

CARDBOARD GANGSTER

Crime Is Not a Recommended Career Choice



An informative eBook to read and share with your child—revealing the real consequences of crime before one bad decision changes everything.

Cardboard Gangster

Crime Is Not a Recommended Career Choice

An informative eBook for parents and young people to read together.

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[My New Future](http://www.mynewfuture.org)

**Read it together. Discuss the choices.
Understand the consequences.**

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Important Information

This book is intended to encourage discussion, safer choices and early support. It does not assume that most young people are involved in crime. The overwhelming majority are not. It focuses on how one impulsive decision, one dangerous situation or one person applying pressure can create consequences that last far longer than expected.

The legal information mainly concerns England and Wales and is general information, not legal advice. Laws, police powers, sentencing and criminal-record rules can change and are different in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Anyone facing an actual investigation or court case should obtain advice from a qualified solicitor.

Descriptions of violence, weapons, drugs and custody are factual and non-graphic. A parent, carer, teacher or youth worker may wish to read the book alongside a younger reader.

If Someone Is in Immediate Danger

Call 999. Do not approach a person carrying a weapon. Move to safety, tell a trusted adult and give the emergency services clear information about the location and danger.

Introduction

One Decision Can Change Everything

Most young people are not criminals. They go to school or college, spend time with friends, use social media, play sport, work, help their families and think about what they might do in the future. This book is not written to label a generation. It is written because even a sensible young person can make one impulsive decision when they are frightened, angry, excited or desperate to belong.

A decision lasting seconds can lead to an arrest, an injury, a court appearance or the death of another person. The young person may say, “I did not think that would happen.” That may be completely true, but the consequences remain.

The chapters ahead look at the image of toughness, peer pressure, modern police evidence, knives, vehicle crime, drug exploitation, custody and criminal records. They also look at families, victims, second chances and practical ways to leave danger before it takes control.

This is a book to read together. It does not ask parents to interrogate their children or young people to pretend they never feel pressure. It asks both sides to talk before a crisis makes the decisions for them.

The central question

Is a few minutes of approval worth risking the rest of your life?

Nobody can guarantee a trouble-free life. Everyone makes mistakes. The aim is to recognise the decisions that carry consequences too serious to test even once.

Stop and Think

1. Who could you contact if you felt pressured to commit an offence?
2. What would make it easier to tell a parent or trusted adult the truth?

Chapter 1

The Cardboard Gangster

What does it mean to look hard? For some young people, it may mean wearing particular clothes, posing in photographs, using certain hand signs or changing the way they walk and speak. It might mean trying to appear fearless, aggressive or ready for a fight.

But an image is not always the truth. Underneath the black hoodie may be an ordinary young person who loves their family, worries about school, enjoys gaming, supports a football team and has hopes for the future. The tough appearance may simply be a performance created to impress friends, attract attention or avoid appearing weak.

That is the idea behind the Cardboard Gangster. From the front, the figure looks confident and intimidating. Turn it slightly and the truth becomes visible. It is extremely thin, and a simple cardboard support is holding it upright. The appearance is powerful. The reality is much more vulnerable.

Why try to look hard?

A young person may be copying friends, trying to belong, protecting themselves from bullying, seeking attention or hiding fear and insecurity. Sometimes the image is a form of armour: “If people believe I am dangerous, they will leave me alone.” Unfortunately, not everyone reacts that way.

The message another person receives

You may believe your appearance says, “I am confident. Do not mess with me.” Another person may hear, “I am challenging you. Prove you are tougher.” Most people will ignore the performance, but it only takes one aggressive person who wants to prove something to friends.

That person may challenge you, push you or film a confrontation. They may not challenge you at all. They may attack before you have time to explain that you never wanted trouble.

A dangerous sequence can start with a look, become an insult, then a push, a punch and a weapon. Neither person may have left home intending to fight. Once fear, pride, friends and weapons become involved, stopping becomes much harder.

Mistaken identity

An innocent young person may resemble somebody an attacker is seeking. A similar hoodie, bicycle, build or group of friends can be enough for an angry person to make a terrible mistake. If a knife is involved, that mistake can cause permanent injury or death.

There is no reliable national total for every attack involving mistaken identity, so this book will not invent one. The warning is not that clothing causes violence. Nobody deserves to be attacked because of their clothes, hairstyle or friends. The attacker is responsible. The warning is that people looking for trouble do not always stop to check.

Respect or fear?

If people avoid you because they believe you may hurt them, that is fear rather than respect. If friends encourage you to fight because they want entertainment, that is not loyalty. Real respect comes from keeping your word, helping people, developing skills and staying calm under pressure.

Walking away does not mean the other person has won. It means they have failed to take control of your future.

For parents

Begin with curiosity rather than accusation. “What does this style mean to you?” will open a conversation more effectively than “You look like a criminal.” Ask who your child could call, what happens if someone challenges them and whether their friends would help them leave safely.

Stop and Think

1. What message do you think your appearance sends?
2. Could a stranger interpret it differently?
3. Are your friends protecting you or using you as entertainment?
4. What would real confidence look like in a dangerous situation?

Chapter 2

Is It Your Choice or Theirs

Pressure rarely begins with a stranger announcing, “I am going to exploit you.” It may begin with friendship, compliments, gifts, lifts, food, money or protection. The request comes later: keep watch, hold this, carry that, lend your account, hide a phone or take the blame.

The person applying pressure may say the task is small, safe or already decided. They may use loyalty: “If you were really my friend, you would do it.” They may use shame: “Do not be scared.” They may use debt: “After everything I have done for you, you owe me.” None of these creates a genuine free choice.

The person taking the risk

Older or more experienced offenders often distance themselves from the riskiest part. The youngest person may carry the drugs, sit in the stolen car or enter the shop because adults believe that child will attract less suspicion or receive a lighter sentence. The young person is treated as replaceable.

A useful question is: if this is such an easy and clever plan, why is the person giving the orders not doing it themselves?

Online pressure is still pressure

Threats, humiliation, rumours and demands can arrive through group chats and disappearing messages.

Screenshots can outlive the message. A young person who feels trapped should not try to solve serious threats alone. Save what is safe to save, block contact where appropriate and tell a trusted adult, school safeguarding lead or police officer.

Stop and Think

1. Who benefits from the decision?
2. Who carries the greatest risk?
3. What words could you use to delay or refuse?

Chapter 3

Clever Enough for Something Better

Planning, persuasion, confidence, observation and leadership are not criminal skills. They are human abilities. The direction in which they are used determines whether they create opportunity or harm.

A person who can organise people can manage a team. Someone who notices what others miss may excel in engineering, design, security or technology. A persuasive speaker can work in sales, teaching, campaigning or business. Courage can become emergency work, sport, public service or entrepreneurship.

The false promise of easy money

Crime is often advertised as quick income without rules. In reality, criminal groups impose their own rules through fear, debt and violence. Money may be taken by people higher up. Goods can be seized. A phone can become evidence. Freedom can disappear.

Legal progress can feel slower, but it can be kept, explained with pride and built upon. Skills, references, qualifications and trust gain value over time. A reputation for unreliability does the opposite.

Redirect the ability

Ask what attracts the young person: money, status, excitement, belonging or independence. Then find a lawful route that meets the same need. A small trading project, apprenticeship, sport, volunteering role or creative challenge can provide a real identity instead of a dangerous performance.

Stop and Think

1. Which abilities do you already have?
2. Where could those abilities earn respect legally?
3. What could you begin this month?

Chapter 4

The First Small Step

Serious trouble often begins with something presented as minor: take one item, keep watch for two minutes, sit in the passenger seat, store a bag overnight or allow money to pass through a bank account. The first request tests whether the person will comply.

Once they do, the request may grow. The organiser may hold evidence of the first offence and use it as leverage. “You are involved now” becomes a threat. A young person who expected easy money may discover that leaving is much harder than entering.

Small does not mean harmless

Shoplifting affects staff, businesses and communities. Carrying a package can make the carrier part of a drug-supply offence. Being present can matter if the group acts together. Lending an account can draw someone into fraud and money laundering. The exact legal outcome depends on what happened and what the person knew or intended, which is why early legal advice matters.

The safest first refusal

The easiest offence to leave is the one not yet committed. Delay, move away, contact somebody trustworthy and avoid accepting the first favour that creates a debt. If involvement has already begun, speak to a safe adult or professional before the pressure becomes greater.

Stop and Think

1. What “small favour” would make you suspicious?
2. Who could help without making the situation worse?

Chapter 5

Odds On What Are the Chances of Getting Caught

Films often show one detective finding one perfect clue. Real investigations can be more like a jigsaw. One camera shows a route. A phone places devices near each other. A payment records a time. A witness remembers a jacket. A number plate appears on another system. DNA or fingerprints connect an object to a person.

No single tool catches everyone, and technology is not infallible. Cameras can be unclear, DNA can be transferred, plates can be cloned and facial recognition can produce possible matches rather than proof. Investigators must test evidence fairly. But the belief that one mask or deleted message makes a person invisible is dangerously unrealistic.

Police checks at the roadside

Police may use breath tests where the legal conditions are met and may use approved roadside drug-screening devices, sometimes called drug wipes, to test saliva for specified drugs. Positive screening can lead to further evidential procedures. Vehicles can also be checked for insurance, tax, theft reports and links to investigations.

Identification in minutes

Some forces use mobile fingerprint devices to check identity against authorised databases when legal grounds exist. This is not the same as taking everybody's fingerprints at random, and use is governed by police powers and policy. The important point is that giving a false name may be tested much faster than many people expect.

The odds change over time

A case does not always end because nobody is arrested that night. Evidence may be reviewed days, months or years later. A new witness, improved image, recovered phone or later biometric match can reopen the picture.

Stop and Think

1. Which traces would an ordinary journey create?
2. Why is “they did not catch me immediately” a dangerous conclusion?

Chapter 6

Cameras Are Everywhere

Public streets, buses, shops, stations, doorbells, homes and vehicles may all create images. Police can lawfully obtain relevant footage during an investigation. A person may avoid one camera and appear on the next without knowing it exists.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition, usually called ANPR, reads vehicle registration marks and compares them with information of policing interest. It can help establish where and when a vehicle travelled. A stolen or cloned plate is not a magic shield: the vehicle itself, its route, occupants, make, colour, damage and surrounding cameras may reveal inconsistencies.

Speed and traffic cameras

Speed cameras and other road systems create time-and-place records. Even when a camera was installed for traffic enforcement rather than a criminal investigation, relevant lawful evidence may help reconstruct a journey.

Facial recognition and AI

Police facial-recognition systems compare facial images and generate possible matches for trained officers to consider. They do not make guilt automatic, and their use raises important accuracy, proportionality and privacy questions. Yet improved image analysis means it is unwise to assume that a hood, cap or brief appearance makes someone unidentifiable.

AI does not make crime impossible, but it is making large amounts of video and data easier to search. Human investigators still need lawful grounds and supporting evidence. The realistic message is not “the computer always knows.” It is “you cannot know which small clue will connect you.”

Communities provide evidence

Residents and businesses increasingly share doorbell footage, dashcam recordings and information about repeated offending. People may stay silent when they feel unsafe, but confidential reporting routes and stronger local cooperation can provide investigators with evidence an offender never noticed.

Stop and Think

1. How many cameras might record a short trip to a town centre?
2. Why might a cloned plate still fail to protect the driver?

Chapter 7

Your Phone Knows Where You Were

A smartphone is a diary written automatically. Depending on settings, services and lawful access, it may contain calls, contacts, messages, photographs, videos, timestamps, app activity, searches, Wi-Fi connections and location-related information.

Deleting something from the screen does not guarantee that every copy has vanished. Data may remain in backups, another participant's phone, a service provider's records or extracted device information. A disappearing message can still be photographed or forwarded.

People connect devices

Investigators may look at patterns: which phones travelled together, who contacted whom before and after an incident, and whether online claims match physical evidence. A message alone may be ambiguous, but combined with camera footage, payments and witnesses it may become significant.

Do not destroy evidence

If an investigation begins, attempting to destroy a phone, intimidate a witness or invent a false story can create further suspicion and possible offences. A young person should ask for a solicitor and use their legal rights rather than trying to outsmart an investigation.

Stop and Think

1. What information does your phone create without you typing it?
2. Who else may possess a copy of a message?

Chapter 8

The Evidence You Cannot See

People constantly leave and collect tiny materials. Fingerprints, blood, saliva, hairs, fibres, glass, soil and skin cells may connect people, objects and places. DNA can be extremely powerful, but it is not a magical answer. Scientists and courts consider how material may have arrived, whether contamination is possible and what the result actually proves.

What happens after arrest

For a recordable offence in England and Wales, police may have powers to take fingerprints, a custody photograph and a non-intimate DNA sample without consent. Whether fingerprints and DNA profiles are later retained depends on the outcome, offence, age and legal rules. An arrest does not automatically mean every biometric record is kept forever.

Where a person is convicted of a recordable offence, biometric material may be retained under the statutory rules. For children and first convictions for some less serious offences, time limits and exceptions can apply. This is more complicated than “everything is wiped at 18” and more complicated than “everything is kept forever.”

A later match

If a retained profile lawfully matches material from another crime scene, police may investigate that connection. A match is not the end of the inquiry: investigators still need context, reliability and evidence about how the material came to be there. But it can bring an old or unknown offence back into focus.

Accuracy matters

This book will never promise that police will knock on a door within hours. Laboratory work, database processes and investigation take different lengths of time. The honest warning is stronger: a trace can remain after the person has left and may be discovered long after they believed the danger had passed.

Stop and Think

1. Why is “I wore gloves” not a complete plan?
2. What is the difference between a forensic match and proof of the whole offence?

Chapter 9

The Stolen Car That Changed Everything

A stolen vehicle can feel like excitement, status or a quick way home. It is actually a fast-moving risk involving the driver, passengers, pedestrians and every other road user. An inexperienced or frightened driver may travel too quickly, ignore signals or panic when police appear.

A passenger may think, “I am not driving, so this is not my problem.” Their legal position depends on the facts, but they can still be injured, killed, arrested or investigated. Friends may encourage the driver until a collision occurs, then run away and leave somebody bleeding.

A death was not the plan

Nobody needs to intend a death for a family to lose someone. Dangerous driving and other driving offences can lead to serious sentences. The exact charge depends on evidence including the manner of driving, knowledge, vehicle and outcome.

An electric bike or motorcycle can also be dangerous when illegally modified, used without required insurance or ridden recklessly. Speed reduces the time available to correct a mistake.

Stop before the engine starts

The safest moment to leave is before entering the vehicle. Do not accept “just one ride.” Call home, use public transport, walk to a safe place or contact the police if a vehicle has been taken.

Stop and Think

1. Would you enter a vehicle if you knew it was stolen?
2. What could a passenger do before the journey begins?

Chapter 10

Carrying a Knife Does Not Make You Safer

Some young people carry a knife because they are afraid. They may believe it will frighten attackers or provide protection. Carrying it can instead make a confrontation more dangerous. It can be taken and used against the carrier, produced in panic or used during an argument that would otherwise have ended with words or bruises.

A knife does not know who brought it. Once it is present, everybody is closer to a permanent injury or death.

Possession has consequences

In England and Wales, possessing a knife or offensive weapon in public without lawful authority or reasonable excuse can be a criminal offence. Schools have additional protections. Sentences depend on age, circumstances, previous offences and the weapon, but young people should not assume that being under 18 removes the risk of custody.

Real protection

Plan safe routes, stay with trusted people, leave escalating situations, tell adults about threats and report weapons. If someone produces a knife, create distance, do not try to disarm them and call 999 when safe.

Stop and Think

1. Does carrying a knife reduce danger or introduce it?
2. Who could help if you are carrying because of a real threat?

Chapter 11

The Package That Was Not Yours

County-lines and local drug networks may use children to move drugs, cash, phones or weapons. Recruitment can involve gifts and friendship before debt and threats appear. A young person may be sent away from home, placed in unfamiliar accommodation or ordered to take risks for people who remain out of sight.

The organiser may say, “You did not know what was in it.” Courts examine the evidence, and knowledge or intent can be disputed, but repeating that sentence is not a guaranteed escape. Messages, previous journeys, payment and behaviour may all be examined.

Exploitation and responsibility

A child can be exploited and still need legal advice about alleged offending. Safeguarding and criminal justice can overlap. Recognising exploitation does not mean ignoring harm to communities; it means identifying the adults and networks controlling children and helping the child leave safely.

Signs for families

Warning signs can include unexplained money, multiple phones, unexplained travel, going missing, new older associates, fearfulness, injuries or sudden secrecy. None proves crime by itself. Calm questions and early safeguarding help are more useful than immediate accusations.

Stop and Think

1. Why does the organiser stay away from the package?
2. What signs might show that a friend is being exploited?

Chapter 12

From Big Fish to Small Fish

A young person may have a reputation in one school, estate or friendship group. Custody places them among people with very different histories, vulnerabilities and levels of violence. The reputation that felt protective outside may mean little inside.

Trying to appear fearless can attract tests and conflict. Equally, looking vulnerable can attract bullying. This is not entertainment or a contest. It is a controlled environment where movement, possessions, calls and daily choices are restricted.

Confidence is not immunity

Size, popularity and bravado do not guarantee safety. Staff have safeguarding duties, but violence and intimidation can still occur. The strongest lesson is not that custody makes someone tougher. It is that freedom should never be gambled to discover how tough they are.

Stop and Think

1. What freedoms do you use every day without noticing?
2. Would a street reputation protect someone in custody?

Chapter 13

Behind the Locked Door

Youth custody is intended as a last resort, but it is still custody. Doors are locked. Timetables are imposed. Searches, rules and restrictions replace ordinary privacy. Family contact is limited and visits require planning. Education may continue, but it is not the same as choosing school, college or work from home.

A sentence can mean missing birthdays, funerals, holidays, friendships and important stages of family life. Parents travel to visits, wait for calls and worry about safety. Brothers and sisters answer questions they never expected.

Time moves differently

A sentence described in months can sound short when spoken quickly. Living each day without control over where to go, what to eat or when to see family can feel very different. Release also brings conditions, supervision and the difficult work of rebuilding trust.

Stop and Think

1. Which part of freedom would you miss first?
2. Who outside would experience the sentence with you?

Chapter 14

Violence Bullying and Vulnerability in Custody

Official inspections and surveys have repeatedly raised concerns about safety, violence, restraint, self-harm and time out of cell in parts of the youth-custody system. Experiences vary between establishments and individuals, and statistics change each year. The sources at the end of this book should be checked for the latest position.

Sexual victimisation is especially sensitive and under-reporting can make exact figures difficult to interpret. This book will not use an uncertain percentage simply to frighten readers. The honest point is that custody brings vulnerable children together in a high-pressure environment where bullying, debt, intimidation and assault can occur.

Ask for help

A child in custody who feels unsafe should tell staff, their legal representative, family, advocate or another safeguarding professional. Reporting abuse is not weakness. Parents should record concerns, ask what protective action is being taken and use formal complaints or safeguarding routes when necessary.

Stop and Think

1. Why should uncertain statistics never be exaggerated?
2. Who could a child contact if they felt unsafe in custody?

Chapter 15

How Long Could You Lose

There is no honest chart that can tell a young person exactly what sentence they will receive from the name of an offence alone. Courts consider age, harm, culpability, role, previous findings, plea, personal circumstances and the need to safeguard and rehabilitate children.

Robbery, knife offences, drug supply, serious assault and causing death by dangerous driving can all lead to custody. Less serious cases may result in youth cautions, referral orders, youth rehabilitation orders or other outcomes, depending on the law and facts.

Maximum is not typical

News reports often quote the maximum adult sentence. That is not a prediction for every child. Equally, hearing that another young person avoided custody does not promise the same result. Sentencing guidelines exist to promote consistency while allowing courts to consider the individual case.

The hidden time

Time is also lost before sentence through interviews, bail conditions, court dates, exclusion from places, damaged education and family anxiety. Even a non-custodial order can control where someone goes and what they must do.

Stop and Think

1. Why can two apparently similar offences receive different sentences?
2. What time can be lost even without custody?

Chapter 16

The Sentence Does Not Always End at the Gate

A common myth is that a juvenile record is automatically wiped clean at 18. In England and Wales, turning 18 does not simply erase every police or court record. Different rules govern police information, rehabilitation periods, DBS certificates, filtering and disclosure for particular jobs.

Some convictions and cautions become spent after legally defined periods, which often means they do not need to be disclosed for many ordinary purposes. Certain roles, especially work involving children or vulnerable people, can involve standard or enhanced DBS checks. Some old or minor matters may be filtered; others may still be disclosed under the applicable rules.

Biometrics and police information

Fingerprints and DNA profiles are governed by separate retention law. Conviction for a recordable offence can permit retention, but rules involving children, first convictions and offence seriousness contain detail and exceptions. Custody photographs are governed differently again. “It disappears at 18” is therefore unsafe advice.

Police information is not identical to what an employer sees on a DBS certificate. A record may exist within policing systems even when it is spent or filtered for a particular disclosure purpose.

Work travel and trust

A record can affect applications, professional regulation, visas and travel to some countries. It can also affect personal trust. The impact depends on the offence, destination, job and time passed, so specialist advice may be needed.

A mistake does not make a worthwhile future impossible. People rebuild lives every day. But rebuilding takes effort that would not have been necessary if the decision had been avoided.

Stop and Think

1. What is the difference between a spent conviction and an erased record?
2. Which future jobs might require additional checks?

Chapter 17

Your Victim Has a Family Too

Crime is not only an event in a police report. A stolen bicycle may remove someone's way to work. A burgled home may no longer feel safe. A shop worker threatened with a knife may replay the moment for years. A person assaulted in seconds may need months of treatment.

Victims can experience fear, anger, financial loss, disturbed sleep and changes in behaviour. Their children, partners and parents may also be affected. Returning property or receiving compensation does not always remove that harm.

Seeing the whole person

Calling someone “the victim” can hide their ordinary life. They have relationships, responsibilities and plans. Understanding this is not about humiliation. It is about developing the empathy needed to stop before causing harm and, where appropriate, to take part honestly in restorative work.

Stop and Think

1. How could one theft affect a person beyond the value of the item?
2. What would meaningful responsibility look like?

Chapter 18

When Your Family Serves the Sentence

Parents may blame themselves, lose sleep, miss work and spend money on travel, calls and legal arrangements. Siblings may feel angry, embarrassed, frightened or forgotten. Grandparents may worry without understanding what happened.

The young person may believe, “It is my life.” The consequences rarely stay with one person. A family can love someone deeply while refusing to excuse what they did.

Honesty gives families a chance

Hiding threats, debt or offending may feel protective, but it prevents the family from acting early. Telling the truth can be frightening and may lead to anger, yet it can also unlock legal advice, safeguarding and a safe exit.

Stop and Think

1. Who would receive the first difficult telephone call?
2. What truth would your family rather hear early than too late?

Chapter 19

One Decision A Lifetime Ahead

A teenager may have sixty or more years ahead. During that time they could work in several careers, travel, create a business, form relationships, raise a family, help a community and discover abilities they do not yet know they possess.

An impulsive decision can occupy seconds while its consequences stretch into those future years. This does not mean a mistake destroys every possibility. It means prevention is easier than repair.

Use the ten-minute question

When pressure rises, ask: How will I feel about this in ten minutes, ten days, ten months and ten years? That pause will not solve everything, but it gives the thinking part of the brain time to return.

Stop and Think

1. What would your 25-year-old self want you to do today?
2. Which future would be hardest to give up?

Chapter 20

The Strongest Word Is No

Refusal does not need a speech. “No.” “I am not holding that.” “I am leaving.” “My family tracks my phone.” “I have to be somewhere.” Safety matters more than sounding impressive.

If a direct refusal feels dangerous, delay and move towards help. Use a pre-agreed code word with family. Ask for a collection without explaining everything on the phone. Go into a shop, station or busy public place. Call 999 if danger is immediate.

Choose allies in advance

Make the plan before pressure arrives: three people to call, one safe place, one code word and one excuse that creates time. Good friends help you leave. They do not demand proof of loyalty through danger.

Stop and Think

1. What exact words could you use to refuse?
2. What family code word could mean “collect me now”?

Chapter 21

Already in Trouble It Is Not Too Late

Fear often says, “You have gone too far to ask for help.” That message benefits the person controlling you. The earlier help begins, the more options may exist.

Do not post explanations online, threaten witnesses or destroy evidence. Tell a parent, carer, safeguarding professional or solicitor what has happened. A child arrested in England and Wales has rights in custody, including legal advice and support from an appropriate adult.

Responsibility and hope

Taking responsibility does not mean giving up legal rights or agreeing to something untrue. It means being honest with advisers, facing harm and doing the work needed to change. One offence can have serious consequences, but it does not have to become an identity or a career.

Stop and Think

1. Who is the safest adult to tell first?
2. What might become worse if you wait?

Chapter 22

Become the Real Boss of Your Life

The person who cannot refuse a group is not in control. Real independence means choosing the direction, accepting lawful responsibility and building something that lasts.

Start with a practical plan: identify one ability, one opportunity and one person who can help. That might be an apprenticeship application, training course, sports club, volunteering role, creative project or small business idea.

Replace the reward

If crime promises money, find a route to earnings. If it promises belonging, find a team. If it promises excitement, find challenge. If it promises status, build expertise. Removing risk without replacing the need leaves a space that pressure can fill again.

Stop and Think

1. What reward makes risky behaviour attractive?
2. What lawful activity could provide the same reward?

Chapter 23

Meet Your Young Dragon

Young Dragons gives a young person a ready-made mentor and a safe place to think, explore ideas and turn them into constructive next steps. It can help a young person consider a side hustle, develop a work-from-home idea, build on their personal experience or explore whether a small idea could eventually become a full-time business.

The mentor can help them think about their strengths, who their idea could help, what they might charge, how to test it safely and the practical steps needed to begin. The aim is not to promise instant success. It is to encourage useful skills, confidence, patience and lawful ways to earn money and build a future.

[Click here to visit the Young Dragons page](#)

Young Dragons does not replace parents, teachers, safeguarding services, police, lawyers or mental-health professionals.

A young person might discuss work, confidence, a business idea, school, friendships or a difficult decision. They can ask questions they feel embarrassed to ask elsewhere. Planning a bank raid is, unfortunately, not allowed.

Good mentoring does not promise secrecy when somebody is at serious risk. Boundaries and safeguarding should be explained clearly from the beginning. Trust grows when people know what will happen with the information they share.

A different kind of reputation

Imagine being known for solving problems, helping people, creating work and keeping your word. That reputation takes longer to build than a photograph, but it has substance behind it. It does not need a cardboard support.

Stop and Think

1. What would you want to ask a mentor?
2. What could you achieve with steady support for one year?

Final Message

This Is Your Life Not a Rehearsal

You do not need to be perfect. You do need to recognise decisions that are too dangerous to test.

The person encouraging you may disappear when police arrive. The crowd may stop watching. The social-media post will move down the feed. Your family, your victim and you will remain with the consequences.

Your life is not a rehearsal. It is happening now. Protect it, use your time wisely and build something real that will bring happiness and last your lifetime.

Sources and Further Information

The links below were correct when this eBook was published. Web pages can be moved, updated or removed after publication.

- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 Code D - [Click here](#)
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 biometric retention provisions - [Click here](#)
- Disclosure and Barring Service filtering guidance - [Click here](#)
- Rehabilitation periods - [Click here](#)
- Sentencing Council guidelines - [Click here](#)
- Youth justice statistics - [Click here](#)
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons children in custody reports - [Click here](#)
- National Crime Agency county lines information - [Click here](#)
- College of Policing automatic number plate recognition guidance - [Click here](#)
- College of Policing facial recognition guidance - [Click here](#)
- Crown Prosecution Service offences against the person guidance - [Click here](#)
- YoungMinds support for young people and parents - [Click here](#)

About My New Future

My New Future aims to make useful AI-supported guidance and practical tools accessible to people who may not consider themselves technical. Its services are designed to help people explore choices, develop ideas and improve their prospects through straightforward support.

[Website: www.mynewfuture.org](http://www.mynewfuture.org)

Your Next Step

A better future is easier to build when you do not have to work everything out alone. My New Future offers practical, supportive tools to help adults and young people turn uncertainty into a clear next step.

Life Coach

Use our Life Coach service to think through a difficult decision, explore goals and create a realistic plan for moving forward.

Explore Life Coach

Young Dragons

Young Dragons gives young people a ready-made mentor for brainstorming, confidence, ideas and positive choices. It is designed to support—not replace—parents, teachers, safeguarding services or professional help.

Meet Young Dragons

Visit www.mynewfuture.org and choose the support that is right for you.