SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

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Knife crime is a growing concern in many communities, affecting young people and their families. While most children will never become involved, it's important for parents to stay informed and engaged. Understanding the risks, recognising warning signs and having open conversations can help keep our children safe.

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The reality of knife crime

Knife crime is not just a problem in major cities; it can happen anywhere. Although most young people do not carry knives, those who do—whether for self-defence or due to peer pressure—significantly increase their risk of harm.

What you can do as a parent:

- **listen without judgment** - children need to feel safe talking to you. Create an environment where they know they can share their worries without fear of punishment.
- **know who they're with** - peer pressure is one of the biggest influences on a child's decisions. Encourage positive friendships and stay aware of who they are spending time with.
- **check their belongings if you're worried** - if you suspect your child is carrying a knife, don't ignore your instincts. It is your right and responsibility to ensure their safety.
- **reach out for support**- if you are concerned, there are organisations that can help. Schools, local youth services and even the police can provide guidance and intervention before it's too late.

Early intervention can prevent a tragedy. Having regular, open conversations, and staying informed about the risks, can help keep your child safe.

Knife crime can impact any family, regardless of your identity or background.

Be vigilant for these warning signs:

- Unexplained cash or new possessions
- Secretive behaviour or sudden mood changes
- Avoiding school or staying out late
- Carrying a knife for "protection" or because it was "found."

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Safeguarding against sexism and misogyny

Sexism and misogyny are increasingly present in online spaces, shaping how young people perceive gender roles and relationships. Social media, gaming and online influencers can promote harmful ideas that normalise disrespectful behaviour toward women and girls. These influences can impact how teens interact with peers, form relationships and view their own self-worth. As parents, understanding these issues is essential in helping young people develop respectful, healthy attitudes towards gender equality.

How social media and gaming contribute

Many online spaces subtly (or overtly) reinforce sexist views. Here's how:

- **social media algorithms:** platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Instagram use algorithms that push extreme or controversial content, sometimes leading young people down a path of increasingly sexist narratives.
- **gaming culture:** online multiplayer games often contain toxic environments where sexist language and behaviours are normalised. Female gamers frequently report harassment, reinforcing a culture of exclusion and hostility.
- **influencer culture:** certain influencers cater to young male audiences by portraying women as inferior or by blaming feminism for societal problems, shaping how boys and young men perceive gender roles.
- **meme culture and dark humour:** sexist jokes and memes can desensitise young people, making them think these attitudes are harmless or just 'edgy humour.'

What parents can do

Helping your child develop critical thinking skills and fostering open conversations can counteract harmful influences. Here's how:

1. **Encourage open conversations**
   - Ask non-judgmental questions like: *"What do you think about how women are portrayed in media?"* or *"Have you noticed any sexist comments in your online spaces?"*
   - Share real-world examples and encourage discussion.
2. **Challenge harmful views**
   - If your child repeats a sexist stereotype, ask them where they heard it and gently challenge it with facts and different perspectives.
   - Teach them to critically evaluate online content and question sources.
3. **Be a role model**
   - Demonstrate respect and gender equality at home.
   - Avoid reinforcing traditional gender roles and challenge stereotypes in everyday conversations.
4. **Set digital boundaries**
   - Monitor your child's online activity.
   - Encourage a balanced media diet, including positive representations of gender equality.
   - Use parental controls where necessary but prioritise open dialogue over strict monitoring.

By staying informed and engaged, parents can play a crucial role in shaping their children's perspectives on gender and respect. Open discussions and guidance help young people develop the tools they need to navigate online influences and build respectful relationships in the real world.