

# Briefing for schools: discussing terror attacks with pupils

**September 2017**

When terrorist attacks happen it can be confusing and frightening for children and they may have a lot of questions.

School staff are in a good position to help children to process what has happened, separate speculation and rumour from fact and offer reassurance. It is important for schools to acknowledge what has happened and be proactive in discussing the issue.

In the aftermath of an attack schools may wish to have special assemblies, in smaller groups rather than the whole school, to address the incident in an age-appropriate, sensitive way, explaining the facts but leaving out any upsetting details.

This is a good opportunity for schools to encourage a sense of community and support, and explain that in cases of terrorism linked to extremist religious groups, although the act may have seemingly taken place 'in the name of religion' the perpetrators do not represent the religion itself.

Staff need to be mindful that some children may become vulnerable to bullying because of their faith or appearance. During the assembly messages around anti-bullying, tolerance and kindness should be shared.

The person leading the assembly should advise children who are upset or anxious to speak to a member of staff or contact to [Childline](#).

PHSE (England), PDMU (Northern Ireland), and PSE (Wales and Scotland) lessons can offer a safe space for discussions to take place about terror attacks and help children process what has happened and talk about their feelings.

Teachers can introduce the topic by stating the facts around what happened in a sensitive and age-appropriate way and offer reassurances that what has happened is very rare and that since the attack the police are providing extra security. Reminding children to 'look for the helpers' in any news footage they may see can help to remind them of people's kindness and solidarity in times of trouble.

It is important to encourage children to ask questions and answer them honestly.

Young children find the idea of 'bad people' particularly frightening so it is important to try and distinguish the difference between 'bad people' and 'bad events' if possible.

At the beginning of the lesson it is important to set basic ground rules for discussion such as:

- Listening without interruption.
- Respecting other people's views, even when they are different to yours.
- Having the right to 'pass' if you don't wish to comment.

If issues arise about religious stereotyping or generalisation, the lesson can be used to challenge and explore this and the class could talk about what makes a community and the importance of diversity. Children should not be placed in a position where they feel they need to defend their community or faith.

If a child discloses any worrying information, safeguarding policies and procedures should be followed.

The school may wish to set up a fundraising project or event to help victims and their families. This can help children feel focussed and positive and promote kindness and a sense of community and support.

### Useful links

NSPCC Helpline - 0808 800 5000

[Childline](#) – 0800 1111

NSPCC – [advice for parents on supporting children worried about terrorism](#)

PHSE Association - [Framework for discussing a terrorist attack](#)

[Look for the helpers](#) – Fred Rogers

**Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:**

**Tel: 0808 800 5000 | Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) | Twitter: [@NSPCCpro](#)**

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