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Buying and carrying knives: the law

The laws about buying and carrying a knife depend on the type of knife, your age and your circumstances.

Basic laws on knives

It is illegal to:

- Sell a knife of any kind to anyone under 18 years old (16 to 18 year olds in Scotland can buy cutlery and kitchen knives)
- Carry a knife in public without good reason - unless it's a knife with a folding blade 3 inches long (7.62 cm) or less, eg a Swiss Army knife
- Carry, buy or sell any type of banned knife
- Use any knife in a threatening way (even a legal knife, such as a Swiss Army knife)
- Lock knives (knives with blades that can be locked when unfolded) are not folding knives, and are illegal to carry in public without good reason.

The maximum penalty for an adult carrying a knife is 4 years in prison and a fine of £5,000.

Good reasons for carrying a knife

Examples of good reasons to carry a knife in public can include:

- Taking knives you use at work to and from work
- Taking knives to a gallery or museum to be exhibited
- The knife is going to be used for theatre, film, television, historical reenactment or religious purposes, eg the kirpan some Sikhs carry
- A court will decide if you've got a good reason to carry a knife if you're charged with carrying it illegally.

Banned knives

There is a ban on the sale of some knives:

- Flick knives (also called 'switchblades' or 'automatic knives') - where the blade is hidden inside the handle and shoots out when a button is pressed
- Butterfly 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, eg where the blade is hidden inside a belt buckle or fake mobile phone
- Gravity knives
- Sword-sticks
- Samurai swords (with some exceptions, including antiques and swords made to traditional methods before 1954)
- Hand or foot-claws
- Push daggers
- Hollow kubotan (cylinder-shaped keychain) holding spikes
- Shuriken (also known as 'death stars' or 'throwing stars')
- Kusari-gama (sickle attached to a rope, cord or wire)
- Kyoketsu-shoge (hook-knife attached to a rope, cord or wire)
- Kusari (weight attached to a rope, cord or wire)

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