

BRITISH LAWS:

In the main the UK is a very safe place to live where the laws are upheld. Certainly it is one of the few countries in the world where the police do not usually carry guns. But, like every country, we have some problems. The following information may be helpful.

CRIMINAL and CIVIL LAW – and WHAT the POLICE DO:

The law in England is split into two parts, civil law and criminal law.

- CIVIL LAW covers problems like unpaid debts and housing disputes. You can get advice on civil law from Citizens Advice Bureau or solicitors. They can also assist with problems such as anti-social behaviour and juvenile nuisance.
- CRIMINAL LAW covers offences such as burglaries, assaults, theft and criminal damage. The police only deal with criminal law.

Most areas also have police community support officers (PCSOs) who do not have the full powers of a police officer but who will still help you.

PREVENTING and REPORTING CRIMES:

As well as calling 999 or 112 in an emergency, and then asking for the police, you are also call Crimestoppers free on 0800 555 111 or contact them via www.crimestoppers.uk.org

IF YOU are in TROUBLE with the POLICE:

If you are arrested and charged with an offence it is important that you get legal advice. You may need a representative to help you in court. The police will give you further information about this and you can have some legal advice free of charge.

RACIAL, XENOPHOBIC and HOMOPHOBIC CRIMES:

If someone is attacked, or shouted at, or property is damaged because of that person's race, religion, nationality, age, disability, looks, language or sexual orientation, this is a 'hate' incident. The police need you to report this. It is not acceptable in this country, and the police will help to find and punish people who carry out hate crimes. The Equality and Human Rights Commission also deal with racial matters. Contact them on 0845 604 6610 or via www.equalityhumanrights.com

If you become a victim of any crime please report this to the police. The matter will be investigated particularly in cases of victimization where you may have been seen to be a member of a minority group. As well as patrol officers, each neighbourhood has a designated police officer. They are able to offer you any help or advice you need. Do not take the law into your own hands because you may end up getting yourself into trouble or hurt.

WEAPONS CRIMES:

You cannot carry weapons in a public place, not even for personal protection. This includes guns and knives as well as other weapons. Pocket knives must have a blade less than 3 inches (7.5cm) and any weapon where the blade locks in place is not permitted, whatever the blade length. Pepper spray/CS gas is classed as a firearm in the UK and cannot be legally carried by members of the public. There is now an automatic 5 year prison sentence for anyone convicted of carrying a gun (or asking a young person to carry it for them).

DRINK:

It is illegal to drink alcohol in a pub before you are 18. There are also serious penalties for any adult who buys alcohol to give to a young person, or who gives drink to a young person – even at home. Anybody drinking and driving faces a long ban and a possible prison sentence.

SEX – The AGE of CONSENT:

It is illegal to have sex before you are 16, or with someone who is under 16. It doesn't matter what the young person wants or says because they have no legal right to give consent. It is illegal to have sex with someone who doesn't want to have sex with you. These crimes are called rape, and both are major crimes. Your partner cannot force you to have sex with them if you don't want to, even in your own home. This is still rape.

SEX – The INTERNET:

It is totally illegal to download child pornography from the Internet or to attempt to meet a child for sex. See www.ceop.gov.uk for the British agency that works with the police of many countries to catch offenders.

DRUGS:

It is illegal to take or deal in illegal drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana and ecstasy. The penalties for dealing in drugs can be very high, including not only lengthy imprisonment but also seizure of possessions and money in bank accounts. Anybody using drugs and driving faces a long ban and a possible prison sentence.

BRIBERY:

It is illegal to try to bribe a police officer. And, in the UK, because the police force is very professional, most attempts at bribery will be reported with serious consequences.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and ABUSE:

If a woman, man or child is attacked by a relative, a partner or ex-partner, this is called 'domestic abuse' or 'domestic violence'. Neither is acceptable in the UK. Anybody who feels under threat, or is abused in their own home, can contact the police in emergency. There are also organizations including Victim Support and women's refuges which operate 24hour helplines. They give emotional support and legal advice to people suffering domestic abuse. They also offer counseling (talking to both parties to find a solution).

Such abuse can also include misuse of the money, assets or belongings of another person.

The women's refuges have places for women (and any children) to go to if they have to leave home because of domestic abuse. The local authorities and the Department for Adult Social Care can also provide houses for victims. Contact the Women's Aid National Helpline with a free call to 0808 2000 247.

STOP and SEARCH:

Police officers can stop and talk to you at any time, but they should only search you if they suspect you are carrying drugs, weapons, stolen property or anything that could be used to commit a crime. Before searching you they must normally tell you their name, the station they work at, why they chose you and what they are looking for. A record will be made of the search.

VICTIMS of CRIME:

If you are the victim of crime the police will ask you to make a statement. This will be taken to a lawyer who will consider if anyone should be charged with a criminal offence. You may have to attend court. If so then you will be given advice, help and an interpreter if you need one. To learn more about the Crown Prosecution Service go to the website at www.cps.gov.uk