

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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Return address:
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Dear Prime Minister,

We are a group of young people who have all been directly affected by knife crime, writing to you as the new Prime Minister, to ask that you take action right now to tackle the knife crime crisis. We are glad the Government is finally becoming more aware of the problem. But more and more of our generation are still dying. More needs to be done, as soon as possible.

As young people we see and hear every day the reality of knife crime from thinking it is normal for people to carry knives to hearing that someone you know has been stabbed. We understand how young people think about the problem. The only way to make sure what's done will actually work is to listen to us. That's why we are asking you to host a meeting in Downing Street with young people like us, so you can hear first-hand why we think knife crime is happening and what needs to be done about it.

Politicians talk about knife crime being done by 'bad people' or 'thugs' or 'gangs'. But the reality is lots of young people are picking up knives because they are scared. Often they are victims too. From what they have seen, heard and experienced growing up, many feel like violence and knife crime is just the norm, so carry a knife as a precaution, to feel protected.

Others think they have no choice other than being involved in crime, because they are pressured into it, or because they are poor, or don't feel like there are any jobs out there for them. Especially if they already have a criminal record or reputation, it follows them around and makes it hard to change. It's true some young people are in gangs and are involved in drug dealing, and carry knives in case they are attacked by rivals. But instead of ostracising and over-policing them, politicians should be asking what has driven them to join a gang or carry drugs in the first place.

Young people feel neglected, labelled, and stigmatised by society. The support available at the moment can contribute to this feeling, as can the police. It seems like there aren't community police who understand local issues, build relationships and try to help. It's good that you have said you will bring back police. But they need to work with communities. The focus should not be on young people just being stopped and searched all the time. It's clear from the number of people in prison, from reoffending rates, and from the increases in knife crime that punishment is not a deterrent.

We have got to start afresh with the way we approach the situation - it can't be solved with one insular solution. There are a lot of emotional and psychological issues that need to be addressed in communities, and support should help young people deal with any traumas they may suffer from, consciously or unconsciously. Young people need guidance. They need a sense of hope and self-worth. They need to be shown positive alternatives, but for this to be possible there need to be more opportunities. We need more funding and resources put back into youth work, outreach workers, clubs and activities. Schools should not be so quick to exclude children.

Every day more young people are picking up knives and every day more young people are ending up in hospital stabbed. These problems require new ideas: asking young people what they need and how they think the government can help would be a step in the right direction. As Prime Minister we need you to make this problem your top priority, and we want to help you do so. We hope that you will accept our request to meet with you to talk through the issue. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime is happy to help organise the meeting.

Best wishes,

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