

# NO KNIVES BETTER LIVES SESSION PLAN

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## Knife Carrying Prevention Work in Youth Justice Settings

**No knives, better lives.**

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# Introduction

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At its inception, the No Knives, Better Lives programme was a response to the very high incidence of knife crime in Scotland and the concerning number of young people charged with handling an offensive weapon. This incident rate has dropped dramatically over the last few years but it is important to continue to prioritise prevention work. No Knives, Better Lives is a primary prevention programme but the toolkits and guidance produced as part of the programme are equally useful (with little or no adaptation) in secondary prevention work.

This resource is a response to requests from practitioners working in youth justice settings for material specifically designed to support secondary prevention work with young people who have carried a knife or who may be particularly at risk of making the decision to carry a knife.

This resource should support practice in the context of the Whole Systems Approach and Early and Effective Intervention.

The Whole System Approach is the Scottish Government's programme for addressing the needs of young people involved in offending. It is underpinned by Getting it Right for Every Child, and aims to ensure that the needs and experience of children or young people, and their family, are at the centre of professional support and that practitioners work together to support families. It also aims to ensure support is available at the first signs of any difficulty, rather than when a situation has reached crisis point. The objective of Early and Effective Intervention is to prevent future offending or antisocial behaviour by providing interventions that are timely and proportionate whilst at the same time alerting other agencies to concerns that exist about the child or young person's behaviour and well-being.

It is important that work with young people in relation to known weapon carrying is informed by and agreed through multi agency discussion and that where young people pose a significant risk of harm to others or themselves practitioners refer to the national **Framework for Risk Assessment, Management, Evaluation (FRAME) Planning for Local Authorities and Partners**

# PART 1 - OVERVIEW

## Principles and Values

The session plan is informed by the principles and values of youth work and by the understanding that young people involved in the youth justice system are likely to have experienced significant adversity in their lives and to have significant speech, language and communication needs.

- Prevention work should be conducted in such a way that young people feel safe and respected (setting, content and interactions)
- Secondary prevention work should be concerned with facilitating recovery and building resilience
- Prevention work should acknowledge, value and be sensitive to young people's lived experience and treat the young person as an expert in their own life
- The purpose of prevention work should be transparent and agreed with young people
- The development of trusting, respectful relationships is central to prevention work
- Where possible, confidentiality should be assured and respected
- Prevention work should recognise and build on young people strengths and assets..

### How to use this resource

In secondary prevention work, a standard session plan is unlikely to be appropriate in all situations or for all young people. Practitioner knowledge and discretion should inform the use and adaptation of the session to suit the needs of individual young people. The session plan is structured around the 4Rs of effective prevention and it is recommended that you familiarise yourself with these and their application in secondary prevention work (**see table on next page**).



## The 4Rs of Effective Prevention (and their application in secondary prevention work)

The 4Rs	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention
<p><b>Reassurance</b> ensuring that young people are aware that knife carrying is not common.</p>	<p>The two main reasons that young people give for carrying a knife are fear/protection and because it is perceived to be the norm. In primary prevention work, it is important not to communicate about knife carrying or knife crime in unnecessarily alarmist terms and to challenge misconceptions about the prevalence of knife carrying in order to avoid contributing to the normalisation of knife carrying or exacerbating defensive knife carrying.</p>	<p>Where a young person is known to have carried a knife or is thought to be particularly at risk, it might seem counter productive to talk to a young person about the fact that knife carrying is not the norm. However, research suggests that successful brief motivational interviewing interventions (related to adolescent substance use and smoking) include feedback on individual behaviour and perceptions compared to norms. Addressing misconceptions in relation to the behaviour, beliefs and attitudes of peers can be effective in relation to changing attitudes and behaviours.</p>
<p><b>Risks and consequences</b> - ensuring that young people are aware of the potentially devastating legal and personal risks and consequences of carrying or using a knife.</p>	<p>Research suggests that young people are often not aware of the legal and personal consequences of carrying a knife. We also know that information about legal consequences is not particularly effective in relation to affecting attitudinal change. The personal potential consequences of carrying or using a knife (particularly related to the impact on the family of both perpetrator and victims of knife crime) is much more likely to influence the way that young people think about knife carrying. Ensuring that young people are aware that carrying a knife does not afford any protection from violence and in fact increases the likelihood of harm also has an impact.</p>	<p>Ensuring that young people are aware of the risks and consequences of carrying a knife is equally important in secondary prevention work. However, particular care must be taken when the discussion of risks and consequences is grounded in the reality of the young person's situation and not hypothetical (as in universal primary prevention work).</p> <p>For example, it is important that young people understand the repercussions of repeat offending but this should not be or perceived to be information given to invoke fear and the discussion should be a platform for exploring options and strategies to avoid this (<b>see "Resilience" below</b>).</p> <p>It is also important, when discussing consequences with reference to impact on family and victims families, that the young person's experience and that any known trauma be taken into account.</p> <p>It may be particularly important to work with the young person in relation to the misconception that knife carrying is an effective form of protection and the fact that it actually increases the chances of being victim to knife attack.</p>

Continued overleaf >>

The 4Rs	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention
<p><b>Resilience</b> ensuring that young people are aware of the influences and pressures that can lead to the decision to carry a knife and how these can be managed or avoided.</p>	<p>Primary prevention work aims to prevent knife carrying before it happens. Information about risks and consequences, on its own, is not enough to decrease the likelihood of a young person making the decision to carry a knife. It is important to anticipate and address the influences and pressures that might inform that decision (e.g. peer influence, conflict, social narratives) and to support young people's resilience to these.</p> <p>Supporting young people's involvement in prosocial activities and groups is also important as a means of building resilience.</p>	<p>It is important to note that where a young person is known to have carried a knife or is thought to be particularly at risk, resilience building is core to the entirety of the support that the young person will receive. The discussion and suggestions made in this resource are informed by the principles of wider secondary prevention work and are intended to compliment, and support this with a specific focus on knife carrying.</p> <p>Where a young person is already carrying a knife, it is perhaps even more unlikely that they will revise their thinking solely on the basis of new information about the legal and personal consequences of carrying a knife. Working with the young person to support them to understand, reflect on and develop strategies for dealing with the beliefs, influences and pressures that may have led to that decision and that might continue to influence behaviour is critical.</p> <p>Supporting young people's involvement in prosocial activities and groups as a means of building resilience is also important in secondary prevention work.</p> <p>As with work related to risks and consequences, it is crucial that known trauma and the existence of influences and pressures that a young person may not be equipped to deal with are recognised and that this session is delivered in a way that is sensitive to wider support needs.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility</b> ensuring that young people are aware of the importance of doing something if they know someone else is carrying a knife.</p>	<p>Positive prevention work involves ensuring that young people have the capacity to make positive choices. It sees young people as assets and partners in prevention work. This extends to understanding that the issue of knife carrying affects young people in different ways and that young people also want to address issues that affect their lives and their communities. Talking to young people about how they feel about knife carrying and what they can do in potentially challenging situations where someone they know is carrying a knife is a very powerful approach to prevention.</p>	<p>This dimension of prevention work is equally applicable in secondary prevention work. The bystander approach carries a very powerful and relatable message and can facilitate a meaningful examination of personal values, what it means to be a friend and reflecting on attitudes and behaviours.</p>

## PART 2 - Preparing for the session

### Mark's Story

The session is based on the NKBL film **"One Knife, Many Victims (Mark's Story)"** and structured around the 4Rs of effective prevention. The film is available on the NKBL website and the NKBL YouTube channel.

You can also request a copy on disc by contacting the NKBL delivery team (NKBL@youthlinkscotland.org). Using Mark's story and the characters from the film as the basis of discussion can facilitate both a hypothetical discussion (which might be easier and feel safer initially for some young people) and discussion about the young person's own experience with reference to the events and characters depicted in the film.

You will notice that the age recommendation given at the start of the film is 15 and over. This is a recommendation rather than a certificate and you can use the film to support work with young people below the age of 15 (if, as an experienced practitioner, you consider it appropriate). Familiarise yourself with the film and the content of the session in advance.

### Age Group

This session is designed to be used with young people aged between 12 and 16 but may be suitable for working with young people who are older than 16. The session is discussion based and the level of discussion generated will vary according to the age and stage of the young people you are working with.

### Method

One-to-one conversation or longer group work session.

### Time

A one-to-one session should take approximately an hour. If you run the session with a group, more time will be required for group discussions. In each of the four sections, you will find suggestions for expanding the session using activities and film clips from the NKBL resource library. You can find these in the **"Practitioner"** section of the NKBL website

### Learning Outcomes

- Young people are aware of the legal and personal risks and consequences of carrying or using a knife
- Young people understand the influences and pressures that can lead to the decision to carry a knife
- Young people have considered strategies for dealing with those influence and pressures
- Young people have explored norms related to knife carrying (any misconceptions)
- Young people have reflected on the responsibility they have to themselves and their peers to challenge the acceptability of knife carrying and to act if they know that someone is carrying a knife.

# PART 3 - Session Plan

## 1. Introduction (4Rs – Reassurance)

As part of your introduction to the session, it is likely that you will want to discuss the young person's own experience of knife carrying (where a young person has carried knife or is considered to be at risk, perhaps because they know other people who do) and the consequences of this. At this point, it might be helpful to build in aspects of a social norms and motivational interviewing approach to prevention by ensuring that the young person is aware that knife carrying is not common. Information about norms should be used to facilitate discussion that allows the young person to reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs and (possible) misconceptions in the light of any discrepancy suggested by actual norms.

It may be helpful to know that the number of young people under 18 convicted of handling an offensive weapon has fallen by 81% from 489 in 2006-07 to 92 in 2015-16.

## 2. Mark's Story (One Knife, Many Victims) Film

Explain that you are going to show a short film that tells "Mark's Story". Mark is a young person who makes a split second decision that has devastating consequences.

Show the film.



## 3. What Happens Next? (4Rs - Risks and Consequences)

The purpose of this part of the session is to ensure that young people are aware of and have reflected on the legal and personal risks and consequences of carrying a knife.

Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- 3.1 What happens next for Ian (the victim)? Do you think he lives or dies? Does it depend where he was stabbed?
- 3.2 What happens next for Mark? Do you think he'll go to prison? How long for?
- 3.3 What happens next for Mark and Ian's friends? Will they be in trouble? How will they feel?
- 3.4 What happens next for Mark and Ian's families? How will they feel? What will the long-term impact be?

Use the following guidance notes to help with the discussion:

- 3.1 We don't know from the film, whether Ian survives or if his injury is fatal. At the very least, he is seriously injured and it may affect him for the rest of his life. This is an opportunity to communicate the following messages as part of the discussion:

There is no safe place to stab someone (a common myth). If an artery is severed anywhere in the body it is possible to bleed out in several minutes. It takes a lot longer than that for an ambulance to arrive (it might be handy to know local statistics for ambulance arrival).

Supplementary material:

- Use the "What's the Damage" activity from the NKBL Sharp Solutions Toolkit for an expanded discussion and illustration of the physical impact of a knife wound.
- The NKBL short film "Paramedic" (which can be found on the NKBL YouTube channel) is also a useful addition here. It is a high impact, one minute clip of a paramedic talking about his experience of treating people with knife wounds.

- 3.3 Mark and Ian's friends will now be witnesses to a crime. They will be questioned by the police and might have to appear in court. Even if you don't use the knife, but you are there, a court might decide that you were involved and you can also go to prison.

They will also be in shock. They have just witnessed a serious assault or possibly the murder of someone they know.

Mark's friends will also have to deal with the loss of a friend if Mark goes to prison.

They will be known in their community for their involvement and this may have negative repercussions, particularly in relation to retaliation.

In the longer term, they may struggle emotionally to come to terms with having been involved in the incident. They are likely to feel some sense of responsibility.

Supplementary material:

- The NKBL information film: "What happens if your friend gets caught with a knife" might be useful in this part of the session

- 3.4 Ian's family will be devastated. They may have lost their son to a mindless act of violence that Mark might not even have intended. It will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Mark's family will also lose their son and will struggle to come to terms with what he has done. They will be associated with what happened and this can have very negative consequences for families including the risk of retaliation. They may feel a sense of responsibility and shame.

The emotions that families and friends of knife crime victims and perpetrators experience are very difficult to deal with and may affect them very seriously and for a long time. They may never come to terms with it. Knife crime destroys families and communities.

Supplementary material:

- The NKBL film "Embalmer" (which can be found on the NKBL YouTube channel) may be a useful addition to this part of the session. In this short, one-minute film an embalmer talks about preparing the body of a knife crime victim before his mother comes to view his body.
- You can also use the NKBL film "My Son William" (which can be found on the NKBL YouTube channel) a harrowing real life account from a mother who lost her son to knife crime and still struggles to come to terms with it many years later.

#### 4. Did it have to happen? (4Rs - Resilience)

The purpose of this part of the session is to encourage young people to reflect on the reasons why someone might choose to carry a knife, the influences and pressures that might contribute to that decision and how it might be possible to deal with them. It is also an opportunity, where a young person has carried or considered carrying a knife, to reflect on (and share if they are comfortable) their own reasons. What might have influenced their decision and what might they might do differently in the future?

##### Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- 4.1 What was Mark thinking when he decided to take the knife? Do you think he was worried and took it for protection? Did he take it to look hard in front of his friends? Did he take because he wanted to hurt Ian?
- 4.2 Why was Mark worried about what was going to happen that night? What contributed to that?
- 4.3 What could Mark have done differently?
- 4.4 What could Ian (the victim) have done differently?
- 4.5 What would have happened if Mark hadn't taken the knife?

##### Use the following guidance notes to help with the discussion:

- 4.1 We don't really know from the film whether Mark took the knife for protection or to look hard, but it seems that he was worried about a possible confrontation. He didn't tell anyone he had it and wasn't bragging about it so it doesn't seem like he carried the knife to look hard.  
  
There is nothing to suggest that Mark went out with the intention of stabbing Ian. It seems like a split second decision that was more about self-protection.
- 4.2 It seems like Mark thought something was going to happen. Maybe he thought that Ian or his friends might have a weapon. There was a lot of hype via social media and his friends were winding him up on the way to the park. Social media can make something small seem really big and young people often feel under a lot of pressure to act in a particular way.

4.3 It is important to be prepared to facilitate a discussion that not just identifies how Mark could have acted differently but also how easy that would have been for him. It is easy to say, for example, that Mark should have stayed at home, but how easy is that for young people to do? A discussion which helps with strategies, not just "should" and "should not" is required.

##### Mark options:

- He could have stayed at home if he thought things were going to kick off
- He could have tried not to react to the social media build up
- He could have spoken to his friends about how he was feeling
- He could not have taken the knife
- He could have handled the confrontation with Ian differently
- Other options - ask the young person whether they can come up with anything else.

4.4 It can be difficult for young people to see Ian as anything other than a victim (he is) but it is important to consider how Ian could have prioritised his own safety.

##### Ian's options:

- He could have avoided building things up on social media
- He could have stayed away from a situation that was starting to look volatile
- He could have asked his friends not to aggravate the situation
- He could have avoided confronting Mark
- Other options - ask the young person whether they can come up with anything else.

4.5 There would probably have been a fight between Mark and Ian that would most likely have been broken up by their friends with no real harm done and everyone would have gone home that night. Having the knife changed everything. Ian didn't go home that night and neither did Mark.



#### 5. What would you do? (4Rs - Responsibility)

The purpose of this section is to use "Mark's Story" and the characters in the film to facilitate a discussion about values and responsibilities in a way that is, initially, abstracted from the young person's situation. This is often easier for a young person than a discussion that is rooted in his or her own environment and relationships. It may be appropriate to discuss how this might apply in the young person's own situation.

##### Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- 5.1 Mark's friends didn't know that he had a knife. Would they have acted differently if they did?
- 5.2 Does it matter that they didn't know?
- 5.3 What is their responsibility as a friend?
- 5.4 What could they have done to help Mark?

##### Use the following guidance notes to help with the discussion:

###### 5.1 - 5.4

Most people will agree that being a friend means that you would act to ensure that your friends are safe. We can assume that Mark's friends wouldn't want Mark to be in the trouble or for Ian to have been seriously injured. It shouldn't matter whether they knew he had a knife or not. Winding up a friend isn't a good way to support them and the consequences are unpredictable. If it helps, ask the young person to imagine how they would feel if Ian was a member of their family or a close friend. Ask them what they would want Mark's friends to have done (if you are aware of any reason why this might not be appropriate (e.g. if a young person has experienced something similar) adapt the activity accordingly).

##### Mark's friends' options:

- They could have avoided contributing to the build up on social media
- They could have helped Mark to stay out of the situation by suggesting not going to the park
- They could have backed Mark up by suggesting he ignore the comments and not slagging Mark about being scared
- They could have acted to de-escalate the confrontation between Mark and Ian
- Other option - ask the young person what other options they can come up.

You can extend this conversation to consider what the options are if you know that a friend is carrying a knife (speak to the person if it's safe, speak to other friends to get help with the situation, speak to someone else you trust who can help, speak to the police). The issue of being a "grass" will probably come up. The difference between being a "grass" and being a friend is an important learning opportunity to focus on.



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