What to do if your child has a knife or weapon

Guide for parents, carers and family members

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1. Introduction

This guidance[1] is for parents, carers, family members and trusted adults who think a child under the age of 18 has a knife or offensive weapon. It explains how to report concerns and ask for help and what you should expect in response.

If you are worried that your child has a knife or weapon, you are not alone. You may feel worried, upset, or unsure what to do. **It is your responsibility to report concerns**. Some parents/carers told us they worry that asking for help will lead to their child being arrested or judged. Getting advice and support early can help keep your child and others safe.

This guidance explains practical steps you can take and where to get support. Support can also come from trusted adults in your child's life, such as relatives, mentors, youth workers, teachers or community leaders.

If English is not your first language, ask the service you contact for an interpreter. You can also ask for information in a format you can understand.

2. Why young people carry knives or weapons

Few children choose to carry a knife or weapon, but if they do, there are a number of reasons why.

Feel unsafe
Children told us that some carry knives or weapons because they feel afraid or believe carrying a knife or weapon keeps them safe: *"They may be part of a gang or carrying a knife because they feel unsafe. They may feel scared or under threat."*

Feel pressured by others
They may feel pressured by friends or feel a need to fit into a group or gang. They may also be pressured, threatened or forced to carry a weapon for someone else. This is a form of exploitation. If you think this may be happening, tell the police, school, social worker or another professional supporting your child.

Want status or respect
They may think a knife or weapon makes them feel important, powerful or respected. One young person told us: *"Some carry to give them confidence that they can deal with a situation. Just feels cool to have something dangerous."*

Want to scare others
They may plan to use it to threaten or scare others.

Want to cause harm
In rare cases, carrying a knife or weapon may be because they want to hurt

[1] We recognise that children and young people live in many types of families and support arrangements. This guidance is aimed at parents, carers and family members. It is not designed for looked after children as there is a reasonable expectation that social workers and children's home staff will report concerns without the need for this guidance.

someone. Even if they do not intend to use it, carrying a knife or weapon can increase the risk of becoming involved in violence or becoming a victim of violence themselves.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities may need extra support in understanding the risks of having a knife. Knowing their needs and understanding how they think can help you or their worker to support them but does not mean there is less of a risk.

3. Signs to look out for

If you haven't found a knife or weapon, but are worried that your child may have one or be planning to obtain one, here are some signs to look out for:

- not going to school
- changes in friendships
- spending a lot of time alone or being secretive
- being bullied or holding a grievance
- knives going missing at home
- expressing negative attitudes or behaviours towards women or girls
- packages arriving at your home which require ID or proof of age
- an interest in violent videos or online content
- use, or suspected use, of drugs

These signs alone do not mean that your child has a knife or weapon, but they should not be ignored.

Young people told us that ignoring concerns can make situations worse and prevent children getting support when they need it.

4. What to do if you are worried

If your child has a weapon, you may feel afraid, alone or unsure what to do. You may be worried about what others will think, or that your child will be taken away.
You may have asked for help before and not been listened to or passed to other services.

Parents told us they frequently felt ignored or judged often because of their race or background; all these can make it hard to report concerns. However early support keeps your child and others safe.

If a young person has a knife, it is likely that they will be arrested, and they will have to work with justice services. The aim is to understand what support and action is needed to keep your child and other people safe.

Stay calm
Children told us that calm conversations are more likely to help than anger, threats or punishments.

Talk to your child
You may wish to:

- ask what is going on which has led them to have a knife
- ask what the knife was for
- explain why you are concerned and ask how you can help
- listen carefully to what they tell you

Take concerns seriously
Do not ignore warning signs or hope the situation will resolve itself without support. You or your child may have had negative experiences of professionals, but children told us: *"Not doing anything, ignoring the situation and allowing it to escalate makes things much worse."* You and your child may find this difficult and upsetting to talk about, but you should try to take an objective view of the possible risks to your child and others in your home and outside.

Keep household knives stored safely and check whether any are missing. If a knife is missing and you are concerned that your child may have taken it, report your concern to a trusted professional, the police or confidentially to a support organisation.

Seek help early
If your child is already receiving support from a youth justice worker, social worker, school, mental health service or another professional, share your concerns with them as soon as you can.

If you are afraid of your child
If your child threatens or hurts you or other family members, seek help straight away. Tell professionals if you are frightened or feel unsafe at home. If there is an immediate risk of harm, move to a safe place and call 999

5. What to do if you find a knife or weapon

It is important to remain calm. If it is safe to talk, explain that you are worried about your child's safety. Listen to what they say. Avoid shouting, threats or blame. **If talking could put anyone in danger, move away and call 999**.

If you don't think there is any immediate threat, then you may choose to remove the knife or weapon and find a place to store it safely before speaking to a professional.

You should only remove the knife or weapon if it is safe for you to do so in that

moment – do not confront them or try to take it from them; do not put yourself or anyone else at greater risk.

Call **999** if:

- the child has the knife with them now and has left home, or is about to leave
- there has been a threat, fight or serious argument
- you think the knife may be used now or very soon
- someone is frightened and cannot stay safe
- a crime is in progress
- someone is in immediate danger.

If there is no immediate danger, but you are concerned about a knife or weapon, you can consider 'how to get support' at section 10 or contact the police on **101** for advice and to report your concerns.

6. What to do if you have removed the knife or weapon

You can dispose of knives or any other weapon by leaving it in a knife bin. You can find your nearest by using this website: https://www.word4weapons.co.uk/knife-bin-locations/ You can also contact the police or take it to a police station if there is not a knife bin in your area.

If you are confident it is safe to, you may wish to tell the child that you have found and removed the knife or weapon.

You should do this in a way that is calm and non-confrontational.

It is possible that the child is being forced to hold the knife or weapon for someone else. This might make them worried about what will happen if the knife or weapon is given in.

In this situation they are likely to resist giving it up out of fear. It is important that you call the police to help.

7. If your child already receives support

If your child has carried a weapon before, tell the workers who already support your child or the police about any new concern.

Tell the worker(s) if your child has bought or tried to get a weapon or has started carrying one again. Do this as soon as you become aware. Workers need this information to understand the danger and plan how best to respond. **Telling a worker does not replace calling 999 in an emergency or reporting a weapon to the police**.

Workers may include your child's social worker, mental health worker, teacher or youth justice worker.

Always ask for the child's named worker first. If that person is unavailable, ask for the duty manager or another worker. Explain your concern and ask for a plan to keep people safe. If you have found a weapon, ask how it can be handed to the police safely.

8. If your child is not already getting support

You can also contact children's services, Early Help or mental health services directly to ask for help for your child.
Getting help for your child from your local council - Citizens Advice
Find a local support group for children, young people and families - GOV.UK.
This might lead to a more detailed assessment, to having Early Help support, or to advice about where else to get support.

9. What to do if your concerns are not dealt with

Your concerns should be listened to and action taken. You know your child most. If you do not feel you are getting the help you need, or it is too slow, ask to speak to a senior manager, contact the service again or use the Council's complaints procedure.

You can also get other professionals to support you – parents told us that their child's school or doctor have supported them. Keep asking for support if you remain concerned. There are also organisations that can help you (see section 12 below).

10. What happens when the police are involved

If the police suspect that your child is carrying a knife or weapon they may:

- stop and search them, if it is in a public place or an area where there is a risk of violence
- search your home for a knife or weapon

If they have a knife, it is likely that they will be arrested.

They may receive an official caution or a court order. This depends on the type of knife or weapon, the circumstances and their offence history.

The police may contact children's social care if they are worried about your child's safety or the safety of others. A social worker may speak to you and your child, visit your home and assess what help is needed. Your family may be offered Early Help, which is support to deal with problems before they become worse.

Asking for help does not mean your child will be automatically taken into care. Services focus on supporting the family and only where the risks can't be safely managed at home is care considered. These decisions must follow the law and fully consider your child's safety.

For more detailed information about legal powers, cautions, criminal records and court orders, see Appendix A.

11. If a knife or weapon is found at school or college

If a school suspects that your child has a knife or weapon, they don't need consent (agreement from your child) to search a bag, coat or locker.

The school will usually call the police and may exclude your child, including permanently. If your child is found with a knife outside of school, the school may also exclude your child even though it was not in school.

If your child is excluded, they still have a right to suitable full-time education. The council has a legal duty to provide full-time education within six days of exclusion.

If no education is provided, if it is fewer than 25 hours a week or if the provision is not suitable for your child's needs, you can contact the council's education welfare team. Every local authority should have an exclusions officer (also known as an inclusions officer) who can provide advice and support.

You can also complain to a local ombudsman: Exclusion from a school - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (England) and Education - School Exclusions Appeals - Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (Wales). There are organisations which may support a complaint:

- School Exclusions Hub (England only)
- Challenging permanent exclusion
- Taking action about discrimination in education - Citizens Advice

12. How to get support

Support for parents and carers

The Ben Kinsella Trust provides guides, training courses, and resources to help parents understand peer pressure, social media influence, and youth exploitation. They also offer practical tools to help you have supportive conversations and take action.

- Resources for parents and carers | The Ben Kinsella Trust
- Islington YJS knife leaflet for parents

Safer London offers one-to-one support for parents and carers (in London only) whose children are involved in or at risk of violence and exploitation.

- Parents & carers affected by violence and exploitation - Safer London

Confidential and anonymous reporting

Crimestoppers is a completely anonymous way to report a crime or share concerns. You can call them on 0800 555 111 or report online. Your calls and reports are not traced back to you, and they will pass information to the police without revealing your identity.

- Independent UK charity taking crime information anonymously | Crimestoppers

Fearless is a specialised branch of Crimestoppers that provides a safe, anonymous place for young people and children to report crime or concerns.

- Fearless: Anonymous Reporting for a Safer Community | Crimestoppers

Support for Children and Young People

Childline is a confidential service aimed at children and young people seeking support, advice, or someone to talk to regarding safety, crime, or worries.

- Gun and knife crime | Childline

Children and young people's mental health services (CAMHS) may be able to support children who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health or emotional wellbeing. This may include concerns such as anxiety, anger, trauma or feeling unsafe. A mental health assessment can help professionals understand your child's needs and identify any support that may help keep them and others safe.

- Parents' Guide to CAMHS | Guide for Parents | Young Minds

Advice and further information

Find a local support group for children, young people and families - GOV.UK

Catch 22 provides services for children and young people, including education and youth justice support. Check its website for services in your area and how to access them.

Citizens Advice & GOV.UK provide practical guidance on navigating local council services, finding local support groups for families, and understanding your rights regarding education and school exclusions. Getting help for your child from your local council - Citizens Advice

Coram Leap Confronting Conflict is a national youth charity that helps children and young people develop the skills to manage conflict safely. It offers conflict navigation training and programmes such as Leadership and Enterprise and Improving Prospects, which may be helpful for children who are at risk of, or affected by, violence.

Safe4Me is a free education resource programme providing dedicated sections for parents and carers on knife crime awareness, mental health, and keeping children safe online and in the community. Safe4Me –free education resource programme

Youth Violence Prevention London runs violence prevention and rehabilitation programs, including early intervention for girls at risk of violence, and support workshops for mothers and families impacted by the criminal justice system.

Appendix A

Understanding the law and legal consequences

1. What the law says

It is illegal to be in possession of a bladed article under Section 139 Crime and Justice Act 1988.

This means it is against the law when someone has:

- a folding pocketknife with a cutting edge that exceeds 3 inches (7.62 cm), that locks in place, or
- something with a blade or sharp point, like a knife
- they have this object in a public place.

Other weapons

Having an offensive weapon in a public place is illegal (Section 1 Prevention of Crime Act 1953).

There are three types of offensive weapons:

1. weapons made for use for causing injury to someone, such as having a knuckleduster
2. something that has been changed so it can be used as a weapon to injure someone
3. an item that is carried with the intention to injure someone - such as a hammer.

There is rarely a good reason to carry a knife, but exceptions can be:

- as part of a recognised religious costume
- for the young person's job or training, for example if they are a farmer or chef

There **must** be proof that a knife was being carried for this purpose.

2. The rules on buying a knife or weapon

- **Age restrictions**: In England and Wales, selling most knives to someone under 18 is illegal. This applies in shops and online and all sales must have strict age checks.
- **Online sales**: If you are aware of a knife or weapon being ordered online, you should cancel it. If the knife or weapon has arrived, remove it, store it somewhere safe and report it to the police.
- **Disposal**: You can get rid of the knife or weapon by contacting the police and arranging to surrender it safely, or by using a knife bin. You should report the shop or seller as they have not taken sufficient action to prevent a knife or weapon being bought by a teenager.

- **Refusing delivery**: If a knife or weapon is sent to your home, you can refuse delivery. You should not open any packaging and try to handle it as little as you can. Keep a note of the organisation that delivered it and keep any tracking numbers and labels.
- **Illegal sales**: If it is an illegal knife, weapon or gun, the best thing is to contact the police. Any knife or weapon which is on the banned list must be removed and given to the police as soon as possible – you can call them to arrange handing it over.

3. What may happen if a child is found carrying a weapon

Depending on the type of weapon, the circumstances and any previous incidents, your child may receive a **conditional caution** or a **court order**.

- **conditional caution** is an official warning that requires a young person to work with a youth justice worker and complete activities designed to address the reasons for their behaviour.

- **court order** may include restrictions, curfews or other conditions that the young person must follow. Failure to comply with these conditions may result in further action being taken.

Whether your child receives a conditional caution or a court order, they will usually be required to work with the youth justice service. Youth justice workers are there to help young people understand what happened, think about the consequences of their actions, address the reasons they became involved with weapons and reduce the likelihood of it happening again. Their role is not only to hold young people accountable, but to support them to help keep them and others safe.

If your child has already received a caution, conviction or court order for carrying a weapon, they may face more serious consequences if they carry a weapon again. They are more likely to be charged and taken to court, and a prison sentence becomes more likely. This is why getting support early is so important.

You can speak to a youth justice worker without your child being present. If this is not offered, you can ask for it. Youth justice workers will also support parents, carers and family members and are there to help, not to judge or punish you.

A conditional caution or court order will result in a criminal record. In many cases, this record will eventually become spent, meaning your child will not usually need to disclose it in certain circumstances. However, it may still appear on some enhanced police checks, particularly if a weapon was used to harm someone. Youth justice workers can explain what this means for your child and provide advice about employment, education and future opportunities.

If there are concerns about your child's welfare, or the risk they may pose to themselves or others, the police or youth justice service may involve children's social

care. Social workers may speak with you and your child, visit your home and assess what support is needed.

Additional support may be provided through Early Help or family support services. These services aim to help children and families address concerns, make positive changes and reduce future risks.

The focus is on supporting families and helping children remain safely at home wherever possible.

Information sharing

Older teenagers aged 16 and above, particularly those living away from home, may have a say in whether information about them is shared with parents and carers, and professionals must take their views into account.

Your responsibility as a parent or carer does not mean that everything will be shared with you, which you may find frustrating. However, if there is a risk of serious harm to your child or someone else, information must be shared even without their agreement.