

Disclaimer

This resource is for educational purposes only and is not intended in any way as advice to be relied upon. As this resource relates to the sensitive topic of terrorist attacks, it should be used at the sole discretion of the parent or care-giver.

How to Talk to Children about Terrorist Attacks

Terrorist attacks are frightening and traumatising, but for parents there is the added worry of what to say to their children. Is it best to talk openly about what has happened, or shield children from the details? With 24-hour news and social media, it can seem impossible to escape from the horrifying details of a terrorist attack, and the temptation can be to turn off and not talk about it. But is this the best way to deal with these events? These suggestions will help you support your family when events like this occur.

DO

- **Take the lead from your child.** Let them tell you if they want to talk. If they don't, respect this for the time being.
- **Give the basic facts honestly.** If you don't tell your child what happened, they may well hear a version on the playground. It is better to give them the basic facts and see what questions arise. However, there is no need to go into details.
- **Plan in time to talk.** Allow time to talk to your child about their concerns.
- **Be honest.** You may be asked, 'Why do people do this?' Be honest and talk about the fact that some people do hurt others, but there are far more people doing good, kind things.
- **Respond to their emotions.** Some children may show little emotion. Others may show worry, sadness or anger. Respond appropriately.
- **Reassure.** Although events like these receive huge amounts of media coverage, they are relatively rare. Reassure your child that life goes on as normal. Say 'Things like this don't happen often,' or 'The police will be making sure security is even better now.'
- **Focus on the response.** Talk about the response of the emergency services and ordinary people to these events - making the area safe, helping injured victims, rushing into danger to give help. Emphasise that there are far more people who want to help others than hurt them.
- **Find out how your child's school is dealing with events, and support this.** Schools will usually respond to terrorist events by giving children the opportunity to talk if they want to. They will also emphasise the sense of community within the school.
- **If your child wants to help or show support, let them.** If there are vigils, charity events or other acts of support for victims and your child wants to get involved, let them. This is especially important if your community was directly or indirectly affected by a terrorist attack.

DON'T

- **Avoid the issue.** It is far better to discuss the facts honestly with your child than risk them hearing a version of events from someone else.
- **Turn off the news.** Tempting though it may be, don't turn off the news every time it comes on. Listen or watch together and then use this as a platform for discussion.
- **Allow too much social media time.** Older children in particular may be tempted to spend a lot of time looking into and discussing the details of an attack on social media. This can be traumatic for them, and they may also end up with an incorrect version of events.
- **Brush off your child's concerns.** Everyone has a right to feel affected by traumatic events, no matter how young they are. Acknowledge your child's feelings and answer their questions honestly.
- **Make sweeping statements.** Emphasise that terrorist attacks are the actions of individuals rather than a whole community.