

# Weapons and violence

Advice and guidance  
for parents and carers



**You have a role to play in helping your child make the right choices.**

If there is one person your son or daughter will listen to, it's you.

Your children respect you more than you think.



**RESPECT**

**Get the facts**

There are over 24,000 young people (age 11 to 19) in Southwark. Many stories in the news are negative, but most teenagers and young adults have good relationships with their family, friends and neighbours. Most are never involved in violent crime of any sort.

**The positives always outweigh the negatives.**

However if you are worried about your child being involved in violent crime, or being a victim, there are things you can do and a number of services to support the community.

**TRUST**

## Facts about the law

Carrying a gun or knife could mean being arrested, going to court, going to jail and **ending up with a criminal record that will affect the rest of your child's life.** Having a criminal record can prevent them getting a job, going to university or college or even travelling abroad.

- It is illegal to carry any knife in a public place
- It is illegal to buy a knife if you are under 18
- It is illegal to possess a prohibited firearm (including a taser or CS gas) or ammunition
- It is illegal to hold any offensive weapon
- It is illegal to use someone to look after, transport or hide a weapon for someone else
- Police can and will search someone if they think they are carrying a gun or knife. Police can also go into schools and search young people there
- The maximum prison sentence for possession of a knife is four years, even if you're carrying it for someone else
- The minimum sentence for possession of a prohibited gun is five years (three years for 16 to 17 year olds)

**If offenders operate in a group or a gang, this is considered an aggravating factor and may lead to a longer sentence.**

CHOICES

CONSEQUENCES

## What is an offensive weapon?

An offensive weapon is **an object made or adapted for causing injury to a person, or an item being carried with the intent of causing harm to another.**

**AWARENESS**

**OFFENSIVE**

### Offensive weapons could include

- Kitchen knives of all shapes and sizes
- Craft knives
- Screwdrivers
- Hammers
- Martial arts weapons
- Dog chains
- Baseball bats
- Planks of wood
- Compasses

Most of these items can be found in your home.

**Are you aware when they go missing?**

**Do you store these items safely?**

## What is a gang?

Young people often spend a lot of time with a large group of friends. Sometimes they may give their group a name. In most cases, this is a normal part of growing up and isn't a problem. However, some gangs are linked to criminal activity, and this is where problems start.

Many young people join gangs because of peer pressure, bullying and intimidation. Bullying may be gang related in some cases, but not in all.

Young people involved in criminal gangs may be forced to commit robbery, assault or drug related crime to prove themselves. They are more likely to carry or use knives and guns or deal drugs. People who carry weapons themselves are more likely to be injured, or even killed, by other people carrying weapons.

## Why do young people join gangs?

You can help stop your child becoming involved in criminal gang activity by following the advice in this guide. If you suspect that your child is already involved, there are people you can contact for help on pages 18 to 19.

Remember, it's normal for young people to hang out in large groups of friends. This may be to find a sense of belonging, to gain friends and to have fun.

However, there may be other reasons why a young person would join a criminal gang.

### Examples of these are

- For protection
- To have power over other people
- To get money from crime
- For settling arguments or having fights
- Territory
- To gain respect and be someone

**BELONGING**  
friendship

## Could your child be involved?

There can be signs that your child is involved in a criminal gang. The following signs do not prove that your child is involved in a gang.

**If you recognise many or some of these signs, or if you are worried, call the numbers on pages 18 to 19.**

## What should you look for?

APPEARANCE

### Has your child

- Withdrawn from the family?
- Lost interest in school?
- Got unexplained money or possessions?
- Started staying out very late without giving any reason?
- Dropped out of positive activities?
- Got a new nickname?
- Been vague about where they have been and who their friends are?
- Broken off with old friends?
- Expressed aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people?
- Made you suspect they are using or dealing of drugs?
- Started dressing differently, in a particular style or colour?
- Got unexplained physical injuries?
- Begun using graffiti or tags on possessions?
- Got new ways of talking or started using hand signs?

Gangs will often have websites or profiles on networking websites such as **Facebook**, **Myspace** or **Bebo**. Be aware of what websites your child is looking at. Slang or text speak is common among all young people. Use of this in their conversations could be innocent but it can also be used to cover up what they are saying.

## What can you do?

### Involve yourself in your child's life in a **positive way**.

- Have open conversations with your child as often as possible
- Praise your child's achievements and effort
- Help your child understand that success needs effort
- Encourage your child to take part in positive after school activities
- Take an interest in your child's school activities
- Get to know your child's friends and their families
- Make your child proud of his or her roots
- Call the numbers on pages 18 to 19

## Help your child make good choices

### **Be a good role model.** Young people learn from what they see and experience.

- Encourage them to do their homework
- Teach them how to cope with peer pressure, and how to deal with conflicts without violence. If you're not sure how to do this, speak to a teacher at your child's school
- Talk about the dangers and consequences of crime
- Teach them that rights come with responsibilities
- Help them find out about other activities they can take part in at [www.whtvr.org.uk](http://www.whtvr.org.uk)



# Discipline

- Don't let younger children stay out late or spend a lot of time on the streets unsupervised. But let them stay up later as they get older
- Stick to your rules. Avoid double standards
- Set limits and boundaries, and keep applying them
- Teach your child that actions have consequences
- Limit access to and consumption of alcohol
- Make sure they go to school on time every day

# Working with your child

REASSURANCE  
LISTEN

Most young people are not involved in gang activity, but have probably heard about gang members or weapons. They may have concerns about this and need reassurance. Have a chat with your child and see what he or she thinks about gangs.

## The following tips may help you to discuss it

- Ask questions, rather than making accusations or statements
- Listen carefully to what they say without interrupting them
- Stay calm and rational, however upset you are
- Involve other members of your family
- Really try to understand the situation from their point of view
- Ask them what you can do to help
- Point out the risks and consequences of carrying or using a gun or knife
- Avoid intimidating or threatening them

SUPERVISION  
standards



## If you think your child is involved in a gang

### Talk to them about it **but don't challenge or accuse.**

- Try to understand why they have joined
- Get help. There are local services to help prevent them getting involved or help them leave the gang (see page18)
- Work with them to find alternatives

**Support**

## Remember

### **You're not alone.**

- Have a chat to your child's friends' parents. If you're worried they probably are too, and it's always good to talk about these things
- You can work with other parents to keep an eye on each other's child. This is another pair of eyes to watch behaviour
- Other members of your family could help you talk to your child about this. Perhaps dad, an uncle or an older brother?



# Contacts for further information

## GATES

A free and confidential service for anyone who has concerns about a child being involved in a criminal gang.

Telephone: **0800 458 9109**

Text **GATES** and **parent** and **Southwark** to **82055**

GATES gives information and support on gang issues, information on things your children can take part in and advice on how to get jobs.

## Southwark gang disruption team

Works with young people at risk of gang involvement and related offending. The team also offers support to parents and carers, including voluntary support groups or individual meetings with a parenting worker.

Telephone: **020 7525 0900 / 7875**

## Crimestoppers

A free service for anyone report information about criminal activity anonymously.

Telephone: **0800 555 111**

**[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)**

## Community wardens

The eyes and ears of your community

Telephone: **020 7525 0846** to arrange to speak to your local community warden.

## Whatever

A directory of activities and opportunities for young people

**[www.whtvr.org](http://www.whtvr.org)**

## In an emergency

If a crime is happening now or if you fear for your safety or the safety of your child, always phone the police on **999**.

# To arrange a translation of this leaflet please take it to:

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For a large print, braille or audio copy of this leaflet please contact **020 7525 2000**.

This brochure is produced by the Safer Southwark Partnership.  
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