



## Paris killings on Friday 13 November

### What to say to our children?

When terrible things happen it affects us all. Children and young people will be seeing images on our TV screens and hearing conversations; the TV images of innocent victims, who happened to be in the wrong place when the suicide bombers and young gunmen with Kalashnikovs decided to wreak terror on Paris. We feel the greatest sympathy for the families of those young victims. We offer our solidarity to the survivors and all the Parisians lighting candles at their vigils, We're all in shock.

It's in another country, but it could just as easily be here. And things might get worse. How can we stop thinking the worst? Everyone feels a little more insecure, more anxious and a little less safe after Friday's massacre. It may be reassuring to see the armed police and servicemen on the streets but the times are tense and uncertain.

How do we all cope? What can we say to reassure parents and their families? What can you do?

Well, parents should understand it is ok to be upset.

Good communication is essential at such a time. The main thing is to understand that it is only human to be upset and fearful about the events of last Friday. Talk to them if they're especially scared. If you talk about being safe, you will help your children feel safe. It might be a good idea to monitor what they are watching on TV, according to what is age-appropriate, perhaps even restricting the amount your children hear on news broadcasts and in heated adult debate: Reinforcing a sense of safety within the family helps.

Children pick up anxieties from their parents. Young people can see for themselves the outpouring of grief through the TV or on the internet. It can be distressing. This is where distractions and fun things can help. But then normal routine, the rituals of daily life, can be reassuring too. You might keep an eye out for any behaviour changes, especially regressive behaviour or sleeping patterns.

For pre-school children, limit the exposure to what has happened. If they see you upset, reassure them you are upset about something on the news. If they ask questions answer in a very simple way. Don't give details and move on quickly to normal routine tasks.

For school age children, be directed by the questions your child asks. Don't use frightening words; reassure your child that they are safe, loved and secure. Be honest, stating that such attacks are very rare, and the bad men have been caught. Keep detail to the minimum. Encourage them to talk about any worries and fears.

Adolescents are probably reading lots and seeing lots on the TV. It will be worth explaining in more detail what has happened and the complexity of the situation. Some adolescents may not want to talk, in which case try to start conversations while you are doing a joint activity together. It's a good opportunity to talk about how to keep themselves safe and problem solve in a difficult situation.

Watch out for signs of stress and anxiety. These could include changes in appetite and sleep patterns, poor concentration, deterioration in school work and nightmares. Somatic symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches may appear, alternatively, they may be more reluctant to socialise or go out. Look out for changes in your young person's normal pattern. If this goes on for longer than two weeks, check how things are going in school and seek help from your GP.

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