

Knives, blades and axes: Age restricted sales

1. Introduction

It is **illegal to sell knives and other bladed or sharply pointed items, to anyone under 18**. This Service enforces laws prohibiting the sales of certain age-restricted products by providing advice to businesses and by using underage volunteers to attempt test purchases at shops.

WE ADVISE THAT YOU DO NOT SELL KNIVES OR BLADED INSTRUMENTS THAT COULD BE USED AS WEAPONS, UNLESS THERE IS A CLEAR BUSINESS NEED FOR YOU TO DO SO.

2. Main legal requirements

The sale of any of the following articles to any child under 18 is illegal;

- knife, knife blade or razor blade,
- any axe,
- any other article which has a blade or which is sharply pointed **and** which is made or adapted for causing injury to persons

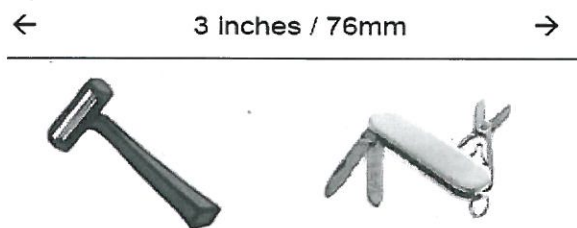
All types of knives are covered including kitchen knives and utility knives.

You should also take reasonable precautions to prevent the theft of these items.

3. Are there any exceptions to the law?

Yes, there are 2 exceptions to the age restriction:-

- Folding pocket knives if the cutting edge of the blade is not greater than 3 inches (76 millimetres) in length.
- Razor blades permanently enclosed in a cartridge or housing where less than 2 millimetres of any blade is exposed (eg. disposable razors & razor cartridges).



4. Who does the law apply to?

The law applies to any person or trader who sells knives etc. Both the **sales person and the business owner** could be prosecuted for any illegal sales. The only defence is for the accused to show that everything reasonable was done to prevent the sale (see section 6).

5. What are the penalties if I sell to underage purchasers?

Underage sale of knives, knife blades, razor blades, axes etc is prohibited by the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (offensive weapons) as amended by the Offensive Weapons Act 1996. On conviction in the Magistrates' Court an **unlimited fine** or up to **6 months imprisonment** can be imposed.

If the item is subsequently used as a weapon, you may also have the injury or death of someone on your conscience.

6. What can I do to avoid underage sales and thefts?

- **Adopt 'Challenge 25'** - It can be very difficult to tell someone's true age, especially if you do not have to assess age often, so we advise you to build in a margin of error by **challenging anyone you think could be less than 25** to provide **proof of age**. No sales will take place if this rule is properly followed.
- **Check proof of age** - Don't ask the buyer's age – the answer may not be true. **Always require and carefully check appropriate proof of age**: an age card carrying the 'PASS' logo; a passport; or a driving licence (which carries a date of birth, but can be held from the age of 17).
- **Keep knives out of reach**. Lock them away or keep them safely behind the counter. This prevents theft and can also act as a reminder for staff to verify the age of young customers. **Display notices** with information for your customers.
- **Train your staff** about the law and **keep records of the training**. (We can provide materials to help you do this effectively). **Ensure they understand the training** and occasionally do **refresher training**.
- **Other reminders** to help the person at the till might be to use your **EPOS system** (if you have one) to prompt the seller to consider age when a product is scanned; or to **put stickers on each item** with a warning that they must not be sold to under 18s.
- **Display appropriate posters** (we can supply these) to warn buyers and keep the law in the forefront of your employee's minds.
- **'Refusals books'** can be used to record refused sales. If you often get children trying to buy, monitoring this book may help you see which employees are following their instructions.
- **Monitor your staff** to ensure they are following your instructions.

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7. Other controls on knives

Some types of knives cannot be sold to anyone, however old they are:

- **Flick knives** - 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** - knives where the blade is hidden inside a handle that splits in two around it, like wings. The handles swing around the blade to open or close it.
- **Disguised knives** - knives where the blade is hidden inside something like a belt buckle or a fake mobile phone.
- **'Zombie' knives** – knives with a cutting edge and a serrated edge, carrying words suggesting it is to be used for violent purposes.

8. How can I get further advice?

If you require further information, clarification or advice on any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact the Trading Standards Service:

Tel: 020 8753 1081

E-mail: trading.standards@lbhf.gov.uk