

Young people in trouble

"Darren's dropped all his old mates and started hanging out with an older crowd. Now he's buying clothes, games and stuff, but he won't tell me where he's getting the money from. Should I be worried?"

- Nationally, motoring, theft and handling are the most common offences committed by young people.
- Robbery accounts for less than 2% of all offences committed by young people.
- The main reasons young people give for offending are boredom and peer group pressure.
- Young people from a stable and supportive family home are less likely to offend.
- If you suspect something is wrong, talk to your child sooner rather than later.

How widespread is it?

Youth crime

Reported levels of youth crime have remained stable for the past three years, with 26% of young people in school and 60% of excluded pupils reporting that they committed an offence in the previous year.

Research shows that the most common profile of a young offender is a white boy, aged between 14 and 16, who is likely to be excluded from school and who got into offending through boredom, peer pressure or being drunk. This profile has not changed year on year.

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Preventing young people offending

The main reasons young people give for offending is boredom and peer group pressure. Young people also say that the two key deterrents to offending are:

- the fear of being caught;
- their parents' reaction.

Research into the lifestyles and experiences of young offenders tells us that the following factors matter most in keeping young people out of trouble:

- a stable and supportive family home;
- consistent parenting;
- attending and making good progress at school, in training or at work.

The Youth Justice System

The Youth Justice System in England and Wales is made up of all the institutions and public services that work with young people that offend; this includes Courts, Police, Probation and Prison Services and Local Councils. The Government completely reformed this system in 2000.

Everyone working in a system now has one overall aim, which is to prevent young people offending. The new system now delivers justice faster and ensures young people are both held to account for their behaviour and supported to take the opportunities that will help them lead law abiding lives.

Youth Offending Teams

Youth Offending Teams (YOT) are a one stop shop for all young offenders. Each young person who has offended will be assessed by the YOT and decisions will be made by the team of specialists as to what steps should be taken to ensure the young offender keeps out of further trouble.

There is a YOT in every Local Authority in England and Wales, made up of Police

Officers, Victim Liaison Officers, Probation Officers, Social Workers, Health and Drugs Advisors and Housing Support Officers. Because the YOT is made up of all these professionals it can respond to the needs of young offenders in a comprehensive way.

YOT's work directly with young people and families:

- If they have offended and are subject to a Court Order or Police Final Warning
- To ensure that young people who have been sent to custody stand the best chance of a positive future on release.

To support this work the YOT works closely with members of the community who volunteer and are trained to work with young people to help them stay out of trouble. YOT will also work with other partners e.g. Children's Fund and Connexions to prevent the onset of offending behaviour.

WARNING SIGNS

There are many possible signs of abuse, ranging from physical injury to changes in behaviour. Alternatively you may witness an incident or a child may tell you that he/she is being harmed.

ACTION

If you think that a child has been harmed, contact the Duty Social Worker or the Police. If you are not sure, you can speak to a confidential helpline, namely the NSPCC.

WHAT TO SAY

Explain exactly what you have seen or been told. If you can, keep a note of dates, injuries and the exact words used. These will help you.

PREVENTION

Make sure your child knows who they can share worries with if and when they need to. Listen carefully to children and be alert to changes in them.

CONTACTS

- *Wiltshire Youth Offending Teams:
North and West Wiltshire & Kennet
01225 793616
South Wiltshire
01722 341644
Swindon
01793 823153*
- *Connexions Direct
080 800 13 2 19*
- *Parentline Plus
0808 800 2222*
- *Wiltshire County Council
01225 713000 for details of local youth centres*
- *Youth Justice Board
020 7271 3033*

*Check the Wiltshire ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.wiltshire.gov.uk*