

# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

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## Knife crime and children: What schools need to know

Based on the University of Bristol Policy Bristol briefing (2026)

Knife crime involving children is often framed as a criminal justice issue. However, new research highlights a more complex and urgent safeguarding reality for schools: serious youth violence is deeply rooted in children's lived experiences, particularly within families and communities.

### The scale and nature of the issue

Recent national analysis of child deaths shows that knife-related fatalities among children are both rising and often sudden. At least two school-aged children die each month in England from knife injuries, with most deaths caused by a single stab wound.

Between 2019 and 2024, 145 children died from knife-related injuries, with the average age just 14 years old and around 90% of victims male.

A significant proportion of these children were already known to services:

- Over 75% had prior involvement with social care
- Around 58% had experienced domestic abuse
- Many had additional vulnerabilities, including mental health needs or neurodiversity

These findings reinforce that knife crime is rarely an isolated incident; it is often the culmination of long-standing vulnerability.

### A safeguarding, not just policing, issue

The Bristol research challenges the effectiveness of a purely enforcement-led response. It highlights that:

- The most severe knife injuries are often unsurvivable, even with rapid medical care
- Prevention must begin much earlier, focusing on children's experiences of violence, particularly within the home
- Knife crime and domestic abuse should not be treated as separate issues, as they frequently intersect in children's lives

For schools, this reframes knife crime as a contextual safeguarding issue, not simply a behaviour or discipline concern.

### Inequality and vulnerability

The research also identifies stark inequalities:

- Children from the most deprived areas are significantly overrepresented
- Children from Black or Black British backgrounds are disproportionately affected, reflecting wider structural inequalities

Additionally, exclusion from education is a key factor. Nearly half of school-aged victims had experienced exclusion prior to their death.

This underlines the protective role schools play, and the risks when children become disengaged.

### Implications for schools

Schools are central to early identification and prevention. Key considerations include:

#### 1. Early identification of vulnerability

Look beyond behaviour to underlying need. Indicators may include:

- Exposure to domestic abuse
- Changes in peer groups or associations
- Persistent absence or exclusion
- Signs of fear, coercion, or secrecy

#### 2. Strengthening professional curiosity

Children at risk may not disclose directly. Staff should:

- Notice what is not said as well as what is said
- Explore inconsistencies sensitively
- Record and share concerns promptly

#### 3. A whole-school safeguarding approach

Knife crime prevention should be embedded within:

- PSHE/RSHE (including healthy relationships and risk awareness)
- Behaviour and inclusion strategies
- Attendance and pastoral systems

Importantly, education should reflect that some children are already living with violence, not just at risk of perpetrating it.

#### 4. Reducing exclusion and disengagement

Given the link between exclusion and harm:

- Review behaviour policies through a safeguarding lens
- Consider alternatives to exclusion where appropriate
- Ensure robust reintegration and support plans

#### 5. Multi-agency working

Effective safeguarding requires strong partnerships with:

- Children's social care
- Police and youth services
- Violence reduction and community organisations

Information sharing and coordinated responses are critical.

#### Read:

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/knife-crime-children/>

## Child mortality in temporary accommodation: What schools need to know

Based on the APPG for Households in Temporary Accommodation report (2025/26)

The latest national evidence presents a stark and urgent safeguarding concern: children living in temporary accommodation are at significantly increased risk of harm, including preventable death. For schools, this is not simply a housing issue, it is a critical safeguarding priority requiring awareness, early identification, and coordinated support.

### The scale and seriousness of the issue

Data from the National Child Mortality Database highlights the severity of risk:

- At least 104 children died between 2019 and 2025 where temporary accommodation was a contributing factor
- The majority of these deaths involved very young children, particularly infants under one year old
- Additional data shows babies born to families in temporary accommodation face increased risks, including stillbirth and neonatal death

These findings reinforce that temporary accommodation is not a neutral environment, it can directly impact children's safety, health, and survival.

### Why temporary accommodation increases risk

The report identifies a combination of environmental, systemic, and social factors that elevate risk:

#### Unsafe and unsuitable living conditions

Children may be living in:

- Overcrowded rooms with no safe sleeping space
- Accommodation with damp, mould, or poor heating
- Shared facilities with unknown adults, including those who may pose a risk

These conditions can contribute to respiratory illness, accidents, and unsafe sleeping arrangements, particularly dangerous for babies.

#### Disrupted routines and care

Families in temporary accommodation often experience:

- Frequent moves and instability
- Lack of access to essential items (e.g. cots, safe sleeping equipment)
- Disrupted access to healthcare and support services

This instability increases the likelihood of unmet health needs and reduces protective oversight.

#### Poverty and inequality

Child mortality in temporary accommodation is closely linked to:

- Poverty and deprivation
- Inequalities affecting certain communities
- Barriers to accessing consistent services and support

These overlapping vulnerabilities compound safeguarding risks.

### The hidden nature of the risk

A key concern highlighted in the report is that schools and services are often unaware when a child is living in temporary accommodation. This lack of information sharing means:

- Early warning signs may be missed
- Attendance and wellbeing concerns may not be fully understood
- Opportunities for timely support are reduced

National policy is now moving towards requiring local authorities to notify schools when children are placed in temporary accommodation, recognising this gap.

### Impact on education and wellbeing

Living in temporary accommodation has significant implications for children's school experience:

- Increased absence and disrupted attendance
- Long travel times or frequent school moves
- Limited space to complete homework or rest
- Heightened anxiety, stress, and social isolation

For some children, the instability of housing becomes a persistent barrier to engagement and attainment.

### What this means for safeguarding in schools

1. Recognise temporary accommodation as a safeguarding indicator
2. Strengthen professional curiosity
3. Prioritise information sharing and recording
4. Provide practical and pastoral support
5. Strengthen multi-agency working

Schools should actively contribute to and initiate multi-agency discussions where needed.

#### Read:

<https://householdsintemporaryaccommodation.co.uk/reports/child-mortality-in-temporary-accommodation-report/>

## Summer term 1 - 5-minute 'bitesize' and audio version safeguarding refresher videos

Homelessness - Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May

Sexism and sexual harassment - Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May

Identifying young carers in school - Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May

**NEW Weekly newsletters** - I've added our weekly newsletters from the academic year starting September 2025 to the CPD area, so you can easily revisit and reference any earlier content as needed.

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