

## Searching of children and young persons

Stop and search is a legitimate power that is used by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to protect Londoners, tackle crime and keep our streets safe.

Children and young persons are amongst the most vulnerable members of society and officers are required to consider the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Children Act 2004 for every stop and search encounter involving a child or young person.

The age of criminal responsibility is 10 years' old, however, police have powers to stop and search persons of any age and there is no general requirement for the presence of an appropriate adult. Searches must be based on reasonable grounds for suspicion that the person has a particular article in their possession, except when officers are authorised under section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Specific guidance is provided to officers regarding stopping and searching of children and young persons, the guidance includes an awareness of vulnerability and promotes a tolerant and patient approach.

In situations where a child over 10 years' old or a young person is searched and illegal items are found, officers have to be aware of the impact of their stop and search but the child or young person will not automatically be treated as a victim.

In situations where a child under 10 is searched and illegal items are found in their possession, the child should be considered as an exploited victim rather than an offender. An appropriate assessment and action must be put in place as required. The parent/guardian must be notified when a child under 10 is stopped and searched.

Removing illegal articles from children under 10 not only detects crime, it enables officers to ensure the safety and protection of those children and the wider community.

The stop and search of individuals under 10 represents only 0.003% of total MPS stop and search activity. Children are far more likely to be stopped and held to account which is much less intrusive and has the potential benefit of safeguarding children.