



IT'S NO JOKE! – PRE PERFORMANCE RESOURCE SHEET

The Comedy School 15 Gloucester Gate, London, NW1 4HG
0207 486 1844 www.thecomedschool.com email@thecomedschool.com



'Our pupils not only enjoyed the experience but really started to consider the important issue... all identified this as the most enjoyable and informative part of the PSHE course' Karen Hayball, Deputy Head of Year, La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School

ABOUT THE COMEDY SCHOOL

The Comedy School was founded in 1998 by Keith Palmer. It is the only arts organisation of its kind in the UK using comedy to stimulate personal creativity, encourage social skills and improve literacy.

"We take serious issues and try to make them accessible to the masses. We try to make our work invoke responses and get young people to question their behaviour. We aim to give and impart information in an interesting and non-threatening manner.

Why use comedy?

If you think about how humour works – if you're laughing, you're listening and, if you're listening, that's when the education process can start."

Keith Palmer, Director

ABOUT IT'S NO JOKE!

It's No Joke! is a fast paced high energy play that uses comedy to address the issues of anti-social behaviour and weapons related crime.

Gerri (the sheep), Danni (the groovy one), and Rufus (the one with style), are three mates who spend a lot of time hanging out together. A lively succession of intercutting scenes show the impact on the young people of living in a world dominated by crime and violence. Comedy coppers PC Romeo and PC Juliet punctuate the scenes with routines that provide the legal framework – which isn't funny, and isn't a joke, because it's the law.

Keith Palmer and Charlie McGuire co-wrote the original show. The research period included extensive background reading in books and newspapers and consulting with the police and young people. They then spent a three week devising and rehearsal period with the cast of three. The play first toured to schools and pupil referral units throughout Camden. In 2005 they formed a partnership with The Metropolitan Police to further develop the play and toured to Haringey, Croydon and Camden again, as part of Operation Blunt. In November 2005 they were invited by Richard Taylor to perform at The Barbican centre as part of The Damilola Taylor Trust Fifth Anniversary Conference. Further tours have continued in 2006/7 & 2008. References from people who have seen *It's No Joke!* can be provided on request.

'I thought the show was absolutely fantastic. Very well scripted and very relevant to young people.'

Monique Anderson ISSP Coordinator

'The It's No Joke! Programme was very well received by schools throughout the Borough. What made it particularly welcome was the way it tackled such a topical and important issue in such a lively manner. The project made the Year 9 pupils (13/14 year olds) aware of several very important points of law as well as addressing the potential outcomes of carrying a knife.'

Inspector Robert Barnes, Hampstead Police Station



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Before your pupils see the performance of *It's No Joke!* you should use the information on the front of this sheet to:

- Explain who The Comedy School are

Explain what participants are about to see

Give a brief synopsis of the play

- Introduce the main characters in *It's No Joke!*

Below are a series of activities you may also consider using with your class before they see the show. You can use them on their own or as a complete 50 minute lesson.

Activity 1 – 15 mins (30 mins if debate option is chosen)

Brainstorm on to the board a list of reasons young people may carry a knife or an offensive weapon. Consider - boredom, peer-pressure, self-protection, fashion/ street cred, to look hard, bullying, low self-esteem.

Use the following statement to lead open group discussion.
(Depending on the size of your group you could use the statement to have a formal debate)

Discussion:

'Young people wouldn't become involved in knife crime if there wasn't so much violence and crime on the television and in DVD games'

An offensive weapon,
means any article
made or adapted for
causing injury, or
intended to cause
injury.

Of the crimes
committed by young
people, carrying a
knife was the most
common offence
among children
excluded from school
(62%) – according to
a survey by the
Youth Justice Board.

Activity 2 (30 mins)

Revisit the list of words from step one in activity one above.

Using another coloured pen, brainstorm round the list of words some of the consequences of carrying a knife or an offensive weapon. It will be important to guide participants into thinking about emotional and social consequences and not just physical. (i.e. try to move away from just getting answers such as 'death', 'you'll get cut' etc.)

Divide participants into about five groups.

Explain that Kamal is 14 years old and lives with his parents, older brother Owen (17) and younger sister Lisa (8). He has just started hanging out with a new gang. To be part of the gang he has to buy a knife.

Give each group one of the following characters/ group of people – Kamal's parents, Kamal's brother Owen, Kamal's sister Lisa, Kamal's teachers, Kamal's neighbourhood, Kamal, Kamal's gang, the Police, the local hospital.

In their groups participants discuss the possible consequences Kamal's decision to carry a knife could have on the character or group of people.

They then make a frozen image to represent one of these consequences and show these back to the whole group.

Use the frozen images to discuss the consequences on the groups involved and explore the emotions and feelings of the individuals involved.

Closing Activity – 5 mins

Close either or both activities by highlighting that all the **reasons** listed and any influence the media may have are just **pressures**. Every **individual** makes a choice of how to respond to these pressures. The decision to carry a knife, therefore, is an individual's **free choice**. Every decision and choice has many **consequences** for the individual who makes that choice and for the wider community. The participants should watch *It's No Joke!* and think about the reasons behind each of the central characters actions and decisions and decide if they make the right choices.

Workshops and Resource Material

The Comedy School can provide
Tailor made workshops to meet your
specific needs.

Some of the issues explored include:

- Peer pressure
- The law
- Impact and consequences of knife crime
- What is an Offensive weapon
- Stop and Search – What happens?
What should you do?

Also available:

Talks with MET police officers
Talks with ex offenders