



# Merridale Primary School

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VIRTUAL\_  
DECISIONS:  
KNIVES

Our Ref: LT/JH

Date: Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Dear Year 6 Parents and Carers,

## Violence Reduction Partnership Workshops in conjunction with West Midlands Police

West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership are delivering two workshops - Round Midnight's Virtual\_Decisions: KNIVES and GANGS to our Year 6 pupils on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023. These workshops have been designed for primary age pupils and will help to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need as they grow into adolescence and move onto their secondary schools in September.

KNIVES: This virtual reality film is an interactive *choose-your-own-path* experience that explores the reasons why young people may carry a weapon, and what the consequences of this might be.

GANGS: This virtual reality film is an interactive *choose-your-own-path* experience that explores the reasons why young people may become victims of gang culture, and what the consequences of this might be.

### These experiences are:

- An **age appropriate** experience.
- Aims to educate young people about the dangers of knife crime and gang culture, in an innovative and engaging way.
- Allows a **safe space** for young people to explore the topic, ask questions and gain an understanding in how to make **positive choices**.
- Covers themes of peer pressure; community; the police; and risk-taking behaviour.
- Explores, raises awareness of, and dispels the myths of knife crime and gang culture.
- Looks at the impact knife crime and gang culture can have on young people, families, and the wider communities.
- **The VR film does not show any weapons or scenes of violence and has been written and filmed by professionally trained trauma-informed specialists.**

If you have any questions about these workshops, please contact Mrs Towle at school. We have provided some further information on these workshops on the next page.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L Towle  
Headteacher

## Virtual Decisions

Virtual\_Decisions is a multi-award-winning, interactive virtual reality in education programme. Round Midnight use the science of adolescent decision-making to create immersive virtual reality experiences that tackle gang culture, youth violence and risk-taking behaviour.

The workshops can be tailored to a primary audience (years 5 & 6), a secondary audience (years 7 to 11), young people in the criminal justice system, parents & families, and for training purposes for professionals.

### Our Virtual Decisions Journey

Round Midnight's virtual reality journey began with the creation of **Virtual\_Decisions: GANGS™**, with funding from Innovate UK in 2018. Using a 'choose your own path' VR format, this prototype aimed to help participants analyse critical decision-making processes and explore the potential consequences of their actions, particularly around the subject of gangs, grooming, peer pressure, and criminal exploitation.

The success of Virtual\_Decisions: GANGS led to **West Midlands Police and the Home Office** funding the research, development, delivery, and production of a brand new virtual reality film **Virtual\_Decisions: KNIVES™**. This film deals with the specifics of why young people carry weapons and the consequences of that. Target group research was carried out with 500+ young people in schools and youth clubs via workshops, creative consultations and questionnaires. Further consultation and research with the police was conducted to ensure all information about knife crime and the law was correct.

The findings were used by **Dr Stephanie Burnett-Heyes of The University of Birmingham's School of Psychology**. Dr Burnett-Heyes, a specialist in the adolescent brain, worked with Round Midnight to create a relevant and impactful script, ensuring characters' decisions and actions were authentic.

Virtual\_Decisions: KNIVES was filmed with a cast of talented young actors and a dedicated professional crew in April 2021. The programme was then trialled in schools and facilities across Birmingham by an expert group of facilitators. Both the film and subsequent workshop aim to open a dialogue with young people regarding the current culture that surrounds knife crime.

### Virtual Decisions: GANGS™

In September 2018, Round Midnight, alongside a digital production company, created an innovative and groundbreaking VR in Education programme **Virtual\_Decisions: GANGS**. This early intervention virtual reality programme for young people explores gang culture, criminal exploitation, and anti-social behaviour.

Since its launch in April 2019, Round Midnight's expert facilitators have delivered the Virtual\_Decisions: GANGS programme to over 2500 young people across the UK.

### Virtual Decisions: KNIVES™

**Virtual\_Decisions: KNIVES** was created as a result of the success of Virtual\_Decisions: GANGS and specifically addresses issues around carrying knives and the consequences of that. It is helping to support thousands of young people who are at risk of criminal exploitation.

By wearing a VR headset, each participant is placed in a real-world scenario where they are faced with multiple dilemmas in which they must make a choice. Each choice results in various outcomes, showing that every action has a consequence. The production uses realworld actors aged 13 – 18 to give authenticity to the piece.

Following the immersive 11-minute VR film, a creative arts workshop then explores the issues raised in more depth. Through discussions and drama exercises the young people are able to reflect on their own personal journey within the VR and compare it to that of others, making it a user-led – and user shared – experience.