

YOUTH VIOLENCE & KNIFE CRIME

Advice for
parents & carers

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INTRODUCTION

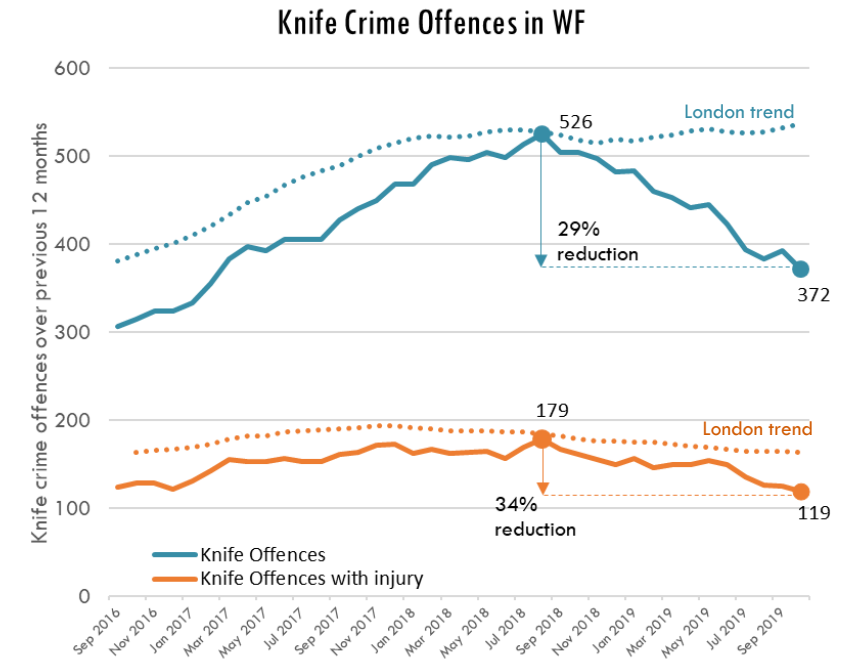
In Waltham Forest **we have been taking action to prevent serious violence**, which has resulted in a reduction in knife crime offences since 2018.

Nevertheless **rates of violence, including youth violence, are still too high** and addressing these issues is one of the Council's key priorities.

It is important to stress that **the vast majority of young people are not involved in gangs or knife crime**, though there are a small minority that are.

Information about knife crime and gangs in the media or on social media can be misleading, and it is important that parents and carers are confident on the subject given the important role they play in discussing with their children the risks, choices and consequences.

This guide provides parents and carers with facts about serious youth violence, and why young people might become involved in it. It shows parents and carers what warning signs to look out for, how to talk to their child about the subject, and what to do if they are concerned.



WHY YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT CARRY A KNIFE

Whilst It is rare for a young person to be carrying a knife in order to carry out a specific attack on another person, there are many other reasons why children might choose to carry a knife or other weapon:

- **Fear of being a victim** of knife crime. This might come from a specific threat or a perceived threat.
- For self-defence, '**just in case**'
- **Not knowing** it is wrong or illegal
- **Peer pressure** to carry/hold/hide a knife for someone
- Being **groomed or coerced** to carry/hold/hide a knife for someone
- To **intimidate** others
- To earn **respect**
- For **street cred**
- In response to feelings of being **excluded, undervalued** or **powerless**
- Due to involvement in **criminal activities**

EQUIPPING YOUR CHILD WITH THE FACTS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT KNIFE CRIME



Getting caught with a knife can lead to prison, even if it is not used. If you are caught with a knife, even if you were carrying it for your own protection or for somebody else, you will be arrested and prosecuted.



Police will stop and search anyone they suspect to be carrying a knife. Between October 2017 and 2019 there were 17,480 such searches in Waltham Forest.¹



Carrying a knife increases your chances of being hurt. Young people sometimes carry a knife to 'keep safe'. However, if you carry a knife you are much more likely to use it, or have a knife used against you.



You can be sent to prison if someone you are with uses a knife. If you are present when someone is killed or injured by a knife, you could be sent to prison for murder under 'joint enterprise', even if you did not use the knife.



Alcohol makes it more likely that you use a knife since it lowers inhibitions and increases the chance you will take risks.



There is no 'safe place' to stab someone. Wounds in the arm or leg can still be fatal. If an artery is punctured, you can bleed to death within one minute.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

The vast majority of young people are not involved in knife crime or serious violence. However, a small number of young people do become involved and the tips below might help you recognise if they are at risk:

- Are they disengaging from you?
- Are they receiving more calls and texts?
- Do they have a new circle of friends, particularly older friends?
- Do they suddenly have more money, new clothes or more than one mobile phone?
- Do they have any unexplained injuries?
- Do they seem very reserved or as though they are hiding something?
- Do they seem afraid?
- Are they self-harming?
- Do they want to avoid school?
- Have they recently been robbed, mugged or bullied?
- Do they disappear from home or school?
- Are they using drugs more or carrying large amounts?

There may be other explanations for these behaviours – you know your child. If you are worried, you can call one of the organisations named at the end of the guide. Try to keep an eye on:

- Your child's lives and social media
- What they are buying online and what is delivered to your home
- Where they are and who they are with
- What you have in your kitchen and toolkit

HOW TO TALK ABOUT VIOLENCE

Parents and carers can help prevent knife crime by talking to their child. These tips might help you have the conversation:

- Remember **your opinion matters** to them, even if they don't acknowledge it.
- **Be available and ready to listen**. Talk to them in a safe, private place. If home is busy, maybe use the car. Try to avoid times when they are tired or hungry.
- **Reassure them that they can be honest** with you, and that you'll support them without judgement.
- **Try not to demand that they talk**. If they do talk, listen and try not to react immediately.
- **Encourage them to share their fears** and, when appropriate, share your own.
- **Use real examples**. Can you talk about your own experiences as a young person, or refer to recent news stories?
- **Be positive**, and reassure them that most young people don't carry a knife. Remind them that they have a choice, even if it feels like they don't.
- Remind them that any specific **worries can be handled without the need for a knife**.
- **Stick to facts**.
- **Be clear about false 'bravery'** and remind them that walking away is the braver, safer and wiser thing to do. Any backlash from peers will pass, whereas if they 'stand ground', the consequences could be severe.
- Remind them that **the vast majority of young people do not carry**, and do walk away from confrontation. By carrying, you could be arming your attacker.
- **Talk to them about the impact of their actions**. Who would be affected if they were injured? Who else might be put at risk?
- **Find out about safe, fun, local activities** and encourage them to get involved.
- **Try a different approach**. Is there someone your child trusts who could help with the conversation? Can you help them understand the risks another way?
- **Get help and support** if you are worried, you don't have to deal with this alone.

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Citizens Advice: If your child has been illegally sold a knife, you can report this to Trading Standards by visiting: <http://citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/report-to-trading-standards/>

Childline: Your child can call Childline on 0800 1111 at any time if they are worried about their own safety or if they think someone they know is carrying or even using a gun or knife

Crimestoppers: You or your child can call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 if you want to report a crime that has already happened

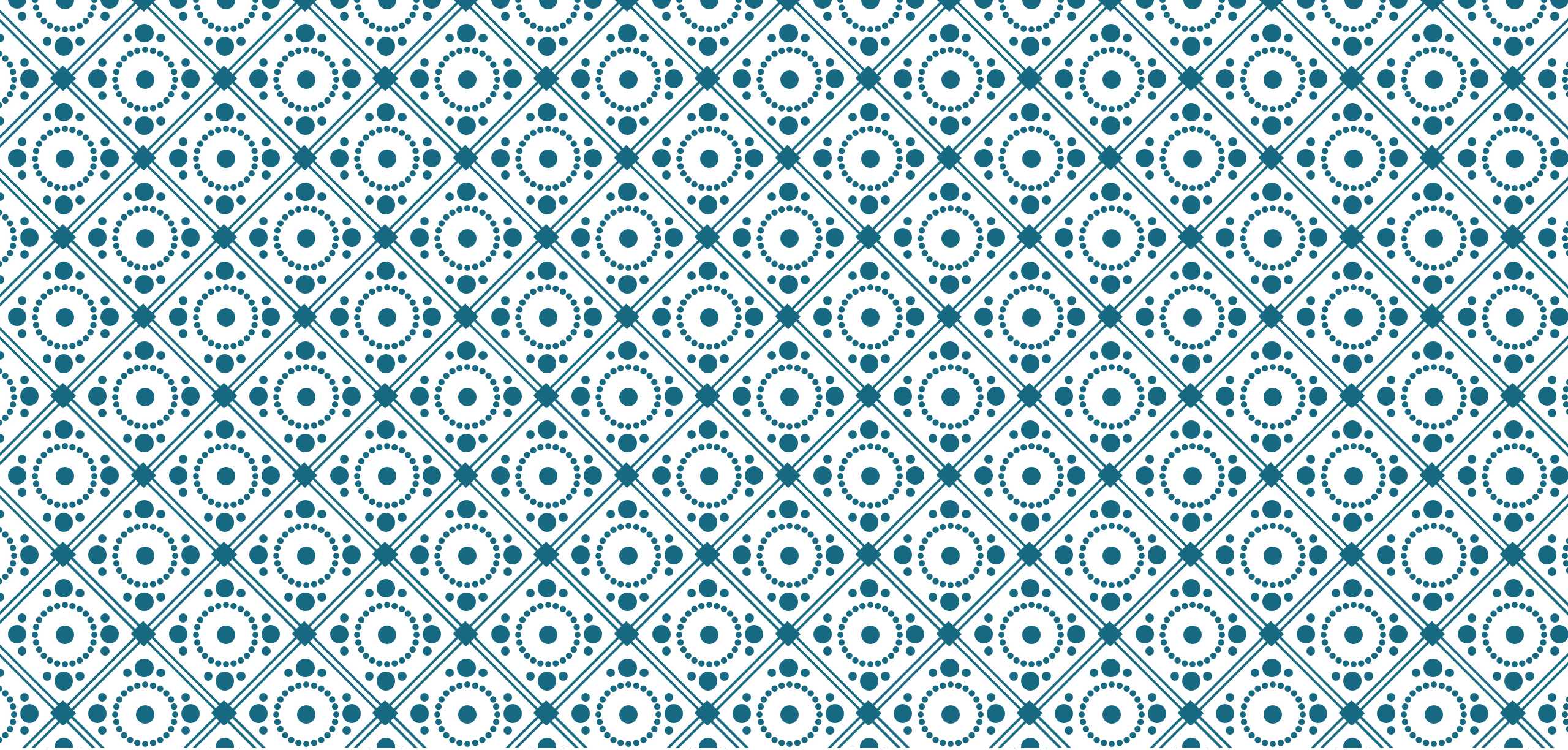
Knife Free: Join the campaign to go #knifefree and get more help and advice about knife crime by visiting knifefree.co.uk

Kooth: Children and young people in Waltham Forest from 11 to 18 years' old can find out more about mental health and seek support by accessing the Kooth website: kooth.com. Professional counsellors are available for one-to-one chat sessions from 6pm until 10pm on weekdays, and from 12noon until 10pm on weekends.

NSPCC: Information and advice to parents and others concerned about young people who may be involved, or affected by gang activity. Their helpline is open 24/7. Freephone: 0808 800 5000. Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Police: Find details of your local team by entering your postcode at www.police.uk. You should call 101 to report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response. Call 999 in an emergency

Victim Support: A national charity which helps people affected by crime. Phone 08 08 16 89 111 or visit <http://victimsupport.org>



References: This guide utilises information from 'Advice and guidance to parents and carers' by City of Westminster; 'Parent's Guide to Knife Crime, Harrow, 2017' by the Metropolitan Police Service; the No Knives, Better Lives campaign noknivesbetterlives.com; and the Home Office