



KEEPING YOUR CHILD
SAFE
FROM
VIOLENCE



The Ben Kinsella Trust



BEDFORDSHIRE
VIOLENCE & EXPLOITATION
PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP

CARRYING WEAPONS ISN'T NORMAL

Your child may not be carrying a weapon. But they may spend time with people who are, or see things online that make this seem normal. It is not normal.

If you find out your child is carrying a weapon, it's natural to feel scared, upset or angry. Try to take a moment to breathe and think about what might be going on in your child's life.

It's important to remember that many young people do this because they feel scared, not because they want to hurt someone.

This guide isn't here to tell you how to parent. It's here to share ways that work well when we support children and young people.



Information courtesy of The Ben Kinseella Trust

WHY YOUR CHILD MIGHT CARRY A WEAPON

There are lots of reasons why your child might carry a knife or another weapon.

They feel they need to protect themselves and carry it “just in case”. This may be for many reasons, including:

- seeing violence online
- hearing that others carry weapons (even if it’s not true)
- seeing young people in their area act in a threatening way
- expecting trouble when they leave the house

Other reasons include:

- feeling left out, unsafe, or alone
- fearing sexual violence
- being pressured into carrying one
- being forced to carry it for someone else, like a peer or gang member
- not knowing it’s wrong or illegal
- wanting respect, status, or “clout” from other young people
- feeling bored and wanting excitement
- seeing violence normalised or glamorised on social media

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

It's illegal to carry any offensive weapon in a public place. An offensive weapon is something that is:

- made to cause injury, like a knife or knuckle duster
- adapted to cause injury, like a broken bottle
- intended to be used to cause injury, like an umbrella or car key used to hurt someone, even if you say it's "for self-protection"

A public place can be any space open to the public, including:



the street



school



shops

"Carrying" a weapon means:

- holding it in your hand
- having it in your waistband or bag
- having it in the boot of a car
- someone else carrying it for you

The following aren't seen as good reasons by law:

"I didn't know
it was illegal"

"I forgot I had it"

"I carried it to
protect myself"

Some weapons are illegal to have, even at home. Search for "Selling, buying and carrying knives and weapons – GOV.UK" for a full list.

UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS

Your child is less safe if they carry a knife:

- they're more likely to be seriously hurt or even killed
- it can be used against them - many injuries happen this way
- if their peers know they carry a knife, they may be targeted

There's no "safe place" to be stabbed

- even a small wound can make someone bleed a lot

Police or teachers can stop and search your child if they think they're carrying a knife or weapon.

If your child is found with a knife - even if they say it's for someone else - they can be arrested and may have to go to court.

They can get up to four years in prison for carrying a knife, even if they didn't plan to use it.

If someone is hurt or killed and your child was there, they could still be prosecuted, even if they didn't use the weapon - **even filming or taking photos can count.**

Most young people do not carry knives. Reassure your child that carrying a knife isn't normal behaviour.

WARNING SIGNS THAT MAY RAISE CONCERNS

We can often tell when something is upsetting our children. Sometimes children show us something is wrong through their behaviour, not their words. If we trust our instincts and notice changes, we can help keep our children safe.



GOING MISSING

A child who is skipping school, staying out late, or staying out overnight may be at risk. If your child goes missing, you should report it to the police by calling 101.



SUDDEN OR DRAMATIC BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

- new friends you have never seen before
- changes in clothing style, music taste, or language
- being more angry or more quiet than usual



PHONE ACTIVITY

- messages from “new friends” or people you don’t know
- being secretive about their phone
- having more than one phone



NEW SOCIAL CONTACTS

- unfamiliar people coming to your home
- chatting online with older or unknown people
- gaming online with unknown people



GIFTS OR UNEXPLAINED ITEMS

They may come home with new clothes, trainers, money, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, or food that they shouldn't be able to afford.



PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- bruises or injuries they can't explain
- changes in mental health
- feeling scared to go outside or go to school
- refusing to talk about what is going on

WAYS TO KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE

➤ KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE AT HOME

Keep track of knives in your kitchen and any tools in cupboards or toolkits. Throw away old or unused knives in knife-surrender bins.

You can search online for “Knife Amnesty Bins in Bedfordshire”.

Look out for online orders that aren't for you. If you are worried, you might check your child's room for hidden knives, money, or gifts.

➤ TALK ABOUT THEIR LIFE ONLINE

People who want to harm or trick your child often use apps, games, and social media. Learn about the apps your child uses and choose the safest settings together.

➤ KNOW WHERE THEY ARE AND WHO THEY ARE WITH

Many risks happen after school hours. Try to know where your child spends time and who they meet when they aren't home.

➤ TALK TO OTHER PARENTS

Other families may have the same worries. They may have seen your child out and about or noticed new friends. By talking to each other, you can spot problems early and help keep children safe.

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT CONCERNS

FIND THE RIGHT TIME

Talk in a place where your child feels safe. If they are angry or upset, help them calm down first.

TAKE YOUR TIME AND LISTEN

Let them know they can be honest. Show them you will not judge.

DON'T INTERRUPT

Even if they say something worrying, try to hear them out.

TALK ABOUT CONSEQUENCES

Help them understand how their actions affect those they love.

BE READY FOR HARD ANSWERS

Stay calm if they say something scary. Services are available to help.

TRY AGAIN IF NEEDED

If the first chat doesn't go well, that's okay. Try again another time.

USE SMALL EVERYDAY MOMENTS

You can also have shorter chats while doing things like watching TV, being in the car, or going for a walk.

HELPING YOUR CHILD SPEAK OUT

It's important to help your child understand that speaking out isn't snitching: it's keeping people safe. When they share information they're being an active bystander - someone who helps others.

Your child might want to report if they:

- see another person with a knife
- hear threats online or know about a plan to hurt someone
- see a child getting picked up by unknown older people
- see an older person giving a child gifts or money
- know a child who is being asked to carry or move things for other people

We can help them feel more comfortable by explaining the difference between snitching and reporting:

SNITCHING

- meant to get someone in trouble, hurt them, or avoid your own trouble

REPORTING

- helps keep you or others safe
- you do it because you know something is wrong or harmful

Remind your child that **they can share information 100% anonymously by searching for "Fearless" online.**

GETTING HELP FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD

Taking part in extra-curricular activities can give your child a way to build confidence, and gain additional support from trusted adults. Services are also available if your child needs extra help or support. You can find out what is available locally by checking the QR code below, or by visiting your local authority's website.



SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

There are many helpful organisations that support young people and their families. We keep an up-to-date list of national and local organisations on our website. You will also find links to parent information sessions and resources.



HOW EXPLOITERS GAIN YOUR CHILD'S TRUST

Grooming is a process exploiters use to gain your child's trust. Some children are groomed very fast online and may never meet the exploiter in person, or even know they were exploited. It often happens in stages:



TARGETING

They notice your child and start to learn about them. They give compliments, show interest, and slowly build trust.



BEFRIENDING

They make your child feel special and protected. They spend time talking to them and may give gifts. They push your child away from family and encourage secrets.



HOOKING IN

They create a strong relationship so your child feels they "owe" them. Your child may rely on the exploiter for protection, drugs, support, or anything they need. The exploiter begins to normalise poor treatment.



CONTROLLING

They drop the act of caring and become controlling. They may use threats, physical or sexual violence, lies, or debt. Your child may feel ashamed or unable to ask for help.

KEY TYPES OF CHILD EXPLOITATION

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

When someone under 18 is taken advantage of for sexual purposes. Your child can be sexually exploited even if they are over the age of consent (16) and there is no physical contact (because it can happen online).

They may not realise what is happening because the abuser may:

- pretend to care
- call themselves a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend"
- give gifts or attention
- use threats or violence
- cut them off from family and friends

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

When a person uses their power to force, trick, or pressure someone under 18 into doing something criminal. This can happen even if the child thinks they agreed. Physical contact is not always involved: it can happen online too.

Criminals use children because they are less likely to be suspected, easier to control, and can protect adults from getting caught.

Children may be used to carry or keep weapons, steal items, move money or drugs, or allow their bank account to be used for money.

WHY ARE CHILDREN TARGETED?

Children and young people are easier to exploit because they:

- are younger
- have less power
- have less life experience
- may have lower confidence

Exploitation can happen to any child, but some things can increase risk, such as:

- having a tough time at home or at school
- mental health struggles
- special educational needs
- a medical diagnosis

Exploiters are very skilled at spotting these vulnerabilities and isolating the child from safe people. It's important to remember that children are never to blame for their own exploitation.

Exploitation is often hard to spot because:

- children may not realise what is happening
- they may think the exploiter is a friend who cares about them
- exploiters use clever grooming techniques
- adults may think the behaviour is just "normal teenage behaviour"

EXPLOITATION ISN'T ALWAYS OBVIOUS

Your child may not realise they're being exploited. They may think someone is a friend, or they may be talking to people online who do not have good intentions. Things that seem safe can become risky.

If you find out your child is being groomed or pulled into something unsafe, it is natural to feel scared, confused, or upset.

This guide will explore why a young person may be drawn in, and how exploiters use tricks and pressure to gain control.

WHAT IS EXPLOITATION?

Exploitation means taking advantage of someone for your own benefit. Your child may think they are agreeing to something, but really they are being tricked, pushed, or controlled.

Exploitation is a type of abuse. It can be emotional, sexual, financial, physical, or a mix of these. It can happen online or in person, by one person or by a group.





EXPLOITATION CAN

HAPPEN TO

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