

# GETTING REAL WITH GUNS AND KNIVES

Weapon Crime Prevention:  
A Resource Guide for Teachers, Parents,  
Young People and the Wider Community



Letise Sampson

# **Getting Real With Guns and Knives: A Resource Guide for Teachers, Parents, Young People and the Wider Community**

*Letise Sampson*

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## **Bio – Letise Sampson**

**BLOODY SPREE: London knife crime worsens – Seven stabbed including SIX in 90 minutes as boy aged just THIRTEEN left fighting for his life.**

These are some of the headlines that have dominated the UK newspapers in April 2018. With knife and gun related attacks and deaths sweeping London and inner cities, questions are being asked and the finger is being pointed once again.

The true stats about gun and knife crime have actually been under-reported for many years until now because the public and newspapers were suffering from knife crime murder fatigue.

Knife crime is a silent epidemic on the inner-city streets of the UK; the question is, are we trying to find a cure or trying to manage the symptoms of this disease?

Gun and knife violence is entwined with prejudices and racial stereotypes which has caused the general public to become desensitised and disengaged from the real issues surrounding youth crime today.

Some common thoughts will be: there will be another murder in a few days; just another inner city black boy killed; he was probably in a gang; must have been a drug deal that went bad; why can't they get a job? Where are the fathers of these young killers? He was one of those drill rappers; you live by the gun, die by the gun... but is this really the truth?

The turning point in the media was when Ben Kinsella, who was just 16 years old at the time, was stabbed to death in a horrific act of senseless violence on the 29th June 2008 in Islington, London. This was maybe the first time the media realised knife crime affects everyone whether you are white, black or Asian; young or old; male or female.

Knife and gun murder respects no one – whether you live in Brixton, Hampstead or the suburbs of Hampshire!

I have worked within the education sector for the last ten years with parents, teachers, police, community members and youths themselves.

The same debates and questions are being asked: Why is this happening now? What can be done about this? How can I keep my child safe? Is it the fault of parents? Is hip hop music to blame? Are the police ineffective because of cuts? Does the government really care? Why are there no leisure activities for the kids? And so on.

The aim of this book is to create awareness in schools, communities and at home. From this foundation it will lead on to knife and gun crime prevention measures, including how to empower young people to stay safe and make better choices.

For parents, it will help you to protect your children and find support. There are no right or wrong answers, so no single person has all the answer, including myself.

**This book is dedicated to all of the young people who lost their lives prematurely, often by just being in the wrong postcode at the wrong time.**

## **My Story**

When I was a teen growing up in north-west London, gun-related violence was more of a cause for concern than the rising knife murders seen today. In those days, 80 per cent of the deaths and violent attacks involving guns were due to gang-related wars fuelled by the lucrative drug trade which devastated communities and broke families apart.

There were isolated disputes which led to a stabbing; at times these could be between close friends that had fallen out or fights over girls but knives were commonly used in street robberies. During school days, I regularly witnessed older gang members from Kilburn come down to Brent Cross shopping centre after the school rush and rob the vulnerable students of their mobile phones.

Everybody I knew, male and female, had some form of knife or weapon. The primary reason for this was the fear of being attacked.

My first experience of gun violence was at the age of 17 years old. I had just raised enough money to buy my first car and as you can imagine I was extremely excited. I searched in the Loot newspaper classified ads and found the car of the dreams.

I asked my friends to come along for the purchase and after arranging with the owner to view and buy, we were given directions to a housing estate off Camden Road.

I would later find out that Kentish Town was a drug dealing area with one of the highest murder rates in London at the time. As my meeting with the owner drew nearer, my inner spirit was alarmed and my sixth sense knew something was wrong but this was laughed off by my two friends in the car as paranoia.

Within seconds of arrival, a masked young gunman abruptly opened the car door on the side in which I was seated and pressed a gun to my face and asked if we came to buy the car.

I knew it was a real gun as I smelt the gun powder from the tip of the pistol. Plus I knew from his slang, body language and attire that this was a real street villain, a career criminal with no qualms about pulling the trigger.

So we kept quiet and remained still and cooperated, and he took the money for the car and robbed the two other occupants of their jewellery and mobile phones.

What alarmed me further was after he took everything, he still pointed the gun at us and we could see he was deliberating over whether to shoot. At this point, the driver sped off and luckily we survived a potentially tragic incident.

Rumours surfaced that my so-called friends planned the whole set up. Although there was no evidence to suggest this, they had a history of setting up people in the community in similar gun robberies.

What happened next was years of anger, paranoia, confusion and OCD. It was so bad at one point, that I slept with a knife under the pillow and I would refuse to go into areas like Harlesden or even visit my brother in Haringey because I believed everyone who looked at me was my enemy. I became a recluse and, having no trust in anyone in the community, my mindset evolved into a 'dog eat dog' mentality.

I never had any intention of walking around with a knife. I was intelligent enough to know I would end up in prison or in an altercation which could cause a life to be taken. Plus, in those days, the police were active in the community with stop and search. The knife was always at home though, ready just in case there was a home invasion, which was very common in the area.

In later years, through counselling, I realised I was suffering from PTSD and with support I was able to move on with my life. I believe that 80 per cent of youths are also suffering from this form of mental health issue; this is one of the reasons knife crime is hitting its peak (which I will explain later in the book).

My point in sharing this story, is that when a young person is caught up in an act of violence, without the right support or guidance it can lead on to negative actions later.

Fast forward to 2018 and my life has changed dramatically. From going to university, working for commercial companies, buying a new home away from the crime (at 26 years) and being able to start my own business in the last 14 years, I was able to literally start a new lease of life for me and my family.

Some may say I beat the odds by becoming successful and leaving the 'hood' as they say. I would disagree. Young people need hope; strong, positive role models; life skill awareness and better decision-making skills.

Life is about choices, and every choice will either create a negative or positive effect for your future. Some of my choices I made as a teen were:

- ✓ I chose to disassociate with negative friends
- ✓ I chose to further educate myself by going to university
- ✓ I chose to get a job which helped me with vital experience
- ✓ I chose to start a business

I understand that every young person is unique and it may not be as easy for everyone. But it's not impossible to change. I believe that every young person has a gift within them. Once they discover what this is, prison, death, the streets and drugs will no longer hold any interest for them because they will understand their true purpose.

In 2018 the game has changed. Never has there been a time where more young people are dying on the streets after minor disputes, social media comments, 'diss' lyrics from a YouTube video or, even worse, being in the wrong area at the wrong time.

Teachers, police, community workers and parents need to be ready to support these children because youth violence will only progressively get worse if nothing is done.

No one should ever lose their life to the gun or knife. With the right decisions and awareness, a young person can create a better life, like I did.



# CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Winning the fight against knife and gun crime in the UK is something that involves us all so whether you are a young person, parent, teacher, police officer or someone else who cares about our society, thank you for picking up this book.

If this book can stop one young person from picking up a weapon and putting themselves and others at risk, then it will have been worth writing it.

Before we can tackle a problem though, we need to understand everything there is to know about it – to get a real handle on it. Gun and knife crime is no exception.

Gun and knife crime is not specifically defined in law. However, guns and knives are used in a number of specific legal offences. For example, here in the UK, guns and knives are used in:

- ✓ Burglaries
- ✓ Criminal damage
- ✓ Domestic violence
- ✓ Robbery
- ✓ Sexual offences
- ✓ Violence against the person

The first chapters of the book look at the history of knife and gun crime in the UK and the evolving laws which have been passed to reduce the risk of knife and gun violence.

We then look at the reasons why young people carry knives in the first place. As I mentioned earlier, protection is a common motivation rather than the deliberate attempt to do harm.

To understand why gun and knife crime happens, you have to take into account a combination of developmental, familial and social factors. The next chapters of this book goes through each of these in turn.

Everything from age, family make-up, socio-economic group, cultural background, school

attended, friends and personal experiences come together to create a person. Every person will be exposed to certain risk factors when it comes to being involved in knife or gun crime.

One trap we need to ensure we don't fall into is pre-judging children and teenagers based only on risk factors and protective factors. Some young people show amazing resilience in the most adverse situations while others seem to have everything in the world going for them – yet still fall off the rails.

**As well as understanding risk factors, we need to look at protective factors.**

**These include:**

- ✓ Doing well at school
- ✓ Good friends as role models
- ✓ Caring and supportive parents
- ✓ Positive community leaders

Risk and protective factors work together. For example, in a safe neighbourhood, a very young, easily influenced child with a bad relationship with their parents might never even see a knife or a gun let alone use one.

In a more dangerous area, even a confident teen with strong family support might be persuaded into carrying a weapon.

The book then covers a wide range of topics which influence youth behaviour, especially in crime-ridden areas, such as social media, gaming and mental health issues.

The second part of the book focuses on knife and gun crime interventions and initiatives. By looking closely at previous and ongoing programmes we can try and find a way forward that works. Interventions can be concentrated at different levels: the individual, the family, school, the community (including law enforcement).

I examine each of these approaches and look at the benefits of a multi-agency approach and how to organise these.

## **How to Use This Book**

This book is a 2020 Dreams publication created in partnership with 2020 Rising. 2020 Dreams provide high quality workshops on a wide range of topical young people's issues. More details on these are at the end of this book.

2020 Rising tackles those tough issue – like knife and gun crime – that all of us find it difficult to talk about.

This book is designed to be accessible not only to teachers and community group members but also to parents and students themselves. If you are not a big reader, there are plenty of case studies, discussion points and activities dotted throughout.

This book will provide you with everything you might want to know about knife and gun crime in the UK and how we can work together as a community to combat their threat and keep our young people from becoming the next statistic.

### **For Teachers:**

- ✓ Based on established and recent research and latest reports.
- ✓ Broken down into bite-sized chapters to help lesson planning.
- ✓ Can be read cover-to-cover or dipped into.
- ✓ 'Discuss This' panels for class discussion.
- ✓ 'Try This' panels for class activities.

### **For Parents:**

- ✓ Real life case studies.
- ✓ 'Discuss This' panel for discussions at home.
- ✓ 'Try This' panel for family activities.
- ✓ Guidance for improving communication at home.
- ✓ Advice for working with other parents and the community.

## For Young People:

- ✓ 'Discuss This' panels gives you things to talk about at school or with your family.
- ✓ 'Try This' panels include fun and useful activities for home and school.
- ✓ Advice to help you say no to carrying weapons.

## For the Wider Community:

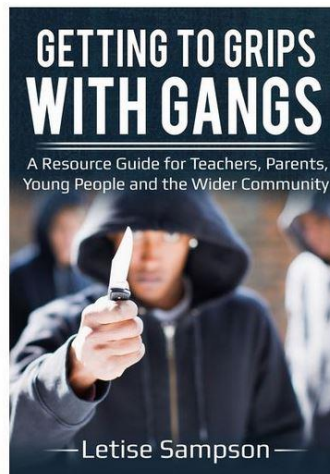
- ✓ Based on established and recent research and latest reports.
- ✓ Builds awareness about knife and gun crime.
- ✓ Practical advice for tackling weapons in your community.

## Publications

To support our work in raising awareness we have produced a number of e-Books.

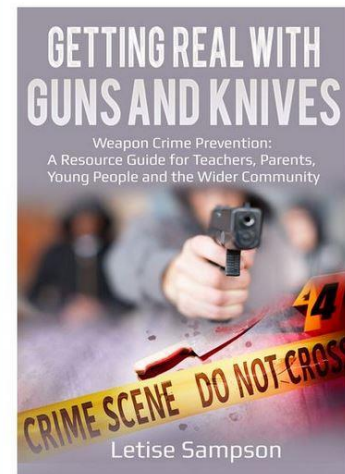
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