



Sent to all Parents, Carers and Guardians

On behalf of Hertfordshire Constabulary

Dear parents, carers & guardians,

My name is Matthew Nicholls and I am the Police Chief Superintendent responsible for the delivery of local policing across Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire is a very safe place. Overall, crime in our area is down from last year. I am writing with some information which will help us continue to keep our children, and Hertfordshire, safe.

Parents, guardians and young people across the country today are facing issues which we should all be aware of, so that each of us can play our part in keeping everyone safe. This letter is intended to outline some of those problems and to offer some guidance and support.

Parents, guardians and carers can really help by talking through these issues with young people. Your child might not tell you much but what you say, think and feel will be important to them. This letter gives you some tips and pointers, and ways to get support or advice if you need it.

How concerned should you be about knife crime?

Nationally, there has been a continued rise in the number of police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp object. There is no disputing that knife crime is a growing concern nationally, but it is important to remember that the number of offences involving knives in our county is still **very low**. That said, the chances are that your child will have thought about the problem of knife crime or heard a story about someone who carried a knife, so it is still a conversation worth having with them.

It is important that everyone knows a few basic points:

- It is illegal to carry any knife if there is intent to use it, even defensively, as a weapon; even if the knife belongs to someone else, such as a friend, girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Police can and will search someone if they believe they are carrying a knife.

- Police officers and school staff can search young people who they think might be carrying a weapon at school.
- Carrying a knife could mean being arrested, going to court and ending up with a criminal record or even a prison sentence. This can seriously affect the rest of someone's life. Having a criminal record can prevent that person getting a job, going to university or college or even travelling abroad to some countries.

Most young people who decide they need to start carrying a knife, do so because they feel threatened. You can help by looking out for signs that may suggest a child is feeling this way:

- School's not going well / they don't want to go in to school at all
- They've been a recent victim of theft/bullying/mugging.
- A child hanging around with a different network of friends who may be a lot older.

The best advice, if confronted with a threat of violence, is to **walk away**.

Not carrying a weapon and walking away from confrontation is what the vast majority of people would do, is the safest option and won't break the law. If you or a young person should find a knife or other weapon in public, my advice is not to touch it, but to immediately report this to the police.

What are 'county lines' and Child Criminal Exploitation?

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks who bring drugs into an area and sell them using dedicated mobile phone lines. The perpetrators are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons.

Children as young as 12 years old can be exploited or used by gangs to courier drugs in and out of their local area; 15-16 years is the most common age range. Both males and females are at risk of being exploited. Social media is often used to make initial contact with children and young people.

Criminal exploitation can be broader than just county lines and can include children forced to commit theft or take part in sexual activity. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if they appear to be taking part consensually.

A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs and any sudden changes in a young person's lifestyle should be discussed with them. Some potential indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out of the local area.
- Unexplained quantities of money, clothes, or mobile phones

- Receiving an excessive number of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple mobile phones.
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home / care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results / performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harming

It's important that anyone who thinks their child is being exploited knows that they are **not alone and not to blame**.

If you feel a child is in immediate danger then call the police on 999. You should never be worried about contacting the police when you are trying to protect a young person from harm.

If you suspect a young person is the victim or perpetrator of crime or exploitation and they are not in immediate danger, you can report it by calling the police on **101**. Alternatively, you or a young person can report intelligence information anonymously by contacting Crimestoppers on **0800 555111**.

Where to find further support and help

The response to tackling knife crime, county lines and criminal exploitation involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and schools. In Hertfordshire we have been working with our partners to address these issues and have developed a Serious Violence Strategy which you can view at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/childrens-services/hscb/professionals/violent-crime-strategy.pdf. For further information regarding these issues, you may wish to visit the following websites:

Knife crime: www.knifecrimes.org – This Home Office approved website offers advice and resources for parents and young people around knife crime and keeping safe.

Knife crime: <https://noknivesbetterlives.com/parents/> where you can find separate sections for young people and parents.

County Lines: www.childrenssociety.org.uk This website offers advice and resources about county lines, including case studies and material for parents in different languages.

<https://www.safe4me.co.uk/parents/> - This website offers advice and resources around many topics including anti-social behaviour, cyber bullying, domestic abuse, drugs and legal highs, radicalisation, sexting, abuse within teen relationships and

Neighbourhood Policing – To find details of your local team and find out more about our local priorities visit www.herts.police.uk Our website also offers more advice for parents and those who work with your people, about county lines and gangs.

Tell us – what should we focus on where you live?

Finally, we would like to make you aware of our Community Voice platform called echo. The service allows you to tell your local police what **you** think we should be focusing on where you live.

This a great opportunity to have your voice heard and to influence the priorities for policing in the local area.

You can let us know your views anonymously and at anytime by visiting the links below and submitting your priorities.

<http://capture.rantandrave.com/s3/herts>



**Please don't use echo for reporting crime. To do that, either contact the Force Communications Room via online web chat at herts.police.uk/contact or call the non-emergency number 101. If a crime is in progress or someone's life is in danger, call 999 immediately.*

I want to assure you that I and my colleagues and partner agencies will continue to do everything we can to make sure Hertfordshire remains a safe county to live in.

By acting on this information, we can ensure our children stay safe, together.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Nicholls', written in a cursive style.

Chief Superintendent Matt Nicholls