



SINCE 9/11

ANSWERING THE
QUESTIONS

After a Terror Attack: School Response & Supporting Students

SINCE 9/11 Advice & Guidance for Teachers

General Guidance

Whenever a terrorist incident or major emergency takes place, the diverse members of a school community will react in different ways. An assembly or tutor time session is an effective way to bring students and adults together so that they can reflect on the events that have taken place, as well as remember the values that bind them together in a school community. However, this type of standalone activity should always be supplemented by the provision of other opportunities to share thoughts and feelings about the events which have taken place. This might be through subsequent assemblies or tutor time sessions, or in other areas of the curriculum.

"At this very sad and tragic time after an attack on our free society, it is important that we do not let our anger turn to hate. We must be open to discuss our feelings, feel safe to do so and understand that with every event there will always be different feelings, perceptions and interpretations, by standing together we can unite to support each other."

Kamal Hanif OBE

Executive Principal of Waverley Education Foundation

Trustee of SINCE 9/11

Although the first instinct of an education professional is to protect and shield students from upsetting and frightening events, secondary age students need a different approach. The students will readily have access to information about the events through the media, particularly through social media. The media may be speculating about the incident, with rolling 24-hour coverage, and people on social media may spread rumours or prejudice.

A sensible response from the school is to provide neutral and balanced information about the essential known facts, without sensationalising or sharing distressing details.

Once students have access to basic facts, educators can ask them if there is anything more they want to know, ensuring that they have access to the information they need. They can also open-up the discussion by allowing students to share thoughts and feelings about the events in a safe and supportive environment.

Reactions After A Frightening Event

Advice from Andrew Sutcliffe, Educational Psychologist;

In the aftermath of hearing about scary or stressful events in the world, including violence and terrorist attacks, young people face the challenging task of trying to understand what has happened. This can trigger feelings such as anger, sadness, guilt and confusion as well as several other reactions, including:

- Difficulty sleeping, having nightmares.
- Memories or images of the event popping into the mind unexpectedly.
- Avoiding anything that might remind them of the event, not wanting to think or talk about it.
- Getting angry or upset more easily.
- Being more alert, agitated and aware of potential danger.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Showing dependence or clinginess to parents, carers or adults in school.
- Experiencing physical complaints, such as stomach aches or headaches.

Although upsetting, these reactions are quite normal, even for a while after any immediate danger of a frightening event has passed. Young people typically worry less if they understand that their reactions are normal and have a way to make sense of them.

Students might wish to discuss the causes and consequences of the events to try to make sense of the events. Educators shouldn't be too concerned with having 'perfect' answers to these questions. Allow students to air their questions and discuss them together, evaluating the information which you already know and finding out further information when necessary.

There is no clear-cut answer to why terrorism happens, nor what the short-term and long-term consequences are, and educators should share this with students. It is difficult for many people to understand why someone would choose to harm another in this way, and educators shouldn't feel like they must appear to understand it. It is more important to reassure students that these types of events are extremely rare and the likelihood of being caught up in an incident is very small.

It is also helpful to remind students that our government and security services work extremely hard to keep us safe, regularly stopping acts of terrorism and other criminals before they can act.

The Aims of a School Response:

Following a crisis, a traumatic event or a terrorist incident, schools should have the following goals in mind:

Safety and calm – re-establish familiar routines, counter scaremongering, normalise emotional reactions, and teach relaxation skills.

Self and community efficacy – help children and young people regain a sense of control in their lives.

Connectedness – enhance social support through existing groups and group events; coordinate information between home and school.

Hope – encourage a focus on the future and on positive goals.

Andrew Sutcliffe, Educational Psychologist

It is completely understandable that many students will feel angry, as well as an array of other emotions such as disbelief, fear and sorrow. It is important for students to feel that their anger can be understood and expressed in a supportive environment.

However, teachers should be mindful that some students might direct this anger towards certain groups of people, such as a religious group, rather than towards the people who have actually committed the act in question. Looking for someone to blame might make students feel better in the short term, but it can lead to longer term prejudice and engrain stereotyping, so this thinking should be appropriately challenged. These feelings can be managed by discussing them with a trusted adult.

The school should remind all students that the actions of an individual cannot be blamed on a religious or ethnic group, and that this is a form of prejudice. Students should also be encouraged to approach the ongoing media coverage with a critical eye, searching for truth and questioning assumptions. They should also be reminded that watching/consuming too much information about the event can lead to more traumatic thoughts.

Discussing Controversial Issues

Where discussions lead onto discussions about radicalisation and extremism, teachers should ensure that they are familiar with the school's PREVENT strategy and Child Protection Policy. The duty lies with the teacher to follow up on, and report, concerns.

This topic is extremely sensitive, and the issues covered will need to be handled with care. It is important to be mindful that certain groups of students may have encountered hostility due to the media coverage on recent acts of terror. Please ensure that you are also aware of any students who might be refugees or asylum seekers from countries affected by terrorism. It is always possible that someone in the class may have suffered a loss of a family member or friend e.g. in the recent attacks in the UK, London 7/7, recent European attacks, the Syrian conflict or fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The teacher/facilitator should remain politically neutral at all times and always present a balanced point of view, considering arguments on each side whilst suggesting students evaluate which arguments are stronger/better supported by evidence.

Please see [Guidance for Teaching Sensitive and Controversial Issues](#) for more information.

Recommended Websites:

[Run, Tell, Hide](#)

Advice from the Police on what young people should do if they are caught up in a terrorist incident.

[Talking about Major Emergencies](#)

Advice from the Red Cross on helping young people to cope with major emergencies.

[Extremism and the Prevent Duty](#)

Resources from Educate Against Hate for teaching about extremism, and guidance for Teachers on the Prevent Duty.

Further Reading:

Yule, W. & Gold, A. (1993). Wise before the event

Trickey, D., Bailie, R. & Serpell, L. (2010). After the event - Supporting children after a frightening event

Further Advice from Educational Psychologist, Andrew Sutcliffe:

More Severe Reactions

Young people who have experienced trauma or losses may show more intense reactions to tragedies or news of terrorism and war. They may need extra support and attention, and their wellbeing should be monitored by staff who know them well.

Where young people are overwhelmed by a preoccupation with war, fighting, or terrorism it can be sign that they are struggling to make sense of what has happened. Similarly, if a young person continues to experience the reactions in Box 2 above for longer than two or three months, their future mental health may be at risk. In these cases, a referral to a mental health service may be appropriate. Staff should discuss this with the school's Educational Psychologist or CAMHS link worker.

Care for Staff

Supporting children and young people in the aftermath of a terrorist incident is a demanding role for school staff, who may be experiencing their own difficult feelings about what has happened. It is a very normal reaction for adults in this role to worry that they are “doing enough” or if they are “doing the right thing”.

Senior staff should promote good self-care for staff and offer emotional and practical support to anyone who is struggling. Local Authority Educational Psychology Services will offer some form of Crisis Support, which often includes individual or group debriefing for school staff who are working hard to support the children and young people in their care.

Flexible Normality

People feel safer when they know what to expect, and a frightening event in the news can trigger worries about what will happen next. Young people are reassured by structure and familiarity, and a predictable routine and schedule can be very supportive of both young people and of the school staff working with them. This means returning to the everyday routines of the school as soon as possible and ensuring as many of their regular activities continue as before.

Some young people will not want to think or talk about a terrorist incident and they will appreciate being about to get back to normal and not having to dwell on what has happened. Returning to their usual timetables enables these young people to cope in a way which suits them.

Other young people, who are finding it harder to take in what has happened, will need opportunities to be with friends, to talk to adults or simply to escape. Support for these young people, which could include a quiet, comfortable room staffed by adults who are skilled listeners, should be made available alongside normal lessons.

Session Plans

Assembly

Time – 15 mins

Slide 1

1) Introduce the assembly by referencing the recent terrorist incident which has prompted it. Some points which you might make are:-

- As a school you wish to come together to reflect of the events, try to come to terms with what has happened and remember stories of people which give us hope in the face of such horror.
- If appropriate give an overview of the known facts about the recent terrorist incident. Do not speculate about what has happened, comment on rumours or coverage in the media. The aim is to outline what we know to be true, at this point in time, and to ensure that students understand that this is what they should focus on.
- If possible, refer to any stories of heroism and bravery which may have already emerged from the recent incident, and use these as a link to the images on Slide 1.

2) Whenever there is a terrorist incident, in amongst the chaos and fear there are always stories of people who have shown extraordinary bravery, compassion and humanity to help and support victims. The three images are (L-R) Tobias Ellwood MP, Jess Haskins and Wayne Marques. Involved in three different terrorist incidents which took place in the UK in 2017, their stories show us that working together in the face of adversity, and confronting the terrible events together is what defines our community. Share each story with the students, highlighting the values they have shown which bind us together and make us stronger as a community.

- **Tobias Ellwood MP – Westminster Bridge attack (22.3.17)**

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/mar/28/tobias-ellwood-commons-mps-westminster-attack>

<https://news.sky.com/story/westminster-terror-attack-minister-tobias-ellwood-battled-to-save-life-of-police-officer-10810914>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40850333>

- **Jess Haskins – Manchester Arena attack (22.5.17)**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5086343/The-nurse-refused-leave-bomb-victim.html>

- **Waynes Marques – London Bridge Attack (3.6.17)**

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/28/policeman-fought-london-bridge-attackers-baton-wayne-marques>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/brave-police-officers-who-rushed-11430766>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-bridge-attack-police-officer-btp-hero-baton-wayne-marques-a7813071.html>

Slide 2 and 3

1) It is important that students understand what we mean by terrorism, as it is used so often in the media and particularly when there has been an incident. Again, students will feel more reassured to know the facts and definitions as this is something tangible which they can understand. If appropriate, ask students to Think/Pair/Share - "What is terrorism? Who can give a definition?" – take selected feedback. Alternatively explain the definition on Slide 3 to students, ensuring they understand the terminology.

2) Show students the definition on Slide 3, if you haven't already. Ask students if the information currently known about the recent incident suggests it is a terrorist attack?

3) Although terrorist incidents are very distressing, making us all worry about our own personal safety and that of loved ones, and they feel like they are happening more often with huge amounts of media coverage, we are very unlikely to be caught up in one. The number of British people killed in acts of terrorism has remained low compared to other countries - with 49 people dying because of terrorism in the UK between 2010 and 2017, which is an average of 7 deaths per year. Put this into perspective for students by highlighting that this is a very small statistic, in comparison to other causes of death in the UK.

Despite this, it is perfectly understandable for people to react more strongly to or to fear terrorism more than other causes of death or injury – our aim should not be to police the reactions of others, but to reassure children and young people about their own personal safety and the safety of loved ones.

Slide 4

1) Explain that at times like this we feel the need to focus on one, simple and easily understood, reason to help us understand the events which have taken place. It is sometimes comforting to identify a reason or group of people to place the blame and responsibility on. However, the real causes of terrorism are hugely complex and difficult to understand. They are also interrelated, which means it is a combination of factors that might lead to a terrorist incident. This means it is unhelpful to focus on a single reason, or on a group of people.

2) Some of the debated causes of terrorism are shown on the slide. Briefly explain each of these reasons to the students, the aim is to show the range of reasons rather than give detail about the reasons.

In a democratic society like the United Kingdom, being unable to affect the change the group wants through peaceful or democratic means is likely because the position falls so far outside of mainstream opinion that it does not have popular support among the public.

Slide 4 (cont.)

However, while the above statement is true of most terrorist groups throughout history, with modern terrorist groups or movements such as al-Qaeda or ISIS for example, the ideology itself sanctions the violence, rather than the violence merely being a means to achieving an objective.

This is an important distinction from only wanting to affect fundamental change to society. Still, the position falls far outside of mainstream public opinion in this country, and around the world. These groups consider Muslims who do not believe in their ideology as legitimate targets of terrorism.

Slide 5

Show the quote on Slide 5. When a terrorist incident takes place, the heroes might be there in person but there are helpers who offer support without even being there – thanks to the power of social media.

Slide 6

Whenever a terrorist incident takes place, social media offers us a place to show our sympathy, solidarity and to offer help. Reference any social media responses which may have been shared about the recent terrorist incident. Remind students that school is a safe place, where they can talk about their concerns and worries. They are also physically safe and shouldn't feel anxious about their personal wellbeing. If appropriate, reference the school values or mission – how do these reflect the values which give the school strength as a community to face the distressing events?

Slide 7

Share the information on Slide 7, so that students know where to go if they have concerns. The police/101 should only be contacted if the students have concern about crime/ safety.

Tutor Time Activity

Time – 15 - 30mins

Slide 1

1) Introduce the session by referencing the recent terrorist incident which has prompted it. Some points which you might make are:-

- As a school you wish to come together to reflect of the events, try to come to terms with what has happened and remember stories of people which give us hope in the face of such horror.
- If appropriate give an overview of the known facts about the recent terrorist incident. Do not speculate about what has happened, comment on rumours or coverage in the media. The aim is to outline what we know to be true, at this point in time, and to ensure that students understand that this is what they should focus on.
- If possible, refer to any stories of heroism and bravery which may have already emerged from the recent incident, and use these as a link to the images on Slide 1.

2) Allow students to share their thoughts and feelings about the recent incident in small groups, and then as a whole class. Allow students to share any thoughts or feelings, the facilitator should always bring students back to known facts so that they can distinguish between speculation and rumour (which is more distressing and shouldn't be focussed on). Give students slips of paper to write down any anonymous thoughts, feelings or fears which you can address at the end of the session.

3) Remind students that whenever there is a terrorist incident, in amongst the chaos and fear there are always stories of people who have shown extraordinary bravery, compassion and humanity to help and support victims. The three images are (L-R) Tobias Ellwood MP, Jess Haskins and Wayne Marques. Involved in three different terrorist incidents which took place in the UK in 2017, their stories show us that working together in the face of adversity, and confronting the terrible events together is what defines our community. Share each story with the students, highlighting the values they have shown which bind us together and make us stronger as a community.

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- Jess Haskins – Manchester Arena attack (22.5.17)

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- Waynes Marques – London Bridge Attack (3.6.17)

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/28/policeman-fought-london-bridge-attackers-baton-wayne-marques>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/brave-police-officers-who-rushed-11430766>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-bridge-attack-police-officer-btp-hero-baton-wayne-marques-a7813071.html>

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2) Show students the definition on Slide 3, if you haven't already. Ask students if the information currently known about the recent incident suggest it is a terrorist attack?

3) Although terrorist incidents are very distressing, making us all worry about our own personal safety and that of loved ones, and they feel like they are happening more often with huge amounts of media coverage, we are very unlikely to be caught up in one. The number of British people killed in acts of terrorism has remained low compared to some other countries - with 49 people dying because of terrorism in the UK between 2010 and 2017. The purpose of sharing this information is to reassure the students, not to undermine the fact that they may be genuinely scared.

Slide 4

1) Explain that at times like this we feel the need to focus on one, simple and easily understood, reason to help us understand the events which have taken place. It is sometimes comforting to identify a reason or group of people to place the blame and responsibility on. However, the real causes of terrorism are hugely complex and highly contentious, even among terrorism experts. They are also interrelated, which means it is a combination of factors that might lead to a terrorist incident. This means that it can be unhelpful to focus on a single reason, or on a group of people.

At this stage it can also be more helpful to focus on how we can pay tribute to the victims and help those affected.

2) Some of the causes of terrorism are shown on the slide. Briefly explain each of these reasons to the students, the aim is to show the range of reasons rather than give detail about the reasons.

Slide 5 & 6

1) Show the quote on Slide 5. When a terrorist incident takes place, the heroes might be there in person but there are helpers who offer support without even being there – thanks to the power of social media.

2) Show Slide 6. Whenever a terrorist incident takes place, social media offers us a place to show our sympathy, solidarity and to offer help. Reference any social media responses which may have been shared about the recent terrorist incident. Remind students that school is a safe place, where they can talk about their concerns and worries. They are also physically safe and shouldn't feel anxious about their personal wellbeing. If appropriate, reference the school values or mission – how do these reflect the values which give the school strength as a community to face the distressing events?

3) If appropriate, asks students to design their own social media hashtag for the recent terrorist incident and present them to the class, explaining what values there are portraying.

Slide 7

1) Share the information on Slide 7, so that students know where to go if they have concerns.

2) Remind students that they are a huge support to each other, sharing worries and discussing concerns. Ask students to share ideas for how they can offer support to each other, and signs that might indicate someone is feeling anxious or depressed. Students should always speak to a teacher if they think a friend needs extra support or seems anxious or depressed.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) Enquiry Plan

60 minutes

If you have been trained to deliver P4C, and your students are familiar with the process, a P4C enquiry may be a supportive way to reflect on those who help, and stand together, when terrorist incidents take place.

Warm Up

Give students two pieces of paper/post it notes. Ask each student to write down one easy to answer question and one hard to answer question. These should be on separate pieces of paper. You may wish students to write questions about the incident or keep it open. Students should move around the room trying to answer each other's questions. Students can choose if they answer an 'easy' or 'hard' question. Once a question has been answered, students swap that question and move on another person.

Stimulus

Choose one of the images on ppt slides 8 – 10 (or a similar image which shows helpers or communities standing firm in the face of terrorism. Students should be given individual thinking time, and then generate concepts linked to the image in pairs/groups.

Question-making and choosing

Students work together to create a philosophical question about concepts which they are interested in. Each group submits a question to the class vote, and one question is chosen for the enquiry.

Enquiry

A philosophical enquiry is facilitated by the teacher.

Last thoughts

All students summarise their final thoughts using three words only, which can be a sentence or three unconnected words.

Review

The Community of Enquiry reviews their progress against the 4C's