

Terrorism – using SMSC to deal with the aftermath

Sadly, the young people that we work with are growing up in a time of increased media coverage regarding terrorist attacks in Britain. Smart phones allow them instant access to information; they can read accounts, absorb images and gather details, often before an adult is aware they have begun to digest this often-sensitive information.

1. Congratulate them for using their right to a free press

Too often young people are viewed as being full of apathy, with no regard to the world around them and certainly with very little care to their role as global citizens. If students have read an article, tweet or social media post and are discussing the said article, this should be applauded. Just as you would congratulate a student for completing extra work, or attending a revision session, reading the news and trying to be globally aware should be celebrated. Disclaimer – always check the source of this information. Remind students that all newspapers have bias, although they should be factually accurate but that social media is not checked in the same way. If students are gathering most of their news from social media, advise them to download a range of news apps or to make use of free papers, like the Metro, as they are commuting into school. If school budgets allow The Day www.theday.co.uk is a fantastic resource that breaks the news down for young readers as well as providing activities to encourage active reading.

2. Make it relevant

The PREVENT strategy clearly calls for schools to talk about terrorism, in a way that prioritises current threats *'Prevent will address all forms of terrorism but continue to prioritise according to the threat they pose to our national security. At present, the majority of our resources and efforts will continue to be devoted to preventing people from joining or supporting Al Qa'ida, its affiliates or related groups.'* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf

I have seen examples where students have been taught about extremism via animal rights groups, although there is nothing wrong with this approach per se, it may appear ignorant and confusing to young people if we fail to address what is happening in the UK in the 'here and now'. Young People have heard of ISIS so it is our duty to explore the ideology of this extremist group so that they can be challenged.

If staff would like to give a balance so that students do not have the opinion that 'all terrorists are Muslims' it can be useful to talk about Northern Ireland so that students are aware that terrorism has taken many forms throughout history, but to shy away from Al Qa'ida its affiliates and related groups is a wasted opportunity to tackle extremism at its core.

3. Put things into perspective

The young people you are working with may know of people that have, in some way, been affected by acts of terrorism; they may themselves have experienced the impact of terrorism as a child refugee fleeing war or persecution. However, the vast majority of the young people you are working with will have no direct experience with these acts. Between 2000 and 2017, 126 people were killed in UK based terror attacks according to figures from the Global Terrorism Database <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/many-people-killed-terrorist-attacks-uk/> whereas over 27,000 people were killed during 2017 as a result of a road traffic accident, according to figures from The Department For Transport <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics>. In short, the chance of being caught up in a UK terrorist attack is extremely small. This does not mean, however, that young people should be ridiculed for their fears, the emotional part of an

adolescent brain is fully formed before the part of their brain that deals with reasoning, so it is natural that they will feel an emotional reaction to scary stimuli, it is our job as adults to rationalise this information with young people and support them with perspective.

4. Maintain a balance

'When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping".'

- Fred Rogers, *The Mister Rogers Parenting Book*

This quote is such a positive focus when discussing terrorism; it humanises the statistic mentioned previously. Yes, sadly there are individuals and groups of people that do bad things, but there are so many more people that do truly amazing, selfless and caring things. The firefighters that ran back into the Twin Towers again and again to save more lives, the taxi drivers (many of whom were Muslim) that travelled to Manchester to provide free transport after the Arena bombing, the Tunisian hotel workers that directed tourists to points of safety during the Tunisian resort attacks.

It can be of some comfort to remember that people are, overall, good.

Some value can also be drawn from explaining the work of the National Counter Terrorism Security Office teachers would of course need to decide

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-counter-terrorism-security-office> whether students would find information about this specialist organisation comforting (due to the amazing work they do, day in and day out to protect the British public) or scary (due to the fact that we *need* a whole team of people working day in and day out to protect the British public) Discretion, as always, should be used to make these decisions.

5. Work towards prevention

As always, it is vital that professionals pay attention to the views and opinions of students in their care. As per the PREVENT strategy, adults have a duty to provide safe, appropriate forums whereby young people can discuss controversial and sensitive issues *'It is important to emphasise that the Prevent duty is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments'*. It is also important that staff report, as per their safeguarding policy, any incidences of sympathy or agreement to extremist views. We have a duty of care to take active steps to ensure our students are not drawn into extremism and its therefore vital that extremist views are challenged appropriately and reported.

Congratulate, contextualise, perspective, balance, PREVENT