What is a gang?

The definition of a gang is a group of people with a shared interest, or who share a common identity. A gang does not have to be involved in criminal activity, although when we hear the word ‘gang’ that is what we tend to think of. It isn’t illegal to be a member of a gang, although many young people will become involved in crime through their allegiance to a gang. Many gangs involve themselves in drugs, violence and weapons.

Why do young people join gangs?

There are many reasons why young people will join a violent gang, often they do so to feel safer in their area. Other reasons could include:

- To get protection from rival gangs
- To have power over others
- Friends or family are involved
- To make money
- Lack of anything else to do
- To get respect and recognition
- To belong to a group / family
- They can seem glamorous to some young people

Some social commentators think that young people join gangs because they don’t have enough support from their family, community or role models.

What is knife crime?

Knife crime is any crime that involves a knife – regardless of whether the knife is used to injure someone. A person can be found guilty of knife crime if they:

- Carry a knife – carrying alone could mean that the individual could face up to 4 years imprisonment
- Stab or slash someone and cause a physical injury
- Threaten someone with a knife
- Use a knife whilst committing another crime

It is illegal to carry a knife in the UK, and you can be arrested, go to court, get a criminal record and/or face a prison sentence if the police search you and find a knife.

Stop and Search

The police have the power to stop and search anyone at any time if they believe they might be carrying a weapon, drugs or stolen property or be involved in terrorism. The police can search an individual, their clothing, bags, other possessions and their vehicles. If a knife or other weapon is found, a person can be charged, regardless of why they were searched in the first place.
The law does not differentiate between carrying a knife for self-defence, or for the intention of doing harm. It is no defence to say you are just carrying a knife to protect yourself – you are still committing a crime. Carrying a knife could mean that someone else could use it against the carrier – in other words, the carrier could be arming a potential attacker.

The police have the right to stop and search anyone they think might be carrying a knife. If they find one, a person can be sentenced to up to 4 years in jail, and fined up to £5,000.

Facts about knife crime:

- Between September 2010-2011, the number of reported robberies that involved a knife rose by 10% from the previous year [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16626558]
- One in five 16-year old boys admitted to attacking someone with a knife, intending to cause serious harm [Youth Justice Board/Mori Survey]
- Being convicted of carrying a knife can lead to up to 4 years in jail

Information on Joint Enterprise

Put simply, Joint Enterprise means that if your presence, knowledge or actions lead to a serious crime such as murder, you too could be charged with murder.

Joint Enterprise can apply to anyone who was there at the time of the crime, or who did something that led to or helped a crime to be committed.

Joint Enterprise isn’t a crime in itself, it is the name of the law – you can’t be charged with ‘joint enterprise’ - but it does mean that anyone involved in a serious crime, like murder, can be charged with murder, regardless of their role. Its intention is to manage gang related violence.

How can someone avoid being charged under Joint Enterprise?

- Think about who you socialise with and who your friends are
- Don’t carry weapons for yourself or anyone else
- Think about the consequence of your actions, and be sure you understand what your friends are involved in and the consequences of their actions too.
PSHE & CITIZENSHIP

BBC Three – My Murder

Gang Culture – the facts

Information on the Criminal Justice System (CJS)

There are two types of law in the UK – Criminal and Civil.

The CJS covers all aspects of criminal law. Criminal law deals with offences like murder, robbery, drug dealing and vandalism.

There are many roles within the Criminal Justice System:

- **Judges** – They oversee all cases in the Crown and High Court, which is where the most serious cases are tried. They don’t decide on innocence or guilt – that is the responsibility of the jury – but they will decide on the sentence when someone is found guilty.

- **Magistrates** – Volunteers from all walks of life who sit in groups of three in Magistrates’ Courts and hear less serious offences. They decide on innocence or guilt, and can sentence offenders to up to six months in jail or £5,000 fine as well as various community orders. Over 95% of all criminal cases will be resolved in the Magistrates’ Court.

- **Jury** – A jury is made up of 12 members of the public, who are over 18 and registered to vote in the UK. They are chosen at random and will decide on innocence or guilt in a trial at the Crown Court.

- **Police** – The role of the police in the CJS is to enforce the law and to protect the public. They arrest those they think have committed crimes, and find evidence that will help convict them. The Police do not prosecute law breakers themselves, that is the job of the Crown Prosecution Service.

- **Crown Prosecution Service** - All criminal law cases are brought to trial by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The CPS acts for all citizens when it brings cases to court, as crimes are seen to be crimes against society as a whole. The CPS takes the case from the police, prepares a case and then prosecutes the defendant in court. There are several different sentences that can be given once someone is found guilty; they range from custodial to community based, and they are supposed to punish the offender, but also to help rehabilitate them. Some crimes, such as murder, are so serious that they will always receive a lengthy jail term.
Young offenders are young people who commit crime. In the UK the age of criminal responsibility is 10 (eight in Scotland); that means anyone aged 10 or above can be charged with a crime. Young offenders are those between 10 – 17, and they are dealt with differently to adult offenders.

There are special courts for young offenders charged with some crimes, they are less formal and more child friendly. However, some very serious crimes committed by those under 18 will still be held in Crown Courts. Young offenders can be sent to Young Offender Institutions to carry out a custodial sentence.

- In 2009/10 those aged 10-17 were responsible for 17% of all UK arrests, but made up only 11% of the population. However, the number of young people involved in the Youth Justice System did fall at this time.

- In 2010/11 there were approximately 2,222 young people in custody at any one time, which was 17% less than in 2009/10. They were held for an average of 78 days.