

## Introduction

This leaflet helps adults in school think about the needs of vulnerable children. It suggests a number of approaches to planning a response.

## Who might be vulnerable?

Children who:

Have suffered a personal loss from or had first hand exposure to terrorism, violence or military actions. This includes refugees and asylum seekers.

Live in the proximity to past traumatic events or potential target areas.

Have family members currently living in or deployed in areas of conflict.

Have parents who served in the armed forces in past military conflicts.

Have parents of different ethnic, religious or cultural groups who feel threatened by intolerance or racism.

Have existing social, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Are young or developmentally young.

Are in public care, including unaccompanied minors.

## Make your school a 'Haven of Normality'.

Children find the normal routines of school reassuring. Be prepared for some children's behaviour to be out of character for a while.

**Remain calm and reassuring** as children, especially young children, will take their cues from you. Acknowledge that the media coverage is unnerving but the likelihood is that you and your children/students will be OK.

**Try to keep to the standards** that you would normally expect. Keeping to a regular routine can be reassuring and promotes physical health. Encourage children to keep up with schoolwork and extracurricular activities but make allowances if they seem to be becoming overwhelmed.

## School Response Planning

**Develop an inclusion plan** for any children joining your school following casualties or displacements as a result of a conflict overseas. Such children are often repatriated without the opportunity to say goodbye to friends and have to deal with joining a new school as well as very altered family circumstances or bereavement.

**Regularly update your school emergency plan** and telephone tree. Ensure that the identified people know their roles in case of an incident affecting your school. You will probably by now have someone in your school who has received training on managing sad events and dealing with grief and loss. You may need to also discuss how

you would 'give bad news' if you were in the position of being asked to do this.

**Acknowledge your own feelings** and take time to talk over any issues that are worrying you with a colleague or friend. Sharing feelings with others makes us feel more connected and secure.

**Emphasise people's resilience** by focussing on children's achievements and competencies in terms of managing their daily life and other difficult times. Help them identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset.

**Be optimistic.** People who coped best after September 11th were comfortable expressing strong emotions, surrounded by caring family and friends, kept a positive view of the future, and utilised problem-solving skills.

**Do something positive with your children/students to help others in need.** Making a positive contribution to your community helps people feel more in control and builds a stronger sense of connection.

## Taunts, Bullying and Racial Incidents

Ensure your policy is up to date and includes effective ways of dealing with bullying and racial incidents. Young and developmentally young children do not understand the finality of death and this can lead to seemingly heartless comments.

This behaviour is best handled by collecting a small group together which includes some of the perpetrators and explaining to them that such comments are very unkind and cannot be tolerated. Without blaming any individuals you ask them for some ideas as to how they could help to stop this happening.

Accept the suggestions from the group and ask them to keep you informed as to how things improve. Meet the group regularly to monitor the situation and check that you are getting the message across.

This message of zero tolerance could be reinforced at assemblies. Getting those who are responsible for taunts involved in the solution has been found to be far more effective than sanctions. Punishments usually serve to foster even greater resentment.

**Monitor all instances of racial harassment and use the racial incident reporting procedure.**

# How to Talk to Children about Conflict or Terrorism

## A Summary of Things to Do

All of us prefer to avoid talking to children about unpleasant events, especially if we are not sure how we feel ourselves. But, if we expect children and adolescents to learn effective ways to cope with distress, we must as adults open up the opportunities to talk with them. Here are some ideas for adults to use when talking to children about tragic events.

Assume children may have heard about events. Disasters and tragedies are media saturated, with children exposed to them almost as soon as they happen.

Be accessible and approachable. Listen to what children have to say about the event. This gives you the chance to clear up misunderstandings and identify the support that they need. Be ready to listen!

Encourage using creative ways to express feelings, e.g. art and music. If they want to draw pictures and destroy them, that's okay. If they want to send them, that's okay too. Be flexible.

Help young children feel safe. Realistically reassure them. You can try to protect them but you can't always keep bad things from happening to children. Identify the difference between the possibility of danger and the probability of danger.

Look for feelings beyond fear and anxiety. Encourage the development of caring and empathy by pointing it out when you see it occurring.

Help children find some course of action. Children may want to write a letter and adolescents may want to become involved in an organisation committed to prevention of such events. Children have great ideas!

Take action yourself. Get involved in working to make a difference. Children sense this and feel more hopeful when you do.

## Giving Bad News

Occasionally there are circumstances requiring the school to inform a child of bad news. This information is best given as soon as possible in a clear, direct and unambiguous way.

Two adults should be with the child, one in a support role and the other to give the bad news. Once the information is given and the child's pain has been acknowledged, that adult should withdraw and leave the child with the supporting adult.

The supporting adult should be known to the child and should remain with the child until a parent or relative or carer arrives. Offer sympathy and support in expressing their feelings, but accept that the child is likely to be in shock and may not behave as you would expect.

If you need additional help or support with managing the situation please contact one of the numbers below.

Some events are media saturated and families may engage in virtual 24 hour TV watching. This is likely to increase the child's sensitivity to any developing events, creating thoughts that it is happening to them. Be aware that such children will have difficulties concentrating and may be experiencing poor sleep or nightmares. Calm school/class management and normal routines will help.

#### Mobile phones

Be aware that children or adults may get information via their mobile phone, which is distressing. Ensure staff are on the lookout for children who are withdrawn or distressed and that you have the pastoral arrangements to check that they are all right.

A Haven of Normality:

## School

Advice for adults in school

#### For more information/advice contact:

Andy Heather	County Crisis Support Co-ordinator Kroner House, Ashford. Tel: 01233 898650
West Kent:	Jan Passmore 01732 225028 RajVinder Singh Gill 01732 225028
East Kent:	Ann Yandell 01227 772992 Ben Hayes 01303 224392

