



**synergy**  
Theatre Project

# TO MY YOUNGER SELF

EDUCATION  
**PACK**

**FEAR. IT'S A FUNNY THING.  
MAKES YOU DO THINGS  
YOU WOULDN'T NORMALLY DO.  
IT MAKES YOU...**

## **Contents**

- Summary and synopsis: Page 3
- Making the play- Interviews with the Creative Team: Page 5
- Context of the play- knife crime statistics: Page 10
  - Workshop suggestions: Page 12
- Follow on activity- Safety Mapping: Page 15
  - Signposting and advice: Page 18

## Summary & Synopsis: To My Younger Self

**Written by Natalie Mitchell**

**Directed by Danielle Baker-Charles**

*To My Younger Self* is a play that reflects on the impact and aftermath of a stabbing, both on the victim's family/friends and the perpetrator. It's a play about peer pressure, regrets, guilt, the revenge impulse and the things we would say to our younger selves. The play also examines remorse, forgiveness and questions how we can break the cycle of violence.

The play follows Amari, Sam and Jaden as they take part in a Healthy Living class at a Youth Offending Service (YOS). The service is in the community, so the young people are not in prison and as part of their court order they are expected to attend YOS a certain number of times a week, attending several classes and courses (such as Healthy Living). All three characters have links to the same crime, but their reactions and the decisions they make about how to move forward differ.

The play is designed for KS3 and KS4 students and aims to spark conversation around knife crime, gang culture and breaking the cycle of violence.

*To My Younger Self is funded by The Mayor's Young Londoners Fund- a fund helping children and young people to fulfil their potential, particularly those at risk of getting caught up in crime.*

### Characters

**Amari:** Male, 15/16. Amari is loud and outgoing and will use humour to deflect when he is feeling vulnerable. He is grieving for his brother Leon but isn't ready to talk openly about it. He is mature and looking for change.

**Jaden:** Male, 15/16. Very quiet, introverted. He's carrying a huge weight on his shoulders which has made him even more withdrawn. Jaden is frightened, constantly waiting for someone to take revenge on him, but always trying to cover this fear and not show weakness.

**Sam:** Female, 15/16. Sam is a tomboy; she is a ball of anger who doesn't know how to show her emotions any other way. She is brash, provocative and witty but she has an underlying vulnerability.

### Synopsis

1. This is the first scene in which we see the young people writing letters to their younger selves. Sam is very reluctant to participate in the activity; Jaden is more willing and Amari is cautious but open minded.
2. Greek Salad: In this scene the characters come together for the first time. Amari and Sam already know each other, while Jaden is new. Amari tricks Jaden into thinking he works for the Youth Offending Service (YOS), much to Sam's delight. It's clear in this scene that Jaden has never engaged with the YOS before, but Amari and Sam have. Jaden expresses concern that the course will make him delve too much into his feelings and a power dynamic between the three characters becomes clear, with Amari dominating the group and Jaden taking a very passive role. It is in this scene that we see the first signs of Amari wanting to turn his life around. At the end of the scene Sam clearly recognises Jaden.
3. The second scene in which the characters are addressing their younger selves. Again, we see Sam is reluctant to engage in the task and to consider regrets. Jaden and Amari are more engaged in the task in this scene, although Amari approaches it in a more light-hearted way. We learn that Jaden feels as though he may have been pushed around/pressured in the past

and Amari is able to reflect on the importance of being able to change your mind about things.

4. Chips: The group witness a fight outside the window, which delays their YOS worker. Sam wants to leave the session, but Amari is keen to stay and make chips. In this scene we see threatening undercurrents from Sam towards Jaden while Amari tries to pacify Sam and keep the peace. There is a lot of subtext in the dialogue and once Jaden has left Amari and Sam openly discuss the crime. Sam is pushing Amari to take revenge and, although he seems reluctant, there appears to be an agreement between the two of them that Amari will retaliate.
5. In this letters scene the characters discuss trust, relationships and reflecting on their own emotions in the wake of the stabbing- particularly Amari and Jaden. We hear about Jaden's remorse and see the first conflicting feelings Amari has about breaking the cycle of violence. We also get an insight into Sam's character, her independence and lack of reliance on anyone besides herself.
6. Burgers: Amari is unpredictable in this scene and changes the subject frequently, always keeping Jaden on the back foot. We learn that Jaden has been placed in the care system. Amari's behaviour flits between light-hearted and threatening and he refuses to engage with Jaden's apology. We begin to truly see how angry Amari is, not just about what happened to his brother but also the situation he now finds himself in. Sam arrives midway through this scene having been involved in a stop and search. She is a ball of angry energy and turns on Amari for not taking revenge and she throws a pan of boiling water at Jaden, which misses because Amari intervenes. She and Amari row about her relationship with Leon. Emotions run high and the scene ends with Sam storming out, Jaden leaving, and Amari left alone.
7. The final scene where the characters address their younger selves. This time they talk about fear and the decisions that they make when they feel scared. Sam talks about weakness and her fear of being taken advantage of, Jaden expresses his regret at what he's done and his worries about repercussions. Amari speaks about the impact of his brother's death, his fears for himself and changing his ways for the sake of his mother.
8. Pizza: The tension is clear from the beginning of this scene; we immediately find out there is a knife missing. Amari immediately assumes Sam is responsible. Sam assumes that Amari has reported her for the behaviour the week previously and they argue over both this and Sam's belief that Amari is siding with Jaden. Amari recognises that he has a future away from violence, he can potentially get a job which will give him a chance to break free from the lifestyle. He reflects on the impact of continuing violence on his family and the fact that retaliation won't solve anything or bring Leon back. Jaden reveals himself as the person who has taken the knife and aims the weapon at Sam, seemingly justifying it as a defence against her previous attack on him. We hear Jaden's side of the story, how he was involved and his regrets. The scene ends with Amari taking the knife, wiping it down and placing it back in the unit, so that nobody is implicated. His final reflection is that the cycle of violence must stop somewhere.

### **Q&A with Natalie Mitchell: Writer of *To My Younger Self***

Natalie writes for television, theatre and radio. Her TV writing credits include EastEnders, Ackley Bridge and theatre credits include NT Connections, the Bunker Theatre.

Natalie's interest in writing for young audiences comes from her background in education. She is an experienced facilitator with experience for companies including Clean Break, Bush Theatre, Old Vic and the Almeida Theatre.

#### **What made you want to write a play like *To My Younger Self*?**

My background before becoming a writer was working with young people, so I've always wanted to find ways of combining my writing and work with young people. They're my favourite people to write for and to have as an audience. I've admired the work of Synergy for many years and was so excited when I was offered the opportunity to write a play for them. The brief was quite specific, in that it had to look at knife crime, which I initially felt a bit anxious about. Firstly, I wanted to find a way to explore this theme in a way that didn't feel like it had been done before. So much has been said about the subject, and I wondered what I could possibly offer that felt different. Secondly, I was really interested in finding a way to write a play that on the surface seems to be about something fairly light (a cooking class) but that has all this stuff going on underneath, that the audience have to work a bit to get to.

#### **Why do you think a play that examines the effects of knife crime is important right now?**

Unfortunately, it's so relevant, and has been for many years. I've worked with teenagers in and around London for over fifteen years, and it's always been something that's been part of their lives. In January 2008, the night before I was about to start a new job working with at risk young people in Hackney, my best friend's sister was stabbed in that exact area. It was a really awful time. Thankfully she survived, but it never even made the news. I always remember that night when people worry that things are getting worse- and wonder are they? Or has social media and online news made information more easily accessible? Either way, the issue has clearly not been dealt with in this intervening eleven years, and something needs to change.

#### **What kind of research did you do in order to make sure the play was authentic?**

Whatever I'm writing, I'm a huge researcher. Synergy organised for me to do workshops in PRUs, youth centres and YOIs to meet people who've been directly impacted. As I mentioned, it is something that has touched my life but I wanted as many different perspectives as I could find. In terms of authenticity, everything I write comes from an emotionally truthful place, so I was able to draw on my personal experience for the central question. How do you react in the aftermath of a huge crime? Also, even though I still look about twelve, I can't be considered a young person anymore, so it's just really useful when you're writing characters very different to yourself to spend time with people who are similar to those characters.

#### **What were the challenges for you writing this play?**

For me the main challenge, as I said previously, was how do you create a piece of work that explores a well-trodden theme in a different way? When we did the workshops, we deliberately didn't talk about knife crime at all. We looked at the ways we react when we're put under pressure. What are the things that make us feel angry; embarrassed; sad, and how do we act when we feel those things? Because each of the three characters are dealing with Leon's murder in very different ways, I wanted to dig into the emotional truth of that. Going back to the issue of authenticity, it was really important to me for this play to feel truthful. I really felt that sense of responsibility.

When I sat down to write the play, I also found that my idea of having everything happening sub textually whilst the characters seem to just be talking about cooking was a bit harder in practice than

it was in theory. Cos if they're not talking about what's happened, what are they actually talking about? But I think we found a good balance.

**Do you want the audience to be clear on how Jaden was involved in Leon's murder?**

We talked about this a lot during the development of the play. I wanted to keep it deliberately a bit opaque, to give the audience a big discussion point. I think audiences will have really mixed responses to Jaden, and the decisions he's made.

**Do you think Jaden deserves to be punished for what happened to Leon?**

Well firstly, he was involved in someone losing their life. That should have consequences. However, there was a real-life case that heavily influenced the play, where a teenage boy was jumped, without provocation, by two older men on his way home, and in self-defence he stabbed one of them. It doesn't change the fact that he took someone's life, but I do think context is important when we're considering anyone's behaviour. I just kept imagining, he left the house that day with absolutely no intention of any of this happening. A split-second decision has ruined his life. And others. It breaks my heart.

**What do you think is going on in Amari's head?**

Oh gosh, loads of stuff! It would be so easy for him to turn around and seek retribution for Leon's murder. The path he's chosen is actually much harder. Because he's under so much pressure from everyone else. Plus, he is angry and heartbroken and a mix of many other emotions that he's probably going to be dealing with for years. I think he's amazing. The strength it must take for him to do what he does. He's incredible.

**What about Sam, what is going on in her head?**

Sam is so complex. It was really important for me that Sam was female, because we often make assumptions about the way men react and behave when they're pushed, and actually Sam is the most volatile character in the whole piece. There was a workshop I did that had predominantly boys in it, and a couple of girls, who were the most challenging to work with. That's Sam. She loved Leon - or at least, thought she did. And she feels betrayed by Amari for not dealing with this situation. She's so full of anger and rage. She could boil over at any moment.

**What do you hope that teachers will take from the play and talk about with their students?**

I actually think there's something quite hopeful in it. Obviously, something awful has happened and everyone's struggling with it, but Amari to me is a huge beacon of hope and strength. I think it provides an opportunity to look at emotions and how they inform our actions, rather than just focusing on actions. And there's a lot of places in the play where characters could have made one different choice, and everything would be completely different. That's quite useful to pick apart.

**What do you hope that young people come away from this play thinking?**

I want them to sit and have big (polite) arguments and debates about what happened. I think everyone will have empathy for different characters. Some will think Jaden's awful for what he did, and the fact he never came forward. Others will think Amari's a wimp for not taking revenge. Picking apart those decisions and considering what they would do in that situation will be really valuable, I think.

**What advice would you give to an aspiring young writer?**

This is kind of rubbish advice, but the most important thing is that you're actually writing. Every day. Get to the end of something, because then you have a product that you can make better and better. And start to develop relationships with different organisations and companies who work with young

writers. Synergy run a writer's course and loads of other opportunities for young people, so get in touch with them!

**And finally... If you could speak to your younger self, what would you say?**

Oh gosh, loads. I think mostly I would want to make sure I knew that things do get better, so keep going, keep trying. Don't give up and don't give in.

**Q&A with Danielle Baker-Charles: Director of *To My Younger Self***

**Why did you want to direct this play and why now?**

As a director I'm interested in work that deals with socially topical issues in a way that explores the complexities of human nature. What drives us? Connects us? And, what can or does, divide us?

Having worked with young people and within criminal justice for a long time, I am keenly aware of the increase in incidents of violence amongst young people over the last few years. *To My Younger Self* is incredibly timely, exploring this very topical, urgent issue and asks difficult questions of itself and its audience. What are the ways forward if you are the perpetrator or victim of knife crime? What are the real-life costs of our decisions? When do we have choices and what does it take to make the most difficult and life defining decisions?

The issues behind knife crime are complex and the line between victim and preparator is rarely straightforward. I think this play beautifully explores and presents these complexities, whilst humanising the characters.

**What do you think are the key themes in the script?**

There are lots of themes to explore in this play. The key theme is obviously knife crime and related to that; relationships and loyalty, expectations of ourselves and others, peer pressure, the impact of trauma, grief, and family breakdown on young people, gang affiliation etc.

Underlying all the themes, I think, is the idea of choices. When do we have choices even when it feels like we don't? What are the costs of our choices? What do we need to be able to make those choices?

**Do you have a favourite line or moment into *My Younger Self*?**

I have loads... absolutely loads – see what I did there!? Seriously though, there are so many brilliant, complex and moving moments in this script and all the actors are so incredible that it's hard to choose one moment. If pushed, I'd say that I think the last few moments of the play are my favourite and those lines are also the most important.

**What do you think is driving each of the characters?**

I think for all the characters it's a mixture of both the desire for something positive and the fear of something negative.

For Amari, I think it's a desire to protect his mum and he feels the best way to do that is to build a positive future for himself as a chef. He desperately wants to move away from the threat of violence (the thing he fears is letting his mum down by putting her through the pain of another son's death).

I think Sam's drive is the most complicated to pinpoint. She's aggressive and defensive but I think she's had a really troubled past. She wants to keep herself safe and the only way she knows how to do this is to hang on to her 'old ways'. She wants to try and keep Amari operating in that world too, so that she doesn't lose him or lose her sense of control. I think she is also driven by a fear of being abandoned or being hurt.

I think Jaden is ultimately driven by the need to find a sense of peace after what happened to him and what he did to Leon. I think he is also driven by a fear of being 'unsafe' and is always trying to find a sense of safety. Jaden also feels deep guilt and a desire to take responsibility for what happened.

**What would like an audience to take away from seeing the play?**

To consider more deeply the issues surrounding knife crime and what part they could play in either raising awareness of the issue, avoiding or tackling such situations themselves and/or to think about ways in which they could support others in similar situations.

Also, to consider for themselves what choices they are currently facing in life and who/what is influencing their decisions and in what ways.

**Synergy Theatre Project always cast ex-prisoners in their productions, can you explain a little bit about this process and how you think it has enhanced the play?**

It works much the same way as any other casting process. The director reads the play, discusses with the writer what their vision is for each character and from that a casting break down is put together and sent to agents and, in this case, specifically to the people Synergy works with and other organisations that do similar work. A list is then put together and suitable people come in and audition for the roles.

I'd say the only difference is that Synergy try to be more actively inclusive in the casting process by sending the casting calls out to more unusual places and encouraging people to challenge themselves by applying for the roles. Synergy probably also have a more open-minded approach to casting in that we aren't necessarily looking for someone who is fully formed as an actor but for people who might have some raw talent that we can help develop through the process of making a play.

How this approach enhances the play is in much the same way that any actor enhances a play. They bring their own lived experiences and understanding of people and life to the show, and that makes the performances human, insightful and entertaining to watch.

**What qualities do you think are important in a director?**

I'm not sure there's a fixed list. Recently I've done a lot of assistant directing and the directors I've assisted are all so different. They have completely different ideas about how to create a show and have very different characters!

I think mostly you just need to have a vision and a passion for making the best possible show you can and to be as positive and as inspiring along the way as you can. I think my style is very collaborative, I like to experiment in the rehearsal room and to be open to getting things wrong- playing around until, collectively, we can find the best way forward for us as team.



Having said all that, I do think there is one key thing every director needs to be able to do and that is to communicate their ideas well and clearly to their team.

**What advice would you give to aspiring young directors?**

I would say be open to learning, to trying different ways of doing things and let yourself find the style that works for you. There really is no fixed way of directing so each of us must figure out our own process, but there are lots of tools that you can learn that might be useful.

I'd also say, especially early on, take every opportunity you can and when you fail, keep going! In my experience it's not always easy to build a career as a director but if you really want to make it work you will!

**And finally... If you could speak to your younger self, what would you say?**

I think I'd say take more opportunities early on, like at school and university, to direct, be creative or just to experience different things. I think as a young person there are lots of opportunities given to do things and I wasn't proactive enough to take them, so I'd say be more proactive, take those opportunities when they come up and if they don't then hunt them out! There are loads of free things you can get involved with across London as a young person, so look online or ask a friend or adult to help you find things to do that you might enjoy.

I'd also tell my younger self to ask for more help and support from teachers and tutors and other trusted adults. I never used to ask for help, especially as a teenager and now I realise I missed out on a huge resource of knowledge and encouragement in many aspects of my life. As an adult I've also realised most adults love it when a young person takes the initiative to ask for help and are often really keen to support a young person's growth in whatever way they can so I'd say go ask for help, support and encouragement in whatever way you think you might need it!

Finally, I'd also say not to be afraid of trying and maybe failing at something. I'd tell myself to be more open to being wrong and to remember that the most important thing I can do is to do my best.

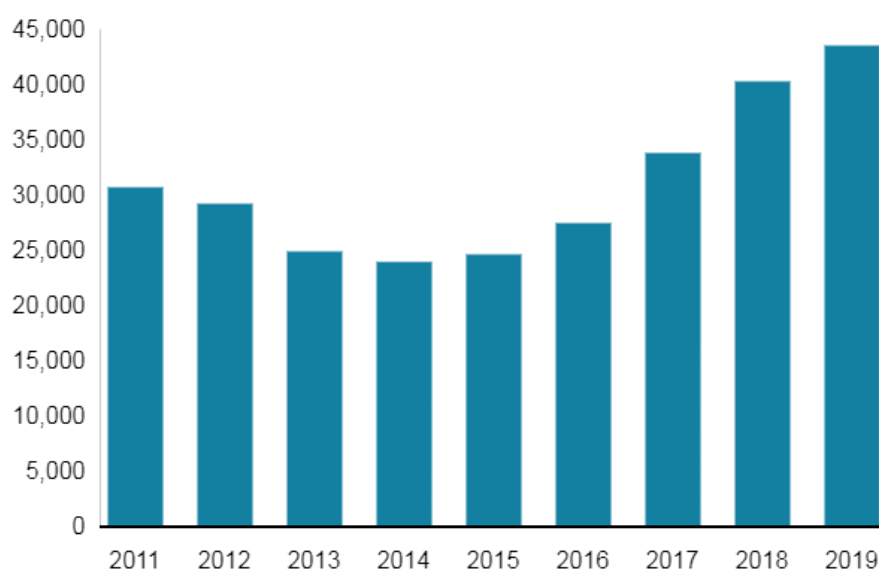
## Context

To My Younger Self was written to explore the issue of youth knife violence. The statistics below aim to contextualise the issue, as it stands in October 2019. The statistics and diagrams have been drawn from articles, the links to which are below. 'Knife crime' is not a specific offence. It refers to a collection of different offences in which a knife is used, as well as knife possession offences. Serious knife crime is defined as any assault, robbery, threat to kill, murder, attempted murder or sexual offence involving a knife or sharp instrument.

A BBC article published in July 2019, using statistics provided by the Home Office, reports **43,516 knife crime offences** in the 12 months ending March 2019. This marks an **80% increase** from the low point in the year ending March 2014. Out of the 44 police forces, 43 recorded a rise in knife crime since 2011.

### **Total knife crime offences**

England and Wales, year ending March 2019



The number of knife-related homicides has risen every year since 2015, with a steep increase in **2017-18, when there were 285 killings**, the highest figure since 1946. **One in four victims were men aged 18-24** (Home Office)

The involvement of young people in knife crime has been growing, confirming anecdotal evidence that **more boys (and girls) are carrying weapons** and being drawn into gangs.

Last year, **15% of knife crime suspects were female** and, including those attacked in domestic abuse incidents, **a quarter of victims of knife crime were women**.

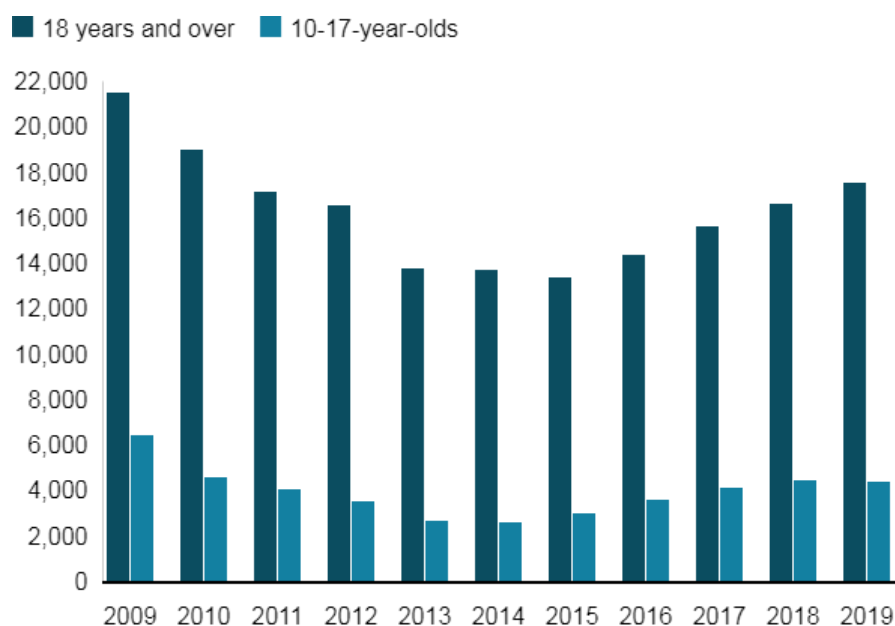
Dr Mike Rowe of Liverpool University, who has been observing police officers at work for the past six years, told the BBC: "Girls and young women are being exploited to carry weapons because they are much less likely to be stopped and searched by police.

"The attention on male suspects may lead to the deliberate recruitment of young women."

Data from the NHS from the last five years show that the number of children **aged 16 and under being treated for assault by a knife** or other sharp objects **rose by 93%**, from 180 admissions in 2012-13 to 347 in 2017-18.

## Knife offences resulting in a caution or conviction

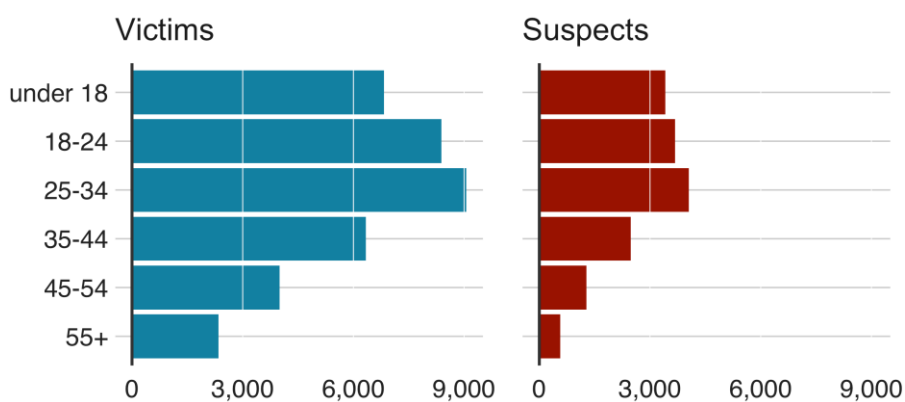
Knife offences by age group, England and Wales, year ending March 2019



**Ten-to-17 year-olds represent roughly 20% of those cautioned or convicted** of knife offences - that's possession of a knife or threatening someone with one. **One in nine is sentenced to a spell in youth custody, most receive a community sentence** (similar to the young people featured in the play).

## Knife crime is mainly committed by young people on young people

Number in each age group 2018



Data from 33 of 43 regional police forces in England and Wales

BBC Freedom of Information requests to police forces in England and Wales

BBC

Overall, **London remains the most dangerous part of England and Wales** (London has 16 areas of the top 25 for knife crime) - but data, obtained from 34 of the 43 police forces, shows **the rate of serious knife crime offences rising sharply in some areas outside London**, and outstripping some of the city's boroughs in places like the city of Manchester, Slough, Liverpool and Blackpool (freedom of information request by the BBC to police forces in England and Wales).

#### References:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46153257>

<https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/uk-knife-crime-statistics-stabbing-numbers-london-explained-87308>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/774866/youth\\_justice\\_statistics\\_bulletin\\_2017\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774866/youth_justice_statistics_bulletin_2017_2018.pdf)

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/04/knife-attacks-teenagers-figures-east-london-manchester>

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/Knife%20crime.%20November.pdf>

#### Workshop Plans

Over the next couple of pages you will find some suggested workshops that you could lead with the young people you work with. These workshops should occur after the young people have seen the play.

The workshops will encourage the young people to think more deeply about the themes and issues of the play and boost drama and creative curriculums by examining the techniques a director might apply when staging a play of this kind.

There are timings listed next to each activity, but these are just a guide. Please feel free to select specific activities, spend more time on some and perhaps disregard others, the workshop plans are offered as a suggestion.

Please note that for the purposes of the workshop we are attaching the script, but any other use of the text will need to be agreed with the writer. If you have any questions regarding this, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Synergy Theatre Project.

<b>Workshop: Knives and Breaking the Cycle</b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Warm Up</b>	Groups: Split them into groups, initially mathematically so everyone easily gets into a group, then start changing it up. When people don't end up in the group then they're out. At the end of the game discuss what it feels like to not be in the group.	Whole group	5 mins
	Commonalities- The group sit in a circle on chairs with one person on a chair in the middle. The person in the middle names something that they may have in common with others (I ate breakfast this morning, I have a brother etc.) The people who agree with this statement all swap chairs and the person in the middle tries to take one of these free chairs, leaving someone without a chair in the circle and having to take up the middle chair. They then name a possible commonality and so on...	Whole group	5 mins
<b>Tableaux, create still images depicting:</b>	Knives: Change up the image by giving different titles: fear/fashion/defence/protection.	Groups of 5	10 mins
	Confrontation: Get participants to play aggressor, victim, peacemaker (then get each character to say how they feel)		
	Family photo: Amari's family and Jaden's family before and after the crime.		
<b>Neighbourhoods</b>	Start one side of the room and get participants to walk to the other in the way they would when they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walking through an area they are familiar with</li> <li>Walking through an area they are unfamiliar with</li> <li>Walking through an unfamiliar area with a knife in their possession.</li> </ul> Discuss what changed, how they moved etc.	Group activity	10 mins
<b>Role plays</b>	The crime – think about what happened when Jaden stabbed Leon. Come up with two differing versions. Work out a different ending, what could have changed?	Groups of 4	15 mins
<b>Read</b>	Read the final scene of the play as a group. Discuss Amari's final line. How can it stop? What is needed?	Whole group	7 mins
<b>Going against flow</b>	Whole group walking in one direction, get in tune with each other and move as a group. One person when tapped should turn and walk against flow. Gradually tap more people. Discuss how it feels and how the feeling changes as more people change direction.	Whole group	8 mins
<b>Scenarios</b>	Create scenes in which one person speaks out against a group, stops the cycle, walks away?	Groups of 4/5	15 mins
<b>Closure</b>	Summarise session- what came up?	Whole group	10 mins

<b>Workshop: Character and the 3 dynamic</b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Warm Up</b>	Commonalities- The group sit in a circle on chairs. There is one person on a chair in the middle. The person in the middle names something that they may have in common with others (I ate breakfast this morning, I have a brother etc.) The people who agree with this statement all swap chairs with each other and the person in the middle tried to take one of these free chairs, leaving someone without a chair in the circle and having to take up the middle chair. They then name a possible commonality and so on...	Whole group	5 mins
<b>Wants and obstacles</b>	A wants something from B. Improvise what happens? What if they hide their want ie. put it in the subtext. How does it change?	Groups of 3	10 mins
<b>Improvisation exercise</b>	C then comes in and wants something else. What happens then?		
<b>Physical work</b>	Everyone has a chair. A moves to a new position and sits on the chair and stops then B, then C.  A wants B to leave the room, B wants A to forgive him, C wants A to avenge C. No talking. See what happens. What atmosphere can be created?	Whole group for demo then into groups of 3	10 mins
<b>Role plays</b>	A has a secret, B doesn't know it. Start the scene. C comes in knowing the secret. What happens? Try it different ways where they reveal or don't reveal it.	Groups of 3	10 mins
<b>Script work</b>	Try out Scene 4 (Chips) when Sam has realised that Jaden was involved in Leon's murder really working on the subtext from all characters.	Groups of 3	15 mins
<b>Character work</b>	Build character profiles by mining the text for facts, highlighting what they say about themselves, what others say about them and what they say about others.	Individual	10 mins
<b>Backstory &amp; timeline</b>	Then ask a list of question such as age, family, tastes, loves, hates, interests, greatest fear, biggest secret, what they want today, what they want long term etc  Find out why they are in the YOT  Create a timeline of key events in their life		
<b>Hot seat</b>	Character sits on the hot seat and answers questions in character, using the information they have gathered previously and their interpretation of the character.	Groups of 5	10 mins
<b>Letter to their younger &amp; future self</b>	Write letters/monologues to their younger and future self.  Write a letter to Leon.	Individual	10 mins
<b>Closure</b>	Summarise session- what came up? How did it feel? Etc.	Whole group	10 mins

### **Follow on activity: Safety Mapping**

As part of their wider training and resources related to Contextual Safeguarding the University of Bedfordshire have formulated an activity called Safety Mapping, which can be a really valuable and useful exercise to do with young people who are at risk of knife crime, exploitation or for any reason may not feel safe in certain public areas. Safety mapping can help practitioners and teachers to understand young people's experiences of places they feel are safe and unsafe and can ultimately help to create a safety plan with young people.

Young people encounter risk and safety in locations outside of the home. These experiences are crucial in shaping how young people move through their local neighbourhood and how they keep themselves safe. The activity below is an example of a safety mapping exercise that could be completed with a young person but, before embarking on the exercise, please ensure you have fully familiarised yourself with the concept (using the links at the end of this section) and are equipped to assist with actions required after the mapping.

#### **A Safety Mapping activity**

This activity is to be carried out directly with young people to identify the areas of safety and risk and then use this information to form the basis of a safety plan.

1. Print a large map of the local area on A3 (ordnance survey have good, detailed mapping tools)
2. Bring some stickers in green, orange and red that you can use to mark the map or bring some coloured pens.
3. Use the safety planning sheet below (also available via Contextual Safeguarding network).

Working with the young person, go through the map and ask them where they feel safe, could be safe and feel unsafe. For each area get them to put a coloured mark on the map (**Red: I do not feel safe in this area**, **Amber: I could be safe in this area**, **Green: I feel safe in this area**)

This could include whole areas or be as specific as certain streets, parks or shops. Use the exercise to try and start a conversation with the young person about why they feel safe or unsafe there.

Using the safety planning sheet, start listing the locations where they feel safe or unsafe and the reasons. Once you have completed the assessment of risk, work with the young person to develop a safety plan with them.

A safety plan will involve thinking about what they could do if they feel unsafe, for example in an area they have located as 'red' you could ask the following questions:

- What would they do if they feel unsafe?
- Is there anyone they know there who they could go to for help?
- What would they expect that person to do to help keep them safe?
- Do they have contact details accessible?

Once you have completed this exercise you should have developed a safety plan with the young person and helped them think about areas of safety and risk. However, it's important that it doesn't end at this point. It's crucial that where young people identify unsafe places, you work with other practitioners and services to consider ways to make them safe. This might include youth workers, police, local park wardens etc. It can also be a useful thing to bring up in any teaching networks or local authority meetings. The school's head of safeguarding should always be involved in these conversations.

Once a safety plan is completed it is important that it does not become a static document. This will mean updating and re-assessing the safety map with the young person regularly. It is also important that where young people identify risk, that this is followed up and an intervention plan is developed into those areas (in collaboration with other professionals).

Where appropriate, plans may be brought together from multiple young people to support the analysis of trends and risks in different areas. This can be vital in identifying a location in the local area where young people universally feel unsafe, which may in turn point to crimes being committed or young people experiencing exploitation.

In order to apply Safety Mapping with the young people you work with, we strongly recommend joining the contextual safeguarding network (free) and there you can access in depth resources and guidelines in completing the exercise safely and ethically. There is also a really brilliant podcast which talks through the process thoroughly: <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>




Please see next page for safety mapping sheet.

*Contextual safeguarding has been developed by Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire over the past six years to inform policy and practice approaches to safeguarding adolescents.*

*Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.*



## Safety mapping planning sheet

	Locations, people and further details
 <p>I feel safe in this area.</p>	
 <p>I could be safe in this area</p>	
 <p>I do not feel safe in this area</p>	
<p><b>Safety Plan</b></p>	

### **Signposting and Advice:**

If any of the young people that you work with have been affected by the themes mentioned in *To My Younger Self*, below are some charities and organisations you could refer them to.

#### **Knife Crime**

##### **#knifefree**

Home Office website full of resources, case studies and support to help young people go #knifefree and stop carrying weapons. They also provide lesson plans on knife crime for schools and youth organisations.

[www.knifefree.co.uk](http://www.knifefree.co.uk)

##### **Your Choice Your Future**

Webpage featuring short films and graphics providing young people with the reality of crime, statistics and legal jargon busting.

[www.ycyf.co.uk](http://www.ycyf.co.uk)

##### **Art Against Knives**

An organisation that imbeds creative spaces into local communities to give young people an outlet (including nail bars, music studios etc.) In these spaces professionals provide skills training, mentoring and specialist support. They welcome all referrals, including self-referrals and referrals from peers as well as professional referrals.

[www.artagainstknives.com](http://www.artagainstknives.com)

##### **The Ben Kinsella Trust**

An organisation focused around educating young people on knife crime. They offer in school workshops and training courses to help young people turn their lives around.

[www.benkinsella.org.uk](http://www.benkinsella.org.uk)

07712 306103 (Sophia Antoniazzi)

##### **No Knives Better Lives**

A website run by the Scottish government (but covers nationwide) that provides help, support and resources for young people, parents and teachers/practitioners.

[www.noknivesbetterlives.com](http://www.noknivesbetterlives.com)

0131 313 2488

##### **CitySafe**

A community led campaign from Citizens UK to make the streets safer. CitySafe Havens are places of safety for people in immediate danger or who are feeling threatened. A CitySafe Haven displays a purple logo in its window, there are over 600 havens across London. Young people can check the map to familiarise themselves where their safe havens are.

##### **Victim Support**

Victim support can offer help to those who have witnessed or experience crime, whether it has been reported to the police or not.

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

0808 168 9111

### **Crime and Criminality**

#### **Crimestoppers**

Help, advice and a way of giving information about a crime completely anonymously.

[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

0800 555 111

#### **Fearless**

Fearless is a site where young people can access non-judgemental information and advice. It provides a safe place to give information about crime, 100% anonymously. They also offer help and advice on: Drugs and Alcohol, Cyber Crime, Street Violence, Abuse, Weapons, Violence, Theft.

[www.fearless.org](http://www.fearless.org) (contact via anonymous form on website)

### **Gangs and Gang Exit**

#### **LGE, Safer London**

London charity working to prevent and address gang violence, vulnerability and sexual exploitation. They can provide intensive support, early intervention and mentoring. They are a relatively new charity but can offer advice and sign posting.

[www.saferlondon.org.uk](http://www.saferlondon.org.uk)

0207 021 0301

#### **HMP Thameside Gangs Service (Part of Catch 22)**

A discreet team working with Catch22. People can refer themselves or a friend/family member and the focus is around support exiting gangs.

<https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/hmp-thameside-gangs-service/>

0208 3317418

#### **Gangsline**

Organisation lead by former gang members that offers mentoring, schools' workshops and multi-agency training. They offer exit strategies to those involved with gangs and prevention work with both young men and women. The website also offers advice and support to parents/carers/teachers who fear a young person may be in a gang.

[www.gangsline.com](http://www.gangsline.com)

01375 483 239

## **Young people's mental health**

### **Kooth**

An anonymous online community of young people finding ways to better their mental health. They can join live forums, communicate with other young people, track mood changes and access free, online counselling sessions.

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

### **Young Minds**

Immediate support for young people in crisis via text messaging. Also training and resources for adults working with young people.

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Text support line: Text YM to 85258

### **Childline**

Support organisation for young people, trained advisors available.

0800 1111

### **Mind**

A charity for all ages focused around mental health, offering guidance, support and referral partners.

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) 0300 123 3393 86463 (Text)

### **The Children's Society**

Provides information about various mental health disorders young people may experience and how they can seek help for them.

[www.childrenssociety.org.uk/mental-health-advice-for-children-and-young-people](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/mental-health-advice-for-children-and-young-people)

## **Healthy relationships and relationship advice**

### **Act on it**

A website dedicated to promoting healthy teen relationships, defining what is abuse and looking at the issue of control. There is information that is young person specific and information for adults/carers/teachers who are concerned. There is also advice on talking to peers and relatives about unhealthy relationships.

[www.actonitnow.co.uk](http://www.actonitnow.co.uk) 0300 123 5101

### **Relate**

Relate provide relationship advice for young adults, whether it's dealing with a breakup, understanding healthy relationships or relationships with family and friends.

[www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-young-adults](http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-young-adults)

### **Brook**

Brook cover a wide range of topics including sex education. They also provide good resources and information about forming relationships, managing online relationships and recognising abusive relationships.

[www.brook.org.uk/your-life/category/relationships](http://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/category/relationships)

## **Drugs**

### **Talk to Frank**

Friendly, confidential drugs advice.

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) (webchat available) Text: 82111 Call: 0300 123 6600

### **Young Minds**

Helpful resources for information and support around drug taking and its effects.

[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/drugs-and-alcohol/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/drugs-and-alcohol/)

### **The Mix**

The Mix is an organisation that can help with many issues affecting young people including mental health, money, homelessness and drug use.

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk) 0808 808 4994

## **Support after death of a loved one**

### **Support after murder and manslaughter**

National charity supporting those who have lost family members through murder or manslaughter. Opportunity to talk to people who will understand your grief and can offer advice.

[www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk) 0121 472 2912 or 0845 872 3440

### **The Good Grief Trust**

This website is focused around managing loss, there are specific pages focused around the loss of a sibling.

[www.thegoodgrieftrust.org](http://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org)

### **Cruse**

Bereavement care service, referral links to local services and resources for managing grief. They also run a nationwide grief support line.

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) 0808 808 1677

### **Child Death Helpline**

A helpline specifically set up and staffed by volunteers who are able to offer advice and referrals to local services to anyone suffering after the death of a young person.

0808 802 0111

### **Grief Talk**

A helpline offering support for anyone suffering from grief. They offer call, email or instant chat and can offer support from a trained counsellor.

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) (webchat available) 0808 800 6019 [griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk](mailto:griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk)

### **Well at School**

Support for schools in dealing with the loss of a student. Resources and training available.

[www.wellatschool.org](http://www.wellatschool.org)

### **Stop and search**

#### **Y Stop**

Y Stop is website and app designed by young people to give advice and guidance on dealing with a stop and search. It focuses on practicalities and information to help young people cope with what can be a very stressful situation. The website also has several print out resources for young people to carry with them (particularly around what is legal and what they are entitled to ask) and lesson plans for teachers.

[www.y-stop.org](http://www.y-stop.org) (contact form on website)

### **Children in care**

#### **Become**

Charity for young people in the care system and care leavers. They offer help and advice via a helpline and also resources and information on their website.

[www.becomecharity.org.uk](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk) 0800 023 2033 [advice@becomecharity.org.uk](mailto:advice@becomecharity.org.uk)

#### **Barnados**

Barnados offer support to young people in care and also advice to care leavers including money management, housing and education.

[www.barnados.org.uk](http://www.barnados.org.uk)

#### **Look Ahead**

Support with care, housing and looked after young people who may need a little extra support.

[www.lookahead.org.uk](http://www.lookahead.org.uk) 033 010 4600

### **General Support**

#### **Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) 116 123

#### **Childline**

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) 0800 1111

*If you require any further assistance or advice, please don't hesitate to contact Siân Henderson at Synergy Theatre Project, [sian@synergytheatreproject.co.uk](mailto:sian@synergytheatreproject.co.uk) 0203 034 0787*