



## Knives and the law

Knife crime, particularly amongst young people, is in the news almost every day. At the moment, a number of different rules apply to knives and it isn't always immediately clear what is legal and what isn't.

### What's legal and what's not?

- it is illegal for any shop to sell a knife of any kind (which includes cutlery and kitchen knives) to anyone under the age of 18
- it is generally an offence to carry a knife in public without good reason or lawful authority, for example, a chef carrying their own knives to and from work
- the maximum penalty for an adult carrying a knife is four years in prison and a fine of £5000
- knives such as a Swiss Army Knife (where the blade folds into the handle), aren't illegal as long as the blade is shorter than three inches (7.62 cm)

### Offensive weapons

If a knife is used in a threatening way (even a legal knife, such as a Swiss Army knife), it is regarded as an 'offensive weapon' by the law. This is also the case with everyday objects like screwdrivers - once used in a threatening manner; they are treated as offensive weapons.

It is an offence to carry an offensive weapon in a public place if you don't have a valid reason. This means that carrying something that could be viewed as an offensive weapon, and then using it in a threatening way, could mean that you are prosecuted.

The penalty is up to four years' imprisonment and/or a fine. There is a complete ban on the sale of certain types of knives categorised as offensive weapons, regardless of their use.

These include:

- flick knives - where the blade is hidden inside the handle and shoots out when a button is pressed - these are also called switchblades or automatic knives
- butterfly knives - where the blade is hidden inside a handle that splits in two around it, like wings or the handles swing around the blade to open or close it
- Disguised knives - where the blade is hidden inside something, like a belt buckle or fake mobile phone.