

A hand holding a knife against a dark background with a green hoodie.

KNIFE CRIME

A TALKING POINTS
ENGLISH LESSON FOR
READING, SPEAKING,
VOCABULARY AND WRITING

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Introduction

What is knife crime?

Does knife crime exist in your hometown or city?

What do you think can be done about knife crime?

Knife Crime

Read Kyle's story below:

It's murder in my neighbourhood.

Quite literally.

Every week I hear on the news of another young person who has been stabbed to death. It breaks my heart. It also terrifies me.

I am only sixteen but I have lost three friends already.

One of them — James — he got into an altercation with a group of other kids about the same age as us. No one really knows what the argument was about. There was some CCTV footage but all it shows is the main ringleader of this gang approaching James and shouting at him.

You can see by James body language that he didn't want any trouble and he tried to leave but the other kids would not let him.

Finally, James tried to run for it and the other kids in the gang grabbed him. Then it happened very quickly. There were four kids in the gang and James was alone. They beat him and then the ringleader pulled out a knife. It looked huge on the video.

He stabbed James three times. And then it was over.

The police came round to ask questions. When they told us what had happened my mum just collapsed on the floor. She had met James many times. She couldn't believe it.

But for me — I don't know, maybe I was in shock — but I didn't get upset or feel angry or sad. I spoke to the police and answered their questions.

The next day at school, everyone knew about it. James' cousin, a girl called Becky, was in hysterics. The other girls were trying to console her. I didn't know what to say to her. I am too young to deal with this kind of stuff. I don't know how to react or talk to others about it.

Since James dying, there have been two others.

These are people I know personally. But I also hear of others happening in my district. It gets to the point where it is so commonplace that you don't have any feelings about it at all.

My mum is really worried about all of this. She always asks me where I am going and who I am hanging out with. I feel like I can't live a normal life because everyone is so scared and paranoid.

I know which areas to avoid and I don't stay out late at night. I come home as quickly as I can if I am visiting a friend and I keep my head down, eyes to the ground.

Some of the other kids at school have started carrying knives of their own. They have shown me.

When I asked them why they have a knife, they just say one word: Protection.

But I think that is the worst thing to do. If you carry a knife around then chances are you will use it. You may not wish to use it, but there could come a time when you do.

I don't want to tempt fate. I don't want to take that chance.

But sometimes I am at home, reading a book while lying on my bed and I hear police sirens and I wonder if it's another kid from my school who has got into trouble.

Reading Comprehension Questions

How often does Kyle hear of a knife murder in his town?

How many friends of his have been murdered?

Who is the first friend that Kyle talks about?

What was the argument about?

What does the CCTV footage show?

Did James invite any trouble from the group? How do you know?

Did James try to leave the situation?

Who stopped him?

Who stabbed him?

Who came to Kyle's house to inform him of the news of his friend James?

How did Kyle's mother react?

How did Kyle react?

What happened when Kyle went to school the next day?

Is Kyle's mother overprotective of him? What does she ask him when he leaves the house?

What actions does Kyle take to avoid trouble?

Do some of the other kids at Kyle's school carry knives? What reason do they give for owning one?

Does Kyle have a knife? What reasons does he give for this?

Essential Vocabulary

quite literally	stabbed	it breaks my heart
it terrifies me	altercation	cctv footage
ringleader	approaching	body language
run for it	grabbed him	collapsed
in shock	hysterics	console
commonplace	hanging out	paranoid
to tempt fate	police sirens	

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Notebook—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”

Discussion Questions

What do you make of Kyle's life? Is this a normal life for a teenager? How will this affect him as he gets older?

Do you think this story is unbelievable? Why/why not?

Do you think the story is easy to believe? Why/why not?

Where do you think this story takes place? Which country or city?

Does your hometown have a knife crime problem like this?

What can the police do about it?

How can this knife crime issue be resolved?

What do the young people in knife crime news stories fight about? Why are they fighting at all?

Is it legal in your country to carry a knife around? Do you agree with this? Why/why not?

What if someone was carrying a fruit knife? Is that a danger to others?

What about carrying scissors?

Is the problem the knives or the people? Or society? Where does the problem lie?

Should all knives be banned? What about knives in a restaurant kitchen?

Debate: How to end Knife Crime?

This is a debate activity.

Divide the class into two groups. Elect or choose a student to be the chairperson. This person should chair the debate and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.

Team A

You believe that there needs to be a strong line against knife crime. You think having a zero-tolerance policy would be a good idea. So that means harsh sentences for anyone caught in a knife crime incident.

Even if you did not hurt or kill anyone with a knife, if you are carrying one within a known group or gang, then you deserve harsh punishment.

Prison sentences with no parole would be a good idea for all perpetrators.

You believe that by having a very hard line against knife crime it will scare younger people from participating in the gangs or becoming affiliated with knife culture.

Team B

You don't believe that all knife crime is associated with gangs. Society has become so dangerous that now innocent members of the public want to carry a knife for protection.

You believe that if young people had more things to do and places to go, then they would not feel threatened on the streets – and would not join a gang.

You strongly believe that if young people could join youth clubs or participate in after-school activities then they would feel less inclined to join a gang or carry a knife. It all comes down to education – education must play an important part in the fight against knife crime.

Each team should prepare their lines of argument for the debate. Take some time in your team to think of things to say. Also, try to anticipate what the opposing team could say so you can argue against it.

When both teams are ready, you can begin the debate.

Role Play: Knife No More

This is a role play exercise.

There are two people in this activity.

1. No Knife For Me.

You don't carry a knife and you have no intention of doing so. Even though in your hometown there is a lot of knife crime, you believe that by carrying one it will end in a lot of trouble for you.

2. Big Knife For Me.

You carry a knife. You take it everywhere you go. You tell others that you need it for protection but you have never had any situation where you have had to use it. You carry the knife because many other young people carry one. You are talking to your friend and you are trying to strongly encourage the friend to start carrying a knife.

The Situation

Two friends meet. You are both very young and you live in an area with a high level of knife crime. One friend carries a knife and is now trying to encourage the other friend to carry one, but they do not wish to. The two people continue discussing whether to carry a knife or not until there is a resolution.

Take some time to prepare your role play. Then show the class.

Writing

Write a letter to your local government representative complaining about the high levels of knife crime in your district.

Outline all the effects that it is having on your community and what steps you would like the police and social services to take.

Credits

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