

Op Sceptre National Knife Crime Strategy: Guidance for schools

What is Op Sceptre?

Operation Sceptre was launched in July 2015 by The Metropolitan Police Service with the aim of reducing knife crime and the number of families affected across the whole of London.



The launch coincided with new legislation that meant those convicted of carrying a knife for the second time will face a mandatory custodial sentence.

There have been several Op Sceptre weeks of action in an attempt to counter a nationwide rise in knife crime. February 2018 saw all police forces come together in the first national response to Op Sceptre.

Keeping national momentum, police forces across the country have adopted local strategies to tackle the threat of knife related issues. Alongside a number of tactical approaches to proactively tackle knife crime, Hampshire Constabulary are placing equal emphasis on **education and engagement**.

Working in partnership with education establishments, statutory/voluntary organisations, parents and young people, we aim to raise awareness about the risks and impact carrying a knife/weapon can have on individuals and the community. Taking this positive work beyond targeted weeks of action, we aim to establish longer-term working relationships with schools to support them with educating pupils about knife crime to help to keep young people safe, supported and informed.

This information offers advice, ideas and resources to guide schools and colleges to work alongside us; encouraging effective working practices to tackle knife crime to reduce the threat and risk of harm posed to young people, education environments and the wider community.

Hampshire police have dedicated youth education and engagement staff to provide schools with advice and support to develop joint working opportunities; contact via the **Safe4me*** contact page: <https://www.safe4me.co.uk/contact/>

The role of schools in tackling knife crime

Whilst it is accepted that schools are very safe places, with knife tragedies mostly happening out on the street, there is a critical role for schools to play in educating young people about the influences, risks and consequences carrying knives/weapons can have to encourage safe and responsible choices

Ofsted have recently carried out research into how London schools are dealing with knife crime, not only looking at how schools are protecting pupils from the threat of knives while they are in school, but also how they are educating pupils about the dangers of carrying a weapon outside of school.

Many schools have been tackling this head on for a long time, yet it is now clear that all schools, no matter their location or context, must develop approaches that safeguard children from this growing threat - recognising that anyone can be the victim of knife crime as more young people carry knives.

1. Participating in local area plans to tackle knife crime

Schools are encouraged to take a full and active role in local area plans and understand what is available to them. Most local authorities and policing areas have developed a knife crime strategy and schools are advised to find out who is leading this in their area, what it is and how they can fully participate in it.

Knife crime is often perceived as just a policing issue. However, Scotland had great success from making it a public health issue. Schools there brought in people from all walks of life to talk with young people about risks and impacts associated to knives as part of a co-ordinated strategic plan which led to a massive reduction in young knife crime in places such as Glasgow.

Although years of austerity have affected many services and significantly impacted on the ability to tackle issues, including knife crime. Schools must identify and engage with any remaining local services available to support them, including local policing teams, public health and partner organisations.

Hampshire Police Engagement & Education Offer

As part of our commitment to working in partnership with education, Hampshire Police offer face to face support to schools and young people through Police Apprentice; a social action education initiative which actively involves children and young people in problem-solving issues affecting them and their peers, engaging them as equal partners in tackling topics such as knife crime.

For more information or to contact us, visit our dedicated Safe4me web page: <https://www.safe4me.co.uk/portfolio/police-apprentice/>

2. Engaging young people in discussion

Young people say they often will not tell school staff about their concerns and fears, because they don't think they can help. So where, when and how can we intervene in young people's lives to reduce the threat of knife crime? We can start by listening to them to find out who they would want to speak to, how they would want to and what schools can do to support them.

Staff and professionals in youth settings are encouraged not to judge - instead, engaging young people in conversations and bringing in other people where possible. This approach provides a chance for pupils to contribute and reflect which can positively influence attitudes, choices and behaviour - helping to support young people to understand who they are, the decisions they make and awareness of harmful influencing factors.

High Risk Pupils/Young People

Professionally we are aware that some groups of young people are more vulnerable to becoming involved or victims of knife crime, in particular pupils excluded from school who are living in areas with active gangs/organised crime. These young people are at greater risk of being drawn in and groomed into criminal exploitation as a consequence of being absent.

While schools need a universal approach that engages all children, they must also identify potentially high-risk pupils, ensuring they educate and safeguard them by providing access to appropriate intervention and support through mentors and other local services. It is important that schools form effective working relationships with local police, health and social services; sharing information with police is also key to safeguarding young people.

Many schools are reluctant to exclude pupils, going to great lengths to avoid this due to the risks posed to pupils not in school, but with very limited specialist settings, this cannot always be avoided. As such, it's important to adopt **contextual safeguarding** approaches in decision making - exploring and identifying all factors which may be affecting a pupil's behaviour, including risk, harm and experiences outside of the home, drawing on the support and intervention of relevant partner agencies. Accepting that this will often be challenging and may require investment of time and resources, excluding pupils can significantly contribute risk to the safety and wellbeing of young people.

'County Lines' is a term given to organised drug networks who criminally exploit children and vulnerable others; where there may be concerns a pupil may be carrying a knife/weapon, schools should consider the possibility of pupils being involved in organised criminal activity.

The Safe4me dedicated 'County Lines' page provides more information and lesson plans specific to this issue: <https://www.safe4me.co.uk/portfolio/child-criminal-exploitation-county-lines/>

3. Exploring classroom resources

Many excellent resources have been developed for schools to help them address knife crime. Scotland has been recognised for its success in reducing knife related deaths, correlating with the significant increase and improvement to education in schools and youth settings.

Recommended resources to support classroom deliveries are listed below; these provide comprehensive lesson plans to promote discussion, reflection and decision-making, with specialist resources to introduce this topic at primary school level upwards, encouraging schools to take education beyond assembly ideas, one-off lessons and drop-down days, to fully integrating it into the curriculum. Some provide information for young people to access themselves which school staff, parents and youth workers can signpost them to as means of support.

Safe4me: a dedicated website provided by Hampshire police to support professionals and parents with a wide range of issues affecting young people; serving as a resource library consisting of lesson plans, advice, information and sign-posting to other services and resources.

<https://www.safe4me.co.uk/>

#knifefree: a Home Office campaign consisting of using real-life stories of young people to highlight the consequences of carrying a knife and to inspire young people to pursue positive alternatives; includes free accompanying lesson plans for KS 3&4 developed by The PSHE Association.

<https://www.safe4me.co.uk/portfolio/knifefree/>

Fearless: a dedicated website provided by 'Crimestoppers' specifically for young people age 11 -16yrs; providing information them and a service to encourage anonymous reporting of crime.

Fearless also provide lesson plans and resources to support teachers which a variety of street based crime including knife crime.

<https://www.safe4me.co.uk/portfolio/knife-street-crime/>

No Knives, Better Lives: dedicated website for practitioners, parents and young people. Consisting of education films, lesson plans and activity resources from **primary age upwards**.

<https://noknivesbetterlives.com/practitioners/resources/toolkits/>

The Ben Kinsella Trust: dedicated website providing free lesson plans for **KS 2, 3 & 4** developed in partnership with The PSHE Association.

<http://www.benkinsella.org.uk/about/free-resources-and-links/resources-for-teachers-and-practitioners>

Knifecrimes.org: a dedicated organisation set up to support families affected by knife crime, providing a host of information and advice.

<http://www.knifecrimes.org/>

4. Including parents and the community

What do parents feel about knife crime? Are thinking about it? Do they know what they can do?

Many of the recommended resources provide help specifically for parents to support them to actively participate in educating and protecting their children. Schools are encouraged to support parents to better understand how they can play a part in tackling this issue.

As schools are often a centre point in the community, it is recommended they encourage parents and communities to come together to talk about the issues and impact of knife crime and related issues; parents, alongside the police and the community, have key roles to play and are likely to benefit from the help of schools to understand the risks and problems, building a local network and find out what support is available to them.