help keep your children safe.**

**Family Lives offers a confidential and free helpline service for families in England and Wales (previously known as Parentline). Please call them on 0808 800 2222 for emotional support, information, advice and guidance on any aspect of parenting and family life.**

# **WORRIED ABOUT A CHILD OR TEENAGER WHO MIGHT BE AT RISK OF HARM OR IN DANGER?**

## **Sussex Police**

- **In an emergency call 999**
- **Anyone who has suspicions or information about drug dealing in their community or wider afield can contact the police at any time online; <https://sussex.police.uk/contact-us/report-online/> or by calling 101.**

## **Children's Services**

- **Contact the Single Point of Advice (SPOA) team to report a safeguarding concern Phone: 01323 464222**

**General enquiries: 0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk**

**Opening hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm, Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm**

**For out of hours enquiries please contact the Emergency Duty Service.**

**Call the Emergency Duty Service out of hours from 5pm to 8.30am (after 4.30pm on Fridays) and during the weekends and bank holidays if you have a serious concern about a child's welfare that cannot wait until the following working day. This out of hour's service covers East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.**

- **01273 335906 or**
- **01273 335905**



Children are being exploited by gangs involved in drug crime.  
**Know the signs to spot.**

County lines gangs use children to courier drugs and money across the country. Children are targeted for recruitment by these gangs in public spaces, such as shopping centres and high streets.

Have you seen:

A child, sometimes as young as 12, alone in a shopping centre or high street either during school hours or unusual hours (early in the morning, late at night)

Are they obviously being approached or intimidated by a controlling, peer or group?

They could be receiving excessive texts or phone calls

They might seem unfamiliar with the local area, or not have a local accent

Are they deliberately avoiding authority figures such as police officers or security guards?

Some may be with older individuals who are purchasing tickets for them or giving them money for tickets

**If you spot a vulnerable young person you should immediately take steps to safeguard the young person in line with your company's safeguarding policies.**

Leaflet produced by #kNOw knives Project East Sussex and the Safer East Sussex Team

[www.safeineastsussex.org.uk](http://www.safeineastsussex.org.uk)

