



Dear Parents/Carers

Police, the council and partners in the city are committed to working together to protect our young people from becoming victims of knife and weapons crime.

We use a range of tactics including educational inputs and in-school searches to ensure that students are well-informed about the consequences of carrying weapons, and identify those that continue to do so.

It is important that the police, schools and families work together to protect young people. To do this, parents must be aware of the warning signs and talk to children about carrying weapons. The consequences of being found in possession of a knife are serious and long lasting, affecting education, employment and travel opportunities, but most crucially, life.

Please be reassured that knife crime is low in Wolverhampton, but sadly there are still incidents from time to time – and these can sometimes have tragic consequences. There has also been an increase in youth violence in recent months, both nationally and regionally, often involving knives.

Some young people carry weapons because they feel it will provide protection or increase the respect they are given by their friends, but the sad fact is that they are more likely to become victims of serious violence.

WARNING SIGNS

You can help tackle the problem by being alert to some of the signs which may indicate that your child or a friend is at risk of knife crime or involvement in gangs. These can include:

1. Have they become withdrawn from the family and/or school?
2. Is their school or college reporting worrying changes in behaviour, academic achievement or attendance?
3. Have they lost interest in positive activities such as sports clubs?
4. Do they stay out unusually late without giving a reason and are vague about their whereabouts?
5. Have they stopped seeing old friends and started hanging out with a new group?
6. Are they secretive about the contents of their bag?
7. Are they defensive if you ask what is in their possession or if they are hiding anything?
8. Has their attitude changed about carrying knives/weapons? For example, justifying it by saying people carry them for self-defence?
9. Have any items gone missing from the kitchen, tool box or garage?
10. Have you found a weapon hidden amongst their possessions?

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE CONCERNED

If you are concerned about your child, please speak to them calmly and explain the risks and consequences.

You may wish to contact a member of the Pastoral Team at your school if you feel your child isn't listening or is at risk. They will be able to talk through your concerns and plan a way forward together.

If you or your child are aware that other young people in school or the community are carrying knives or weapons, you should contact the police directly via 101. Alternatively you can contact Crimestoppers

anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via www.crimestoppers-uk.org – and remember, if a crime is taking place or a life is in danger, always call 999 immediately.

Further advice is available from your local Strengthening Families Hub and from the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children's Board website, <https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/>, and tips about talking to your child can be found at www.noknivesbetterlives.com/parents/having-the-conversation.

Our focus is very much on prevention and supporting families where there are concerns; the key is early identification to access the right support early to reduce risk and avoid criminalisation of young people wherever possible.

We are working closely with schools and community groups to tackle youth violence and prevent vulnerable young people being involved in such lifestyles, with a range of programmes being delivered in schools and community settings through our Preventing Gangs and Youth Violence Strategy.

These include a school mentoring project aimed at developing the resilience of pupils in Years 5 and 6, the Girls Allowed Project for young women who are at risk of gang involvement and the Fearless programme, aimed at Years 7-11, which addresses gang culture, knife crime and Child Sexual Exploitation. We also have a Police and Schools Panel, which meets regularly to gather intelligence to help identify those most at risk of knife crime and provide appropriate support at the earliest opportunity.

In addition, we provide training for frontline professionals and have also recently unveiled a fourth knife surrender bin, at St Chad and St Mark's Church in Lime Street, Merridale, joining others at the New Testament Church of God, Heath Town; Tabernacle Baptist Church, Whitmore Reans; and Morrisons, Bilston, where weapons can be disposed of safely.

Once again, please be reassured that we are committed to tackling knife crime, and with your support we can make our city even safer for our children and young people.

Yours sincerely

Three handwritten signatures in black ink. From left to right: Mark Taylor, Lynne Moran, and Jayne Meir.

Chief Superintendent Jayne Meir, West Midlands Police

Mark Taylor, Chair, Safer Wolverhampton Partnership

Councillor Lynne Moran, City of Wolverhampton Council Cabinet Member for Education and Skills