



HM Government

Government Guidance for Child Knife Possession Offences

England and Wales

February 2026



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Executive summary

This guidance is issued jointly by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to support police, Youth Justice Services and other agencies in dealing with children caught in possession of a knife.

This Government has set an ambitious but essential target: to halve knife crime over this decade. In the year ending June 2024, when we came into office, there were 237 knife related homicides, up from 203 in 2013/14. There were over 50,000 knife crimes in total, and knife crime had risen 4% against the previous year. Every injury, every life lost, is one too many.

We are already making tangible progress, since the start of this Parliament:

- Knife crime has fallen by 8%, meaning 4,229 fewer offences.
- Knife homicides are down by 27%.
- Hospital admissions for stabbings have fallen by 11%.
- We have banned dangerous weapons such as ninja swords and zombie style machetes.
- And we have taken nearly 60,000 knives off our streets.

But we must go further. Across all parts of the system, we will keep sharpening our focus: identifying those most at risk, intervening earlier, turning innovation into mainstream practice, ensuring our legislation is effective, taking tougher enforcement action, and holding every organisation accountable for delivering the reductions in violence that our communities deserve.

It is a crime to possess a knife in public or in a school or further education premises without good reason or lawful authority. But in recent years, knife possession has not been treated with the seriousness or urgency it requires. For too long, when a child has been found carrying a knife, there have not been swift or certain enough consequences. The system has been too slow to react, too hands-off in dealing with warning signs, and too reliant on interventions which do not align with the evidence base on best practice for reducing reoffending. We are changing that.

This Government is committed to halving knife crime over the next decade, and we are already making clear progress. We are acting quickly and decisively to provide opportunities for children and young people at risk to prevent them from being drawn into knife crime and have already introduced a series of tough new measures to crack down on the availability and accessibility of knives. However, we must also ensure there is always firm action to deal with knife possession.

Reducing knife crime requires a step change in the way that the criminal justice system responds when a child is found in possession of a knife. Therefore, this guidance sets an expectation that the response to knife possession should always be Swift, Robust, Evidence-based and Thorough –

Swift

The importance of responding to a knife possession offence within the 'reachable, teachable moment' cannot be overstated. Police officers should alert the Youth Justice Service of knife possession offences within one working day or as soon as practicable. The Youth Justice Service should undertake a thorough assessment of the child as a priority. This should always be done while promoting a child-centred approach and considering safeguarding concerns in parallel. Youth Justice Services should begin working with a child no longer than four weeks after referral.

Robust

Knife possession should be responded to with a mandatory intervention plan. This ensures public protection. Knife possession offences should only be met with a charge, a Youth Conditional Caution or a Deferred Prosecution. It is expected that the majority of Out of Court Resolutions where a knife is involved results in a Youth Conditional Caution. The decision on which outcome is most appropriate must be based on consideration of the full context of the offence, including the child's age and level of maturity and are as follows:

- A charge may be appropriate where the gravity of the offence or the details of the case means a charge should be pursued in line with existing guidelines.
- A Youth Conditional Caution may be appropriate and proportionate as a statutory Out of Court Resolution where the child would benefit from structured support aimed at addressing the underlying causes of their offending behaviour.
- A Deferred Prosecution may be appropriate in select cases where it is not proportionate to criminalise a child for knife possession and the child would benefit from structured support aimed at addressing the underlying causes of their offending behaviour and avoid prosecution upon completion.

The Government expects all police forces to ensure Deferred Prosecution is available for child knife possession offences to ensure there is a non-criminal outcome available for select cases where criminalisation may not be appropriate. This should still involve a referral to a Youth Justice Service and still requires the Youth Justice Service to carry out the interventions with the child but avoids undue criminalisation of children in circumstances where it is not appropriate to do so.

Evidence-based

Interventions must be well-evidenced to reduce reoffending. Interventions should be designed on the basis of a holistic and thorough assessment of the child and address the root causes of their offending behaviour. All interventions should be equally robust and of high quality, irrespective of the outcome provided. Interventions which have weak or no evidence to support them – such as knife crime education or awareness courses – should not be used.

Thorough

Compliance with interventions should be monitored. Where the child breaches conditions set within their intervention plan, action should be taken – both the police and Youth Justice Service should be aware of any non-compliance, and appropriate steps taken to ensure public protection and victim satisfaction and prevent reoffending. This includes charging the child for the original offence.

About this guidance

This guidance sets out the Government's expectations that all children who break the law by carrying a knife will swiftly receive tailored support and high-quality interventions from a Youth Justice Service. This applies to all police forces and Youth Justice Services throughout England and Wales.

It recognises the distinct responsibilities held by the Welsh Government and Welsh Police forces under the current devolution settlement and incorporates Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

This guidance provides additional information on cases where an Out of Court Resolution is appropriate. Where it is appropriate to charge¹, existing established criteria and processes should continue to be followed.

This document provides advice on the Out of Court Resolutions deemed appropriate in response to child knife possession-only offences, and how to ensure a robust and meaningful mandatory intervention is delivered by the Youth Justice Service in all Youth Conditional Caution and Deferred Prosecution cases where appropriate.

Throughout this guidance, 'must', 'should' and 'could' are used. Please note:

- **'Must'** refers to where there is a legal duty where something has to be carried out.
- **'Should'** refers to a clear expectation from Government that a particular action will be carried out. While not a statutory duty, the use of 'should' signals that the action is considered essential to achieving the intended outcomes of the guidance and ensuring an appropriate response to child knife possession offences.
- **'Could'** refers to where carrying out that responsibility is best practice but not yet routine.

The use of the word 'knife' throughout this guidance applies to any article which has a blade or point except a non-locking folding pocketknife where the cutting edge of its blade does not exceed 3 inches and razor blades permanently enclosed in a cartridge or housing where less than 2 millimetres of the blade are exposed.²

¹ [Guideline on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences v5.0](#)

² [The Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(Offensive Weapons\) \(Exemption\) Order 1996](#)

Overview of process

Stage 1: Police to alert Youth Justice Service

1. It is an offence to possess a knife in a public place or on school or further education premises without good reason or lawful authority. Where children are found in possession of a knife in these circumstances, it is critical that prompt and appropriate action is taken to ensure the individual receives the necessary support and guidance to prevent harm or further offending.
2. The police should alert the Youth Justice Service of all knife possession offences. This should be done within one working day. The Government expects all decisions on knife possession offences to be reached after consultation between the police and Youth Justice Service.
3. In cases where a child is found in possession of a knife in a school or further education premises, existing guidance should be followed^{3,4}. Any knife found, and evidence of a suspected offence must be passed to the police as soon as possible.

Stage 2: Initial judgement and Youth Justice Service referrals

4. The Youth Justice Service must make a judgement of the child's needs on a case-by-case basis, including considering their circumstances, risks and any safeguarding concerns (including extra-familial harm such as trafficking, criminal exploitation and serious violence).
5. Following completion of the investigation by the police, the initial judgement of the child's needs should be informed by all relevant information available to the Youth Justice Service, including information owned by relevant partner agencies, e.g. Children's Social Care, Education and Health. Multi-agency statutory guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), sets out what professionals and organisations in England need to do, individually and in partnership with other agencies, if there are concerns about the safety and welfare of children and young people.

Stage 3: Appropriate Outcomes

6. Where the decision-making panel (which should occur on a weekly basis) determine an Out of Court Resolution to be appropriate and where the child requires support from the Youth Justice Service, the support must be mandatory. This means that the child must be offered a Youth Conditional Caution or (where appropriate), Deferred Prosecution involving engagement with, and support from the Youth Justice Service.

³ [Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#)

⁴ [Keeping children safe in education 2024](#)

7. If the child is offered a Youth Conditional Caution or Deferred Prosecution but refuses to accept the disposal, they may be prosecuted for the original offence.
8. In the rare cases that the police and Youth Justice Service judges that a child should be supported solely by a different agency, the child should be formally referred to this agency, and the crime should be closed as Outcome 20. It would be appropriate to use Outcome 20 where there is thought to be no potential risk to public safety. These are the only circumstances in which there is no need for a further assessment from the Youth Justice Service. The closure of the crime as Outcome 20 reflects that further action has been taken by another body or agency.
9. However, where there is a knife possession offence and risk to public safety, a mandatory plan should be offered with support from other agencies secured in parallel. Outcome 20 for knife possession offences should only be used when another agency is supporting the child in isolation.

Stage 4: Appropriate Interventions

10. Whether as part of a sentence or an Out of Court Resolution, it is best practice for interventions to commence as soon as possible after the knife has been found and the Youth Justice Service has been alerted of the offence.
11. All Out of Court Resolutions issued for knife possession offences should entail a mandatory plan. Interventions within the plan should start as soon as practicable after the police find a child in possession of a knife. Support and interventions given to the child should always be evidence-based to prevent reoffending.

Stage 5: Scrutiny

12. Scrutiny panels already established in every force area should be used to consider the appropriateness of the Out of Court Resolution decision and that the right outcomes are issued.
13. Youth Justice Service Management Boards should ensure oversight of the quality and effectiveness of interventions delivered. They should consider whether intervention plans are achieving meaningful, positive impacts for children and ensuring safety for potential victims and the community.
14. By reviewing practices available locally and outcomes, these panels play a key role in identifying areas for development and driving continuous improvement.

Stage one: Police alert Youth Justice Service to every child knife possession offence

15. The police should alert the Youth Justice Service to the knife possession offence as soon as practicable after interaction with the child – the Government considers the maximum time this should take to be one working day to enable fast decision-making.

Risk assessment of the child when alerting the Youth Justice Service

16. Police should complete a safeguarding referral using existing local assessments via locally agreed processes. This should be completed as soon as practicable after the offence has occurred and is the point at which the Youth Justice Service should be alerted of the incident to protect the child and others.
17. Police should share all relevant information about the child to enable the Youth Justice Service to make a thorough assessment. Some information helpful to include in the referral includes previous arrests, any experiences of being a victim and family information where known. Other agencies should share information in a multi-agency approach including schools, health and local authorities so a holistic assessment can be made.
18. It is unlikely that an incident where a child has committed a knife possession offence should be categorised as 'low risk' when considering the safeguarding referral. Appropriate agencies such as children's services should be made aware in a timely manner via the usual routes and processes. The risk assessment carried out by the police should be dynamic and ensure that all relevant agencies are informed promptly and take actions to safeguard those at risk, for example, where there are concerns of extra-familial harm.
19. Where a child has been found in possession of a knife, relevant police databases and intelligence reports should clearly reflect this and include details on the type of knife, where appropriate.

Stage two: Initial judgement and Youth Justice Service referrals

20. When undertaking a decision as to whether to charge a child for a knife possession offence, the police should seek the view of the Youth Justice Service, and authority from the Crown Prosecution Service as appropriate.
21. Following the completion of the investigation, the police will make a decision as to whether to issue an Out of Court Resolution. If the Youth Justice Service judges a full multi-agency assessment is appropriate, it should be carried out in the usual manner – a holistic assessment, including interviews with the child and their family.
22. If the offence is suitable for an Out of Court Resolution, the police should formally refer the case to the Youth Justice Service. It is then the responsibility of the police, taking account of the views of the Youth Justice Service, to judge whether it is appropriate for the Youth Justice Service to engage with the child and carry out the necessary interventions; or whether, in rare circumstances, another agency would be more suitable to take sole responsibility for the child, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). If there is a difference of professional views, this should be resolved through existing processes and escalation routes.
23. Where an Out of Court Resolution will be issued, the police should use the National Police Chiefs' Council Child Gravity Matrix⁵ and consider any aggravating or mitigating factors and consult with the Youth Justice Service to decide whether a Youth Conditional Caution or Deferred Prosecution is most appropriate.
24. Existing decision-making panels bring together key partners to determine the most appropriate outcome. At a minimum, the panels should consist of the police, Youth Justice Service, health, children's social care and education. Further information on decision-making panels can be found in the Youth Justice Board Case Management Guidance.⁶

Safeguarding

25. All organisations and agencies working with children have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, as set out in statute. It is important that any assessment(s) made of the child by the Youth Justice Service

⁵ [Child Gravity Matrix v2.3](#)

⁶ [Case management guidance - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

or other agencies for a knife possession offence continue to have due regard for safeguarding procedures and structures.

26. Police and Youth Justice Services must refer to and follow the statutory Working Together to Safeguard Children⁷ guidance which sets out that children who are encountered as offenders, or alleged offenders, are entitled to the same safeguards and protection as any other child, and due regard given to their safety and welfare at all times. The guidance also outlines the safeguarding needs for those experiencing extra-familial harm including trafficking⁸, criminal exploitation and serious violence. Additional support to address these concerns, for example, Independent Child Trafficking Guardians, should be sought where available. Separate advice and guidance on safeguarding procedures in Wales is also available.⁹

Fast and thorough referral and assessment structures

27. Local areas should establish and embed a joint working agreement clearly setting out multi-agency diversion processes, including specifying referral processes, and the roles and responsibilities of the professionals involved¹⁰.
28. Interventions should be in place as soon as possible to maximise the ‘reachable, teachable moment’. The period between the referral to the Youth Justice Service and the activity beginning should be no longer than four weeks. The local Youth Justice Service and police should regularly review their processes and working arrangements to ensure children who have committed a knife possession offence receive the support they need as quickly as possible. This may include prioritising cases for decision-making where appropriate.
29. Following the full assessment and decision-making panel, all partners should ensure separate records regarding one individual are consistent – they should contain the same information and background history of the individual child being assessed. A child should not have to give the same information repeatedly to different agencies. This will help inform decisions on what intervention is appropriate for the child and provide a clear rationale for the decision, especially when Deferred Prosecution has been assessed as more appropriate than a Youth Conditional Caution or charging the child.
30. This process should be carried out for every instance of a child being found in possession of a knife without good reason or lawful authority¹¹, even if a child has been known to the police and other agencies previously.

⁷ [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

⁸ [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales](#)

⁹ [Safeguarding Wales](#)

¹⁰ [YEF Diversion Practice Guidance](#)

¹¹ [Criminal Justice Act 1988](#)

31. Youth Justice Service Management Boards are responsible for leadership and oversight of the Youth Justice Service, contributing to multi-agency strategies and safeguarding children who work with the Youth Justice Service, to prevent children from further offending. The Government expects management boards to be consistently attended by senior representatives of all relevant partners, especially police, local authority, health, social care, and education. Management boards should operate with a clear mandate to monitor performance against agreed outcomes, using robust data and measurable indicators to assess progress in delivering timely referrals and outcomes for knife possession offence interventions.

Good Practice Example¹²

Timely referrals

One scheme has structured their referral process to ensure that no referrals take longer than four weeks – most are resolved much sooner. They hold their decision panel once a week.

Once a decision is made, Youth Justice Service workers have five working days to contact the young person and their parent/carers.

Where there is a delay in decision-making, their aim is that the delay should not hold up interventions to prevent further offending. As a result, delays in decision-making do not exceed three weeks or three panels. Allowing for a speedy decision-making process enables swift justice for the victim and keeps the integrity of the scheme.

Some schemes have included another layer of scrutiny: a staff member will act as 'gatekeeper' and will review all referrals for suitability. It is important that these gatekeepers are empowered not just to reject referrals deemed too high risk, but also those that do not meet the threshold.

¹² [Centre for Justice Innovation - Timely Referrals](#)

Stage three: Appropriate outcomes

32. Having considered the aggravating and mitigating factors, circumstances, and history of offending or violence in line with the Child Gravity Matrix, it may be appropriate to charge a child for a knife possession offence. This guidance does not change this approach. Where a charge is pursued, it should be done so through existing processes.
33. Repeat and escalated offending should be met with an escalated response. Therefore, for repeat knife possession offences, a charge will likely be the most appropriate response in most circumstances.¹³
34. If seeking a charging decision from a prosecutor, a Child Information Form should be completed by the police and submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service. This enables the prosecutor to take into consideration the child's specific needs and circumstances, and reduces delays where prosecutors need to seek further information to aid their decision. The form guides the police as to the appropriate information they need, which should be gathered from partners such as the Youth Justice Service, drawing on existing local information-sharing arrangements to make their enquiries.

Out of Court Resolutions

35. Some instances of knife possession offences may be appropriate for an Out of Court Resolution. All children who commit a knife possession offence should swiftly receive tailored, evidence-based interventions from Youth Justice Services.
36. The Government considers that the following Out of Court Resolutions are not appropriate for knife possession, because they do not entail a mandatory plan:
37. **Youth Caution (Outcome 2):** The Government does not consider Youth Cautions to be appropriate for knife possession offences as they do not guarantee an intervention will be provided. Where there is evidence or risk of criminal behaviour, a Youth Conditional Caution or Deferred Prosecution, where appropriate, should be issued.
38. **Community Resolution (Outcome 8):** A non-statutory outcome that does not require a Youth Justice Service referral or an intervention to be carried out. Community resolutions should only be considered for low-level offences. The Government does not deem a community resolution appropriate for a knife possession offence.

¹³ [Sentencing Act 2020](#)

39. ***Out of Court Resolutions which offer the child a mandatory intervention and support are:***
40. **Youth Conditional Caution (Outcome 2): A youth caution with rehabilitative, reparative and punitive conditions attached. Conditions must be capable of being completed within 16 weeks of the date of the original offence for knife possession offences. It is expected that the majority of Out of Court Resolutions where a knife is involved results in a Youth Conditional Caution.** If a child fails to comply with their conditions, the Youth Justice Service should inform the police. The police should decide, taking account of the views of the Youth Justice Service, whether to prosecute for the original offence. The Youth Justice Service should explain to the child that non-compliance will be investigated and a decision to prosecute for the original offence could be made.
41. **Deferred Prosecution: Diversionary, educational or intervention activity, resulting from the crime report, has been undertaken and it is not in the public interest to prosecute.** A non-statutory outcome that should only be used after taking into account the individual knife possession case, the child's age or level of maturity as well as considering the Child Gravity Matrix and consulting with the Youth Justice Service. This outcome should be available and considered in select cases where it is not appropriate to criminalise a child for knife possession and is designed for children where the risk that the individual poses to themselves, others and public safety is assessed to be low. The individual could be prosecuted for the original offence if they do not complete the activity. The Youth Justice Service should be consulted in the decision making. The Youth Justice Service should determine the intervention being put in place, as they would for a Youth Conditional Caution.
42. **Action undertaken by another body/agency (Outcome 20): This outcome does not include a mandatory plan. However, in rare circumstances, where there is no assessed risk to public safety and it is deemed that another agency should be solely responsible for supporting the child, this outcome may be appropriate.** Further action resulting from the crime report will be undertaken by a body or agency other than the police or Youth Justice Service. This outcome should be used to close a case when the child's needs would be best met by a non-criminal-justice agency, for example Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Deferred Prosecution

43. The Government expects all police forces to ensure Deferred Prosecution is available as an option to respond to select child knife possession offences, where appropriate and it is not in the public interest to charge the child or where issuing a Youth Conditional Caution is not suitable.
44. Deferred Prosecution should not replace charging or the use of Youth Conditional Cautions. Instead, it should be employed in select cases to prevent unnecessary criminalisation of a child, once the individual circumstances of the child and the offence have been considered. A child should generally not receive more than one Deferred Prosecution for a knife possession offence.
45. Where police do not currently use Deferred Prosecution schemes more widely, it should be made available for child knife possession offences and, where used, there should be a referral to the Youth Justice Service. It is for the Youth Justice Service to carry out the mandatory plan in response to knife possession offences.
46. Changes will be made to the Home Office's recording of crime outcomes to ensure police forces are recognised for their work and positive action taken to divert and prevent the child from being drawn into further criminality.
47. To respond to child knife possession offences through Deferred Prosecution, the case should be referred to the Youth Justice Service, and the intervention should be carried out by the Youth Justice Service and not the police force.
48. The same thorough and evidence-based approach to designing, delivering, monitoring and following-up interventions should be taken for interventions put in place through Deferred Prosecution as for those put in place through Youth Conditional Cautions, including the 12-week duration of the intervention.
49. Children who successfully complete the programme will see the prosecution dropped, while those who fail to comply could face criminal proceedings.

Stage four: Appropriate interventions

50. To reduce reoffending, it is critical that children quickly receive interventions which are well-evidenced, assessment-based and closely monitored. This is true for all interventions, including those put in place through Deferred Prosecution schemes and those which are given in court. Practitioners should do the following to ensure interventions are effective for the individual child:
- **Consider the child's strengths and needs.** Interventions should build on the child's strengths and be proportionate to their needs. It is important to identify the child's unmet needs and try and address them through any intervention offered, through developing their strengths. Best practice is to co-produce plans with the child.
 - **Consider the causes of offending behaviour.** This will ensure that the interventions will be able to tackle the offending behaviour and provide a good chance for the child to not re-offend.
 - **Consider the need and views of the victim or any potential victim.** This will ensure victims' voices are present in decision-making and be involved in cases which have/may impact their safety.
51. Youth Justice Services should make use of the Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit¹⁴ – which is based on the world's largest repository of evidence on violence. Interventions should be well-evidenced to be effective in tackling the root causes of offending, such as behavioural therapy and mentoring, rather than interventions for which there is no evidence of efficacy, such as knife crime education or awareness courses. Where interventions offered in a local area are not well-evidenced, Youth Justice Services should work to bring the range of available interventions more in line with evidence on what works to reduce reoffending.
52. Interventions can include being supported to re-engage with education and/or safeguarding measures to protect the child. Where Violence Reduction Units are in place, they should work closely with Youth Justice Services to ensure all necessary services are commissioned and drawn upon. Youth Justice Services should also work closely with commissioning bodies and appropriate services in their area to ensure the right referrals are possible and made and the full range of support available to the child is considered.
53. Where practitioners are considering using knife crime education or awareness courses, particular care should be taken to ensure they are comprised only of activities which are evidenced to reduce reoffending, such as social skills training, and do not include potentially traumatic content which may create or exacerbate a desire to carry a knife for personal safety, such as wound imagery.

¹⁴ [Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit](#)

54. Children who are at risk of suspension and/or permanent exclusion are more at risk of engaging in serious violence and should be supported and receive effective interventions to help them remain in education, such as mentoring. School is a protective factor, and it is important that children are supported to attend education, whether mainstream schools or Alternative Provision and navigate any disruption to education caused by knife possession itself.
55. It is vital for both the child and public safety that children are supported to complete diversionary activity. The Youth Justice Service should actively monitor engagement with activities. In cases of disengagement, the Youth Justice Service should make every effort to support re-engagement. Where the child remains disengaged, the police should be informed. The police should then consider prosecution for the original offence, taking account of the views of the Youth Justice Service.

Involvement of other agencies

56. The Youth Justice Service may deem it appropriate to work with the child alongside other agencies, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and social care support available within education settings. In such cases, the child should be referred to those in addition to completing Youth Justice Service interventions. Consideration should be given to minimise any duplication of interventions with the child.

Stage five: Scrutiny

Decision-making panels

57. Decision-making panels, consisting of the Youth Justice Service manager, police, health, Early Help, children's social care, education and victim's services, should continue to discuss children for as long as they are undergoing a Youth Justice Service intervention. Panels should focus on the impact of the chosen disposal and the success so far of the interventions delivered, or any non-compliance, and agree improvements (or escalations where necessary) to be made for these ongoing cases.

Youth Justice Service Management Boards

58. It is the responsibility of the Youth Justice Service Management Board to monitor outcomes, successful completion rates and reoffending rates to take a strategic view of the effectiveness and quality of interventions being delivered through Out of Court Resolutions and develop and deliver improvements where required. This should be informed by considerations made by the decision-making panel as to the efficacy of interventions.

59. Following all scrutiny and decision-making panels, Youth Justice Service Management Boards should be provided with regular, comprehensive data and information regarding the use and effectiveness of Out of Court Resolutions and the interventions offered. This is important to ensure decisions are working well and highlight wider lessons to take into consideration.

Scrutiny panels

60. Local police forces and Youth Justice Service management boards should ensure scrutiny panels for knife possession cases are in place on a quarterly basis within each force area. Scrutiny panels should review the outcomes agreed upon and identify and monitor improvements to practices and processes on this basis.

61. Scrutiny panels should consist of:

- Police
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Youth Justice Board
- Youth Justice Service
- Probation
- Magistrates
- Independent Advisory Group
- Victims' representative
- Community involvement will enable victims' voices to be present in decision-making and allow the community to be involved in cases which may impact their safety.

Inspectorate scrutiny

To aid ongoing scrutiny of how this guidance is being implemented, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation will incorporate this guidance into their case assessment rules and guidance (CARaG). Subject to local levels of knife crime, the inspectorate will inspect local practices for handling knife possession cases, in accordance with their standards, and published rules and guidance and where relevant will highlight any issues, including effective practice in their future published reports.

Terminology explanations

Child Centred Approach	Police forces in England and Wales should also be aware of the July 2023 Child Centred Policing definition ¹⁵ , developed by the NPCC, to provide further clarity and ensure a shared understanding.
Child or children	We define a child as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and civil legislation in England and Wales. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection. The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old.
Deferred Prosecution	A non-statutory disposal, whereby the police have the option to put on hold a prosecution until diversionary activity is undertaken.
Knife Crime	Knife crime, as defined by the College of Policing ¹⁶ , broadly relates to two kinds of behaviour. The first relates to people owning or possessing knives when doing so is illegal. This may be because their ownership is specifically banned, such as certain (de facto or 'made') offensive weapons, or because they are illegal in certain contexts, mainly being possessed in public without good reason. The second behaviour relates to the use of a knife in the commission of another 'knife-involved offence'. Typically, this relates to violence or threats against the person, theft, burglary or criminal damage.
Objects covered in the guidance	It is an offence, under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (CJA) ¹⁷ , to be in possession of a bladed article in a public place or, under section 139A CJA, on school or further education premises without good reason or lawful authority. This applies to any

¹⁵ [Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024 - 2027](#)

¹⁶ [Defining knife crime | College of Policing](#)

¹⁷ [The Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(Offensive Weapons\) Order 1988 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

	<p>article which has a blade or point except a non-locking folding pocketknife where the cutting edge of its blade does not exceed 3 inches.</p>
<p>Out of Court Resolution</p>	<p>In this guidance, we will refer to Out of Court Disposals as Out of Court Resolutions. Out of Court Disposal is the term used in legislation for the disposals able to resolve low-level offending without proceeding to court. Out of Court Resolutions can be used interchangeably with Out of Court Disposals.</p>
<p>Welsh Safeguarding Procedures</p>	<p>Welsh police forces and Youth Justice Services draw on the Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TRaCE) toolkit, which sets out what a child-centred approach looks like in practice, including consideration of neurodivergence in Wales.</p>
<p>Youth Justice Service</p>	<p>The Youth Justice Service is made up of a group of professionals from different agencies who work together to prevent children and young people from entering the youth justice system for the first time. They support individuals in moving away from offending behaviour. They work with children between 10 and 17 inclusive.</p>

