



Advice for Discussing Knife Culture with Teens *using a trauma informed approach*

PACE is a trauma informed approach developed by Clinical Psychologist Dan Hughes which is centred around building safe, trusting, and meaningful relationships with children and young people that have experienced trauma or attachment difficulties. PACE provides opportunities for adults to build on their attachments with children, by communicating and interacting in a way which helps children and young people feel safe.

PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.

The first thing you will notice is we use the word culture rather than a crime. For young people often those that carry a knife already know it's a crime, but it's become a part of their culture and their lifestyle and seeing it as a crime is sometimes the last thing on their mind.

Before you engage with young people engage with them on a personal level, have a general chat, be interested in their lives, what is going on for them, pick up on the small details i.e. their tone of voice, their body presentation, what they may say about specific family or friends. Young people want to know you really see and hear them and aren't just talking to them for your benefit.

Engaging with young people off topic first will encourage them to freely talk more easily about recent local events and their thoughts on carrying knives and culture. For lots of young people their friendship group gives them a sense of belonging and identity. It is normal for young people to start separating from their family with peer groups become more important.

Examples of ways to talk therapeutically with teens

Firstly let them take the lead, do not try to control the conversation:

While we often want to 'resolve' problems do not preach or tell young people what they feel and think is wrong. Rather than tell them consequences just be curious, are they aware.

Listening is the most important step – Even if they aren't saying much, make sure you 'hear' them.

Don't rush to give advice that they might not be ready to hear, your natural instinct is to correct young people or tell them everything will be ok.

Young people may be reluctant or scared to talk at first – it's a difficult subject. Be patient and try not to react straight away, remember they do not have to tell you anything.

Let them talk as much as they want to first without responding.

Encourage them to share their fears and worries, even be playful i.e. "I mean how would us oldies have any idea how you guys are feeling, it must be difficult feeling like we don't understand."

It is important to remain non-judgemental and use a not knowing stance. Be curious but still relaxed ready for what may come!!! Be accepting of the actions that young people may have taken if they choose to tell you.

Use open phrases which don't shut a young person down such as:

"Think with me about school, I can imagine teachers have been going on recently..."

"Tell me about what is like for you at home"

"I've noticed that things are a little crazy on the streets right now, how are you feeling about it"

If a young person struggles verbally these may help:

"How does it look to you....".

"Picture it for me, your friends been stabbed how would you help?"

"What did it feel like for you when....."

"Imagine a time when..... Imagine if xyz happened how do you think you would react."

If young people laugh, swear, even tell you that you do not understand/get it or that you or someone does not care, here are some possible responses:

If you have a young person who is in trouble a lot or always out ask them about family and do you feel their family are worried. If a young person say "No my family do not give a shit about me.." Avoid saying I'm sure they do or of course they do. That shows you haven't listened and invalidates their feelings. Try saying "It makes me sad you feel that way" or "Really what makes you feel like that".

If a young person says you do not understand, again do not say of course we do, maybe try lines such as "It must feel like no one gets the pressure you are under to carry" or "you're right we probably don't explain it to us so we can try understand"

Remember to be relaxed and genuine each young person is different and they will try to catch you out. It's ok to admit you probably do not get what it's like for teens nowadays and there must be such pressure.

If you find yourself with a group of young people who will engage and do start talking be creative with them:

You're at a friend's house, just about to leave together. Your friend says something to suggest there could be trouble where you are going. He quietly removes a kitchen knife from a drawer as you leave and slips it into his pocket. You ask, "What's that for?" He says, "Protection." What do you do next?

Ask them - What would be the best things to say or do? Why? What might be unhelpful? What do you think could happen?

Be interested in young people's lives be creative with talking to them ask questions such as:

- What or who are you not?
- What is success to you?
- What or who eats at your soul?
- What can you quit, put down or do less or move on from?
- What can you thank yourself for?
- What gives you joy or honest pain?
- What would you like to be or do in the future?
- What steps could you take to get there?
- Is there anything that might get in the way of achieving your goals?
- How could you overcome these barriers?
- What effects might choosing to carry a knife have on your future goals and ambitions?