



The Ben Kinsella Trust

Stop Knife Crime



The Ben Kinsella Trust

Distinguishing Violence-Exposed and Violence-Fixated Young People Through Universal Prevention.

Patrick Green – CEO

Distinguishing Violence-Exposed and Violence-Fixated Young People Through Universal Prevention.

- Background-The Ben Kinsella Trust
- The Ben Kinsella Trust Model Choices and Consequences
- Rationale for the Choices and Consequences Intervention Model
- Why the Inquiry Should See Prevention as the Firstline of Defence
- Violence Exposure and The Internalisation of Knife Carrying
- The Role of Social Media In Exposing Young People to Violence
- The Normalisation of Violence
- Obsessions, Delusions and Overvalued Beliefs
- A Tiered Approach to Prevention and Early Intervention
- Regulation and Legislation Are Not Enough



Ben Kinsella



Ben Kinsella 1992 – 2008



The Ben Kinsella Trust

Our Mission

The Ben Kinsella Trust prevents knife crime through education and campaigning.

Our Vision

A society free of knife crime.

The Ben Kinsella Trust Model: Choices and Consequences

A trauma-informed, immersive prevention programme that helps young people understand the real consequences of violence and develop safer decision-making skills before risk behaviours become established.

What is it?

- A **universal, evidence-informed knife crime prevention intervention** for young people aged **10-18**.
- Delivered as a structured **2-hour immersive workshop** within purpose-built exhibitions.
- Running since **2011**, reaching over 50,000 young people.

How is it delivered?

- Combines:
 - Real-life victim narratives
 - Interactive exhibits and activities
 - Short films and immersive theatre
 - Facilitated discussion and reflection
- Delivered by trained facilitators and professional actors.
- Supported by robust safeguarding and emotional wellbeing processes.

The Ben Kinsella Trust Model: Choices and Consequences

Key Outcomes for Young People (Theory of Change)

The programme aims to strengthen:

1. **Skills & self-belief** – confidence to make safe decisions and resist negative peer influence.
2. **Empathy & emotional regulation** – understanding the impact of violence on individuals, families and communities.
3. **Attitudes, norms & intentions** – challenging misconceptions about knife carrying and reducing its perceived acceptability.

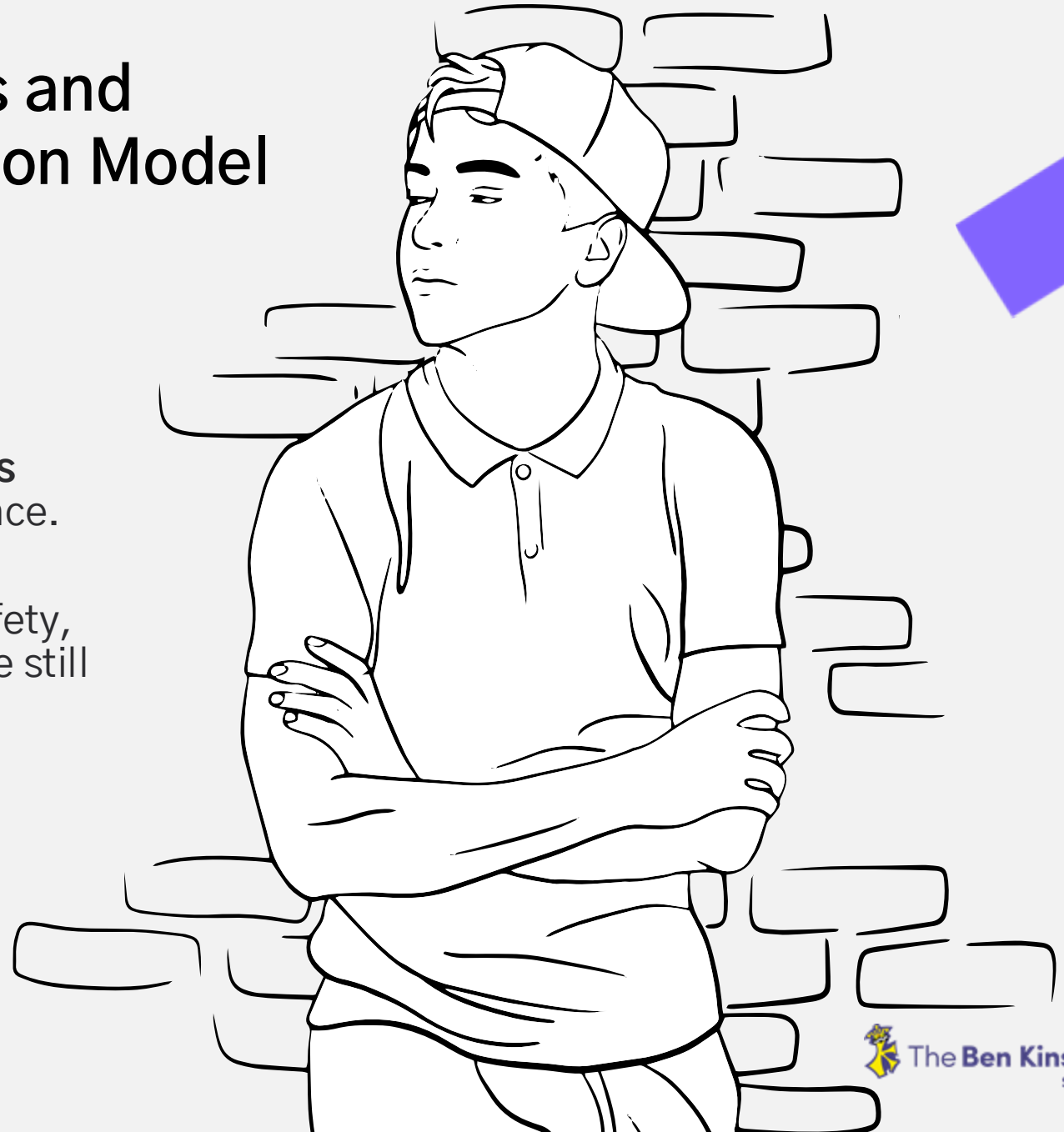
Why it matters

- Focuses on influencing attitudes, empathy and decision-making **before harmful behaviours emerge**.
- Embedded within local safeguarding and prevention systems.
- Whole-cohort approach reduces stigma and promotes inclusion.

Rationale for the Choices and Consequences Intervention Model

Evidence-Informed Prevention

- Based on evidence that **attitudes, beliefs and perceived social norms** influence later involvement in violence.
- Targets **late childhood and early adolescence**, when views about safety, peer influence and responsibility are still developing.
- Focuses on prevention **before risk behaviours emerge** and become established.



Rationale for the Choices and Consequences Intervention Model

1. Developmentally Appropriate Outcomes

Focuses on changing:

- Attitudes towards knife carrying
- Empathy for those affected by violence
- Perceived peer norms
- Confidence to make safer choices

Recognises these factors as important precursors to later behaviour.

2. Immersive and Experiential Learning

Uses interactive exhibits, immersive theatre, short films, facilitated discussion and reflection.

Designed to promote emotional engagement, empathy and critical thinking.

Avoids fear-based or sensationalist approaches.

Delivered within a safe, supported and age-appropriate learning environment.

3. Universal and Non-Stigmatising Delivery

Delivered to whole classes and year groups, not identified 'at-risk' individuals.

Promotes inclusion and avoids stigma or labelling.

Recognises that beliefs about violence develop within peer groups and school cultures.

Supported through trauma-informed, inclusive facilitation and strong safeguarding processes.

Three Core Design Principles

Rationale for the Choices and Consequences Intervention Model

Programme Quality and Maturity

- Developed and refined over **more than 15 years**.
- Informed by:
 - Delivery experience
 - Facilitator feedback
 - Youth consultation
 - Internal evaluation
- Delivered through a **manualised, quality-assured model** by trained facilitators.
- Designed for consistency, sustainability and rigorous evaluation.

Choices and Consequences combines **evidence-informed prevention**, immersive learning and universal delivery to influence the **attitudes, empathy and decision-making skills** that underpin safer behaviour in later adolescence.

Prevention as the Firstline of Defence

Why Early Intervention Matters

- Exposure to violence does **not** inevitably lead to violent behaviour or fixation.
- However, without timely intervention, exposure can shape beliefs that violence is acceptable, necessary or inevitable.
- Prevention should focus on challenging these beliefs **before they become entrenched**.

Choices & Consequences interrupts the pathway by challenging misconceptions, increase understanding of consequences, and promote safer responses to conflict.

Evaluation finding: belief that carrying a knife offers protection reduced from **24% to 5%** following participation in the programme.

Universal Prevention

- Reduces risk across whole populations of young people.
- Strengthens empathy, attitudes and safer decision-making.

Early Identification

- Helps identify young people whose attitudes or behaviours remain resistant to change.
- Highlights those who may benefit from targeted or specialist support.

Two Key Functions of Prevention

Prevention as the Firstline of Defence

Violence-Exposed Young People

Many young people experience:

- Exposure to violence online or in their communities
- Fear, anxiety or victimisation
- Peer pressure
- Misconceptions about safety and protection
- Beliefs that carrying a knife offers protection

Most remain open to challenge and reflection, making them highly responsive to preventative interventions.

When Additional Support May Be Needed

Some may show signs of developing a fixation with violence:

- Persistent fascination with violence or weapons
- Repeated consumption of violent content
- Grievance-based thinking
- Resistance to alternative viewpoints
- Social isolation or reinforcement by online communities

Limited response to preventative interventions may indicate a need for further assessment and specialist support.

Universal prevention programmes **can both reduce violence risk and help identify young people** whose attitudes, beliefs or vulnerabilities suggest a more concerning trajectory, **creating opportunities for earlier and more effective intervention.**

Violence Exposure and the Internalisation of Knife Carrying

What Young People Told Us (Pre-Intervention)

Keeping Young People Safe (2024) found that before attending *Choices & Consequences*:

- **36%** only sometimes, or never, feel safe in their local area
- **64%** were anxious or worried about knife crime
- **24%** believed carrying a knife would protect them
- **24%** knew someone who carried a knife
- **8%** had considered carrying a knife themselves

Key Insight – For many young people, knife carrying is linked to **fear and perceived safety**, rather than criminal intent alone.

Belief in the protective value of knives was evident across genders:

- **21% of girls**
- **27% of boys**

Similar levels were seen across age groups, including primary-aged children.

Dangerous beliefs about safety and protection are **often established before secondary school**, highlighting the **importance of early, preventative intervention**.

The Role of Social Media in Exposing Young People to Violence

Youth Endowment Fund (2024) found that:

- **70%** of teenagers encountered real-world violent content online in the previous year.
- **25%** of those exposed said the content was recommended by platform algorithms.
- Only **6%** actively searched for violent content.
- **35%** had seen weapons-related content.
- **33%** had seen gang-related content.

Historically, young people had to actively seek out violent material. Today, social media algorithms can **push violent content directly to young people**, meaning many are not violence-seeking but **violence-exposed**.

The Role of Social Media in Exposing Young People to Violence

Repeated exposure to violence online can:

- Increase fear and anxiety
- Distort perceptions of risk and safety
- Normalise violence and weapon carrying
- Influence beliefs about what is common, acceptable or necessary
- Shape attitudes and everyday decision-making

Considerations

- Most young people exposed to violent content will **not become violent**.
- However, sustained exposure can contribute to harmful beliefs and desensitisation.
- For a small minority of vulnerable individuals, it may form part of a broader pathway towards violence fixation and future risk.

Young people **increasingly experience violence through digital exposure rather than direct involvement**, making early education, critical thinking and prevention more important than ever.

The Normalisation of Violence

The Children's Commissioner's *Children Referred to the Prevent Programme (2026)* highlights a growing number of children whose safeguarding concerns are linked to **fascination with violence rather than ideology**.

- Over **4,700 children** referred to Prevent in 2024/25
- **71%** had **no clear ideological motivation**
- Concerns included:
 - Obsession with weapons or mass casualty attacks
 - Sharing violent content
 - Idolising perpetrators
 - Immersion in harmful online communities



The Normalisation of Violence

Professionals are increasingly reporting that children are exposed to:

- Violent and extreme content through recommendation algorithms
- Online communities that normalise harmful behaviours
- AI and digital tools that may reinforce existing beliefs and perspectives
- Repeated exposure to violence, self-harm and attack-related content

This can contribute to:

- Desensitisation to violence
- Distorted perceptions of safety and risk
- Reinforcement of harmful beliefs and grievance narratives

The concern is **not simply exposure to violence**, but when repeated exposure becomes **reinforced through digital environments**, access to weapons and unresolved vulnerabilities, **increasing the risk of entrenched violence-supportive beliefs**.

Additional Risk Factors

For some vulnerable young people, risk can be amplified by:

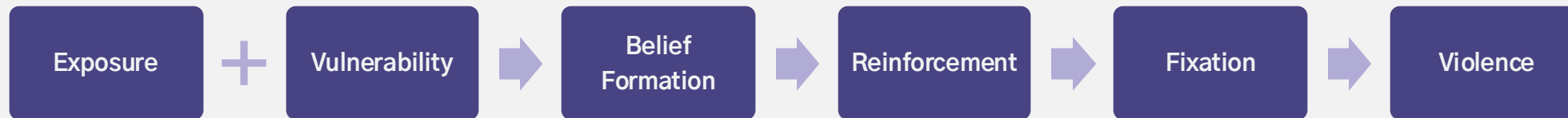
- Trauma, isolation, bullying or unmet emotional needs
- Easy access to knives in the home or online
- Social media content that normalises or glorifies weapon carrying

Considerations

Most violence-exposed young people will **not** become violent. However, repeated exposure can shape attitudes and beliefs. For a small minority, these influences may contribute to **violence fixation**, requiring earlier identification and targeted support.

Obsessions, Delusions and Overvalued Beliefs

Violence is best understood as a **continuum rather than a binary state**. Similar to models used in suicide prevention, young people may move through different stages of vulnerability, belief formation and risk, with only a small minority progressing towards violence fixation.



Examples of this continuum may include:

- Exposure to violence, fear, victimisation or harmful online content
- Development of beliefs about danger, self-protection and trust
- Reinforcement through peers, social media, online communities or personal experiences
- Increasing identification with violence-supportive beliefs
- Resistance to challenge and alternative viewpoints
- Elevated risk of harmful behaviour

Factors that may increase vulnerability:

- Trauma and adverse experiences
- Social isolation or exclusion
- Poor mental health and/or unsupported neurodivergence
- Experiences of inequality, marginalisation or grievance
- Exposure to reinforcing violence-supportive narratives

Obsessions, Delusions and Overvalued Beliefs

Understanding Different Belief Systems

Type	Characteristics	Violence Risk
Obsessions	Intrusive, unwanted thoughts that cause distress and anxiety	Generally low
Delusions	Fixed false beliefs not shared by others and detached from reality	May increase risk in some circumstances
Extreme Overvalued Beliefs (EOBs)	Socially reinforced beliefs that become increasingly important, emotionally charged and identity-based	Higher concern when linked to grievance, status, belonging or perceived victimisation

Why Extreme Overvalued Beliefs Matter

Unlike mental illness-driven delusions, many violence-related beliefs are socially reinforced:

- "The world is dangerous."
- "Nobody can protect me."
- "Everyone carries a knife."
- "Carrying a weapon keeps me safe."

These beliefs may become increasingly dominant when **reinforced by experiences, peers, social media and online communities.**

- Most young people exposed to violence will **never become violent.**
- Most young people with violence-supportive beliefs will **never carry a weapon.**
- However, risk may increase when beliefs become central to identity, resistant to challenge, and linked to grievance, status, belonging or self-protection.

The pathway towards violence is often driven not by exposure alone, but by the **gradual reinforcement of beliefs** that become **increasingly normalised, emotionally significant** and **central to a young person's identity.**

A Tiered Approach to Prevention and Early Intervention

The Ben Kinsella Trust's model suggests that universal prevention can help professionals both **reduce risk** and **identify young people who may require additional support**.

- Young people who show positive attitude change are more likely to be **violence-exposed** rather than **violence-fixated**.
- Those who continue to endorse violence-supportive beliefs, identify strongly with weapons, or show limited empathy may require further assessment.

Tier 1: Universal Prevention

For all young people:

- Empathy-building and emotional learning
- Challenging misconceptions about violence and weapons
- Safer decision-making skills
- Building resilience and protective factors



Tier 2: Targeted Early Help

For young people with multiple vulnerabilities:

- Trauma-informed support
- Mentoring and trusted adult relationships
- Family and educational support
- Mental health and wellbeing interventions



Tier 3: Enhanced Early Intervention

For those showing signs of possible violence fixation:

- Multi-agency assessment and planning
- Mental health support
- Monitoring concerning behavioural changes
- Intervention around harmful online engagement Identity-building and diversionary programmes
- Support addressing isolation, grievance and unmet needs

Regulation and Legislation Are Not Enough

What the Evidence Shows

- Harm is rarely caused by a single piece of content.
- Risk develops through **repeated exposure to increasingly extreme material over time**.
- Regulation can reduce access to harmful content but cannot, by itself, build resilience, empathy or critical thinking.

Experience from knife crime reduction shows that enforcement alone is insufficient.

Effective prevention also requires:

- Early intervention and education
- Safeguarding and family support
- Trauma-informed practice
- Building resilience and protective factors

Regulation and Legislation Are Not Enough

Current Challenges

- Professionals are identifying concerns, but pathways to support are often unclear or limited.
- Many children identified as vulnerable do not progress to specialist intervention despite significant concerns.

What is Needed

A public health approach that includes:

- Early identification and prevention
- Youth services and mental health support
- Public awareness and education
- Professional training across safeguarding, education, health and youth services
- Appropriate regulation and enforcement

Violence fixation should be viewed not only as an online safety or security issue, but as a safeguarding, prevention and public health challenge requiring sustained investment in early intervention and support.

Thank you for your time

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