

Advice for Schools
in the context of terrorist incidents
claiming religious motivation

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Adapted from original work by Denise Chaplin, Religious Education Adviser, and Shaun Burns, Primary Religious Education Adviser of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education. Update prepared with input from Stephen Tippell, Prevention Programme Manager, London Borough of Lambeth

Introduction

This advice is based on a document originally approved by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) in partnership with the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education for schools / academies to support them in their provision of Religious Education, collective worship and pastoral support in the light of the tragic and disturbing murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich. This advice continues to be relevant in the light of recent events in Paris, Mali, Pakistan, Africa and Egypt and the continuing international high level terrorist threat.

Members of the SACRE are shocked and saddened by all of these tragic events. In this context SACRE is of the view that the following guidance remains highly relevant to all schools.

We live, are growing up, being educated and/or working in local authorities and dioceses that are proud to have a rich blend of faiths and cultures. These unexpected and horrible events can make people question relationships and look again at the way our communities work together. They can challenge the trust we have in each other and be an attempt to destroy relationships between people of faiths and of no faith.

It is vital that we encourage all age groups to talk through their fears and questions openly so that we can retain the cohesion of our community and protect what we hold dear. .

In the context young people may raise difficult and sensitive questions in schools. Teachers will need to provide a safe space in which engagement and fair, balanced and honest dialogue can happen. Schools and academies are uniquely positioned to be catalysts in their community to encourage links between faith communities and young people and their families in order to support conversations, question and have debates and discussions to promote positive understanding of each other.

Religious Education

Religious Education has a key role and provides many opportunities where these questions about issues of extremism, terrorism and faith will arise and discussions will happen. This will be very challenging for all teachers whatever phase they are working in.

SACRE members and the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) wish to remind teachers of the following Aims of RE as stated amongst other Aims (as shown) in the local Agreed Syllabus and diocesan scheme of work:

Religious education in schools celebrates the diversity of religious and human experience. It encourages pupils to grow with the knowledge, skills, sensitivity and understanding to develop as confident and productive members of their local multi-faith community and the world.

Religious education should help pupils to:

- develop a positive attitude towards other people, respecting their right to hold different beliefs from their own and towards living in a society of many religions and beliefs;

- acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions and non-religious world views represented in Great Britain;
- develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures;
- develop the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues, with reference to their own values, and the teachings of the principal religions and beliefs represented in Great Britain:
- enhance pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by:
 - developing awareness of the fundamental questions of life raised by human experiences, and how religious teachings and philosophies can relate to them;
 - responding to such questions with reference to the teachings and practices of religions and to their own understanding and experience;
 - developing the ability to reflect on their own beliefs, values and experiences in the light of their study.

Some of those who commit acts of terrorism may claim a religious or theological justification for their actions, particularly at present in relation to Islam. It is challenging for all members of a multi-faith community to see interpretations of their own and other faiths and beliefs that they do not recognise, particularly when these lead to actions that are illegal, shocking and inconsistent with their own understanding of the faith.

There will be many teachers, governors, pupils and parents/carers who will question the validity of the way that RE presents the faiths and beliefs in the syllabus following such recent tragedies. However it is important that we listen to and acknowledge the statements from the faith communities and trust that the core beliefs and practices presented in the syllabus are valid and expressed honestly.

Such shocking events both in London and internationally show us clearly how vital it is that we learn to know and understand each other and are able to have informed and respectful discussions in order to learn lessons from the events and appropriately consider their impact on and empathise with the communities involved. This in turn should contribute towards developing greater understanding between and of our multi-faith community and strengthen community cohesion.

Pupils will begin to make judgements about religious and moral issues influenced by their developing knowledge and understanding, but also influenced by exposure to the media and those around them. This will make its way into school and may manifest in argument, disagreement and possibly fearful behaviour or intimidation. Schools will need to be vigilant to instances of bullying or aggression as well as distress. Pupils at different ages and abilities may or may not have a broad enough vocabulary or repertoire to debate and try to organise their thinking. This may then take place in any school lesson but particularly in RE lessons.

Schools, as major institutions within their community, have a key role to play in supporting their pupils and the families of their pupils, along with other members of the school community, and part of that support will come through accurate, complete and honest RE which allows pupils to engage in asking difficult questions, considering challenging contexts but also learning an accurate and balanced understanding of faiths, particularly, in the light of this incident, Islam.

This honest dialogue and sharing of human values along with true understanding of the richness of the diversity of our community need to be the core purpose and legacy of the RE in our schools. This will encourage goodness to come out of evil, hope to grow out of despair and to develop in the young people whom we are charged with educating, a fair, just, accurate and balanced understanding of the essence of belief and what is at the very heart of what it means to be human.

SACRE & the SDBE regret that:

Terrorist incidents and the threat that they present aim to create; it is our responsibility as educators to ensure that positive steps are taken to ensure that this does not happen in our schools

And advise that:

- Schools should continue to include teaching about Islam and other major world religions within the context of the local Agreed Syllabus
- Schools should take great care to actively challenge views that Muslims are at war with the west or that being a Muslim is incompatible with being British.
- Schools should guard against religious stereotyping, actively challenging pupils who automatically assume that people committing terrorist attacks in any part of the world are typical of any religious faith.
- Schools should be extremely cautious about suggesting that the current situation represents a conflict between religions.
- Schools should ensure that Islam is not portrayed as something 'other', apart and remote from us, it has in fact had profound influences woven into Western science, philosophy and culture which are too often unacknowledged.
- All employees must continue to work within the local authority's and / or diocesan equal opportunities guidelines.

Advice for Schools on Supporting the Needs of Pupils

Dealing With Pupils' Anxieties

All of us have been affected in some way or another by recent tragic events such as those in Woolwich, Paris, Mali and Africa. Indeed a principle aim of terrorism is to create chaos, fear and division within the community.

Pupils may be afraid for their personal safety in case they or people they know are going to be subjected to attacks similar to those seen in the media.

Children of Forces or police personnel may be particularly anxious about the safety of their families particularly whilst they are in school. This may be worse when they are away from their home and schools will need to be particularly supportive of these pupils and their families

Some pupils may have direct personal or family experiences of religious and cultural intolerance and violence in other countries.

Some Muslims, including members of local school communities, may have experienced being placed in the position of being associated with the actions of others who claim a religious justification for acts of violence and terrorism. Some pupils and their families may have been subjected to verbal and physical attacks on their way to and from schools and whilst being around in their local communities. We believe that pupils will need to express and deal with their fears and confusion and are pleased to attach to this advice (Appendix B), the document: 'Talking with Children when the talking gets tough', distributed by Judith Myers-Walls, Purdue University, United States in the hope that this will support schools as they work with pupils who are afraid. These notes were produced following the shootings in Columbine High School in America and drafted to assist anyone working with children.

Schools and academies will also need to listen to the anxieties of parents and carers and help them to rebuild a sense of security and trust.

SACRE & the SDBE advise that:

- all schools and academies continue to treat religious intolerance and attacks on the basis of faith or belief in the same way as they treat racist incidents;
- schools and academies need to be aware that some of their pupils may come from families involved with extremist groups and these pupils may bring racist / faithist language and behaviour into schools;
- Schools and academies encourage their community to support families experiencing difficulties at this time.

Collective Worship - ideas for positive approaches

- Concentrate on how ordinary people from all communities will have similar feelings and fears.
- Light candles and talk about having good memories of people after they have died.
- Use texts from holy books of world faiths that focus on respect for God, human life and other people.
- Focus on the 3 “angels of Woolwich,” the 3 women who went to the aid of Drummer Lee Rigby; Amanda Donnelly and her daughter Gemini Donnelly-Martin comforted the soldier as he lay on the ground and Ingrid Loyau-Kennett calmly spoke to the attackers until police arrived. The fact that no other bystander was hurt in the incident is testament to the courageous actions of these women.
- Another example schools might use is Lassana Bathily, a Muslim who helped up to 15 people to take shelter in the Jewish Super market store's walk in freezer in Paris, putting himself at risk.

Appendix A: Talking with Children - When the Talking Gets Tough

Wars, shootings in schools, natural disasters, deaths at sporting events—as adults we hope that these and other tragic outcomes will never happen anywhere and definitely will not impact the children and youth we care about. We would like to protect those young minds from the pain and horror of difficult situations. We would like to ensure that they have happy, innocent, and carefree lives.

So what is a parent, teacher, or other caring adult to do when disasters fill the airwaves and the consciousness of society?

- **Don't assume that the kids don't know about it.** They probably know more than you think. The reality of today's world is that news travels far and wide. Adults and children learn about disasters and tragedies shortly after they occur, and live video footage with close-ups and interviews are part of the report. Children and youth are exposed to the events as soon as they can watch TV or interact with others who are consumers of the news. Not talking about it does not protect children. In fact, you may communicate that the subject is taboo and that you are unavailable if you remain silent.
- **Be available and "askable."** Let kids know that it is okay to talk about the unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support that they need. You do not need to explain more than they are ready to hear, but be willing to answer their questions.
- **Share your feelings.** Tell young people if you feel afraid, angry, or frustrated. It can help them to know that others also are upset by the events. They might feel that only children are struggling. If you tell them about your feelings, you also can tell them about how you deal with the feelings. Be careful not to overwhelm them or expect them to find answers for you.
- **Help children use creative outlets like art and music to express their feelings.** Children may not be comfortable or skilled with words, especially in relation to difficult situations. Using art, puppets, music, or books might help children open up about their reactions. They may want to draw pictures and then destroy them, or they could want to display them or send them to someone else. Be flexible and listen.
- **Reassure young people and help them feel safe.** When tragic events occur, children may be afraid that the same will happen to them. Some young children may even think that it already did happen to them. It is important to let them know that they are not at risk—if they are not. Try to be realistic as you reassure them, however. You can try to support them and protect them, but you cannot keep all bad things from happening to children. You can always tell them that you love them, though. You can say that, no matter what happens, your love will be with them. That is realistic, and often that is all the children need to feel better.
- **Support children's concern for people they do not know.** Children often are afraid not only for themselves, but also for people they do not even know. They learn that many people are getting hurt or are experiencing pain in some way. They worry about those people and their

well being. In some cases they might feel less secure or cared for themselves if they see that others are hurting. It is heartwarming and satisfying to observe this level of caring in children. Explore ways to help others and ease the pain.

- **Look for feelings beyond fear.** After reassuring kids, don't stop there. Studies have shown that children also may feel sad or angry. Let them express that full range of emotions. Support the development of caring and empathy. Be careful not to encourage the kind of response given by one child: "I don't care if there's a war, as long as it doesn't affect me and my family."
- **Help children and youth find a course of action.** One important way to reduce stress is to take action. This is true for both adults and children. The action may be very simple or more complex. Children may want to write a letter to someone about their feelings, get involved in an organization committed to preventing events like the one they are dealing with, or send money to help victims or interventionists. Let the young people help to identify the action choices. They may have wonderful ideas.
- **Take action and get involved in something.** It is not enough to let children take action by themselves. Children who know that their parents, teachers, or other significant caregivers are working to make a difference feel hope. They feel safer and more positive about the future. So do something. It will make you feel more hopeful, too. And hope is one of the most valuable gifts we can give children and ourselves.

Distributed by Judith A. Myers-Walls, Extension Specialist, Purdue University, United States

Developed in the days following the shootings at Columbine High School and distributed via listserves, web pages and handouts at training programs, and re-distributed on 11 September 2001.

Appendix B: Faith Responses and Useful Texts

Christian

Some Christian responses might include the following but some are more appropriate for secondary than primary:

Christians believe that there is a place for righteous anger. God does not condone or bless any act of evil. Romans 12:19 *'Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord'*.

Rather than blaming God for all that goes wrong, Christians emphasise that God wants people to share their feelings with him and this includes our sadness, anger and questioning.

Psalm 139 begins- *O Lord you have searched me and you know me.*

You know when I sit and when I rise;

You perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

You are familiar with my ways.....

and ends with

Search me O God and know my heart;

Test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

Anxiety

Christians believe that everyone is made in the image of God and whether Christian or not God knows everyone by name:

Matthew 6: 25 - 34 *'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... God knows you and loves you'*

Luke 12: 6-7 *'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are numbered. Don't be afraid, you are worth more than five sparrows.'*

Use thoughts of love and reconciliation from the faiths:

Be open to the night... Pray with open hand, not with clenched fist...

(Lord Dunsay, from The Lion Prayer Collection, by Mary Batchelor pub. Lion ISBN 0 745 93133 2)

Lord; make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon, Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope, Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is sadness, joy. (Attributed to St Francis of Assisi)

Faith, Hope, Love Prayer.

God of faith, deepen our faith

so we may bear witness to Christ in the world;

God of hope, strengthen our hope

so we may be signposts to your transforming presence;

God of love, kindle our love

so that, in a fragile and divided world,

we may be signs of the faith, hope, love

which we share in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bishop Christopher, The Bishop of Southwark.

Muslim

Surah al-Baqara (Qur'an 2, v. 284 -285)

(284) *"To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Whether you show what is in your minds or conceal it, Allah calls you to account for it. He forgives whom He pleases, and punishes who He pleases. For Allah has power over all things.*

(285) *The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one of them believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His Messengers. They say: "We make no distinction between one another of His Messengers." And they say: "We hear and we obey: we seek Thy forgiveness Our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys."*

Surah al-Hujurat (Qur'an 49, v.13)

(13) *Oh mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into Nations and tribes, that you might know one another (and not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).*

An unknown Muslim scholar reflects on interfaith:

*I should become one with you
And you would become one with me.
I should be the body,
You would be the soul.
Then no one would be able to say
That I am different from you,
Or that you are different from me'.*

Appendix C: Other Resources and Websites.

Use the text of '*Peacetimes*' by Scholes, published by Belitha Press [ISBN 1 85561 761 7], to explore issues around Peace and to provide a focus for reflection - teachers will be able to modify their use of this text for almost any age group.

The 3 Faiths Forum. <http://www.3ff.org.uk/resources/>

3FF builds understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs. They run education, engagement and action programmes that bring diverse communities together. To the Question 'Why is this work needed?' they say:

'In our diverse societies good relations between our communities are essential. Without these ties, myths and prejudices flourish, often leading to racism and intolerance. Our programmes break down barriers and find ways for people to work together to improve their communities and society. By building new intercommunal relationships we make positive social change possible.'

Insted Consultancy, <http://www.insted.co.uk/index.html>

“reflecting work on equality and diversity in education.” This website contains a wealth of useful background information and ideas.

REsilience. <http://resilience-england.recouncil.org.uk/>

REsilience is a self evaluation, planning and training opportunity for teachers of RE. The programme is school based and can be tailored to individual needs. Its purpose is to help increase teachers' confidence when addressing contentious issues, particularly where religious ideas are sometimes used to try to justify extremism and violence.

National Union of Teachers <http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/18572>

Countering Islamophobia through education, discussion and information

Following the highly publicised and tragic murder in Woolwich in May, there was a rise in Islamophobic attacks and in particular of online harassments of individuals. Some of this harassment is carried out by young people. There have been attacks on some mosques and teachers have reported conversations in classrooms, corridors and playgrounds which have caused them concern.

It is important that teachers know where to find advice and information about how to discuss issues around Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of racism; and what strategies can be used to prevent and counter prejudice and to challenge and reduce stereotypes about race and religion.

Information and resources to use in classroom are available including:

1. **Do not tolerate intolerance: racism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia**
2. **School project on racist and religious Hate Crime developed by the NUT, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Anthony Walker Foundation**
3. **Show Racism the Red Card**
4. **Love Music Hate Racism**