

# Talking to children about terrorist attacks

## Information for parents and carers

**The various acts of terrorism around the world are often reported in great detail. Such news and images of attacks reach children and can lead to uncertainty and fear. The closer these events are, or seem to be, the greater the perceived threat can be.**

**Many parents face a difficult challenge: how to talk to their child about what has happened? What is the appropriate way to deal with the media coverage? This booklet provides some answers to these questions.**

## What is important to your child?

Let your child know that you are always there for them. Show that you are willing to talk and listen carefully if your child wants to talk about what has happened. However, do not force your child to talk about terrorist acts.

Answer questions frankly and honestly. Present the available information as objectively and calmly as possible. Do not trivialise what has happened, but do not dramatise it either: do not try to 'play down' what has happened in order to protect your child. On the other hand, do not say anything that might cause additional anxiety. Speculating about the possible consequences of attacks and other feared terror scenarios is not appropriate for children.

## How you can support your child

### **Conveying a feeling of security**

Do not hide your own concern. Your child will quickly notice if you are not telling him, and this may make him feel even more insecure. Explain why you are worried or sad so that your child can understand your behaviour.

### Selecting and measuring media coverage

Constant exposure to horrific images and videos, especially on the internet, can stress your child. Try to limit media consumption. If necessary, watch individual stories together, especially on age-appropriate news formats for children. Do not leave your child alone with reports and impressions. Protect your child from media reports if they are particularly upset by them. Older children may want to know more about the local situation, the background to terrorism, security concepts or rescue measures. If this is an area of interest, you can research the information together. Use reputable sources, such as official websites or materials from specialist societies and aid organisations.

## **Making your own concern understandable**

Together with your child, see if there is anything you can do yourself. Your child may want to write or draw what moves them or what they would like to see happen. You could also symbolically light a candle together. Talk about how people can comfort and support each other.

## **Select and measure media reports**

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## **Enabling activities**

Consider together with your child whether there is anything you can do yourself. Perhaps your child would like to write down or draw what moves them or what they wish for. You could also symbolically light a candle together, for example. Also talk about how people can comfort each other and provide support.

## **Observe possible reactions**

If your child has trouble concentrating, nightmares, anxiety or irritability, be understanding. Younger children may express their feelings through drawing or play. Such reactions may occur when children are affected by a terrorist attack, serious accident or act of violence. Children who have not been directly affected by such an event, but who have experienced it, may also show such reactions. These reactions are initially a normal part of coping with stress, although they can be uncomfortable. In most cases, these reactions subside after a short time. However, if they are very severe or persist for several weeks, do not hesitate to seek professional help. Even if you yourself are very worried and have further questions about how to deal with your child, you can always seek professional advice, for example from your paediatrician, an (educational) counselling service or a psychotherapist for children and adolescents.

## **For further information please contact:**

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