

Lewisham SACRE

Advice for Schools 2019

The potential of RE and Collective Worship in responding to local, national and international crises





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Introduction

Violent and/or tragic national and international situations and subsequent reactive comments and events which occur as political and social reactions are shocking and disturbing. Following recent such events, SACRE has considered, reflected and formulated this support and advice for schools.

Living, growing up, being educated and working in a local authority and diocese that are proud to include a rich blend of faiths and cultures, unexpected and horrible events and disasters, international wars and crises, terrorist attacks and the possibility of international military action, make people question attitudes and relationships and look again at the way our communities work together. Such situations sometimes show us acts of great courage but most may challenge the trust we have in each other and could be used as an attempt to destroy relationships between people of faiths and of no faith.

It is vital that people of all age groups, cultures and beliefs can talk through their grief, fears and questions openly in an environment of trust, so that we can continue to work together to retain the cohesion of our community and protect what we hold dear.

Young people ask many difficult questions at home and in school. Teachers always endeavour to provide a safe space in which these questions can be articulated and engagement and fair, balanced and honest dialogue can happen. Schools, academies and other educational establishments 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, have debate and discussion, which should result in a positive understanding of each other.

Religious Education

Religious Education lessons provide many opportunities where questions arise and discussions happen. This is always very challenging for all teachers whatever phase they are working in, and particularly when a crisis happens but is an important opportunity for ensuring that this event does not cause lasting damage to the community. This is especially delicate where faith or belief is in some way, even mistakenly, reflected in a current crisis.

SACRE members and the Diocese wish to take teachers using the local Agreed Syllabus back to the following Aims of RE where, stated amongst other Aims it says:

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 MultiFaith community and the world.

It is challenging for all members of a MultiFaith community to see in the news interpretations of their own and other faiths and beliefs that they do not recognise, particularly when these may have led to actions that are illegal, shocking and inconsistent with their own understanding of the faith in question. There may be as a reaction, teachers, governors, pupils

and parents/carers who question the validity of the way that RE appears to present faiths and beliefs through the syllabus. It is important at such times to remember that the syllabus has been constructed in partnership with faith and belief communities. It is also important as an initial response 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.

Shocking incidents both abroad and on our own streets, 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. This will help us 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 multifaith 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 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 (of all types), 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.

Honest dialogue and sharing of human values along with true understanding of the richness of the diversity of our MultiFaith community needs to be a core purpose and legacy of the RE in our schools. This will help goodness to come out of evil, hope to grow out of despair and develop in our young people a fair, accurate and balanced understanding of the essence of belief and of what is at the very heart of what it means to be human.

SACRE regrets that:

- Some elements of the media frequently use unfortunate phraseology that encourages negative stereotyping of members of faith and belief communities
- The term 'war' appears in the media at times encouraging the perception that the world is engaging in a war between religions or religions and cultures. This is not the case.
- Racist, 'faithist' and religious stereotyping and strong negative messages in the media including those from groups marching or demonstrating, can result in attacks on individuals, families, businesses, personal property, faith venues and faith communities The across the country, sometimes targeting members of many different religious communities and cultural groups.

The SACRE advises that schools:

- **do not** adjust their RE curriculum to exclude teaching about any faith during times of crisis as this may give or reinforce a negative message about this faith and its adherents.
- guard against religious stereotyping, ensuring that they do not allow their pupils to automatically assume that people committing terrorist attacks in any part of the world are typical of any faith or belief.
- are extremely cautious in their use of words like 'just war', 'holy war' or 'crusade' because of many bad historical examples and their total inappropriateness if in any sense they convey that current situations represent a conflict between religions. Please note that the Second World War would be seen by many as a just war but this in no sense implies that it was a religious war.

Supporting the Needs of Pupils

Dealing With Pupils' Anxieties

Everyone is affected in some way or another by tragic local, national or international events and in many cases people feel and express great fear both for the present and the future.

Pupils read newspapers, watch the news or access it online and / or use social media; this may make them afraid for their personal safety or fearful that they or people they know are going to be subjected to attacks similar to those they have seen or heard about.

Some residents are refugees from religious intolerance. Many of these are refugees from different parts of the world where they have witnessed inhuman acts first hand. Pupils from these families may become very concerned for their own safety and that of their parents throughout the school day.

Many religious believers including members of local school communities, may find themselves placed in the position of considering that fellow believers are being accused of an atrocity without proof being made public. Older pupils particularly may wish to express their anger and confusion at what they consider an injustice to members of their religion.

SACRE members know that there have been at times examples nationally of pupils and their families being subjected to verbal and physical attacks on their way to and from schools and whilst being around in their local communities. There have also been demonstrations and marches and attacks on community centres and establishments that have been intimidating and have targeted particular communities.

SACRE members also appreciate that because there are people living in the borough who have links to intolerant groups such as the EDL and Britain First, this is a time of great anxiety for members of minority faith communities or residents from minority ethnic groups who fear that they and their families may encounter physical violence.

SACRE believes that pupils will need to express and deal with their fears and confusion. The members of SACRE are pleased to attach to their advice (Appendix A), 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. Other really useful resources are also attached.

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.

The SACRE advises that all educational establishments :

- continue to treat religious intolerance and attacks on the basis of faith or belief in the same way as they treat racist incidents;
- need to be aware that some of their pupils may come from families involved with, for example, the National Front or the EDL and these pupils may bring racist / faithist language and behaviour into schools;
- encourage their community to support families experiencing fear and difficulties , particularly those who are frightened for their safety.

Collective Worship - ideas for positive approaches

- Concentrate on how ordinary people from all communities experience the same 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 how communities come together in acts of kindness to support those affected.

Appendix A:

Talking with Children - When the Talking Gets Tough

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

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 can not 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

Appendix B:

How can parents and teachers talk to children about terror attacks?

By Professor Atle Dyregrov and Magne Raundalen, psychologists, Center for Crisis Psychology, Bergen, Norway

A caution about adult rhetoric

Through media slogans like “We are not afraid”, “Back to normal to-morrow”, “Take back the streets”, “They will never scare us, we have no fear” are heard with great frequency. This adult rhetoric on how we want to cope and deal with the terror threat and our own fear is re-iterated by our political leaders in “Churchill-like” speeches even by saying that “we shall never surrender.” As psychologists, we of course see this shared attitude as a healthy and strong way to enable us to continue normal life at home, at work and in our free time.

Although we favour and understand this strategy, we also think that it is a cover for a fear underneath. A fear we want to suppress. Do we succeed? Do children believe us or can our pretended lack of fear cause more fear among some of them, at certain age-levels? How do we then explain to a sharp 7-year old that the media are so intensely focused on something we should not fear - a non-dangerous event?

The dilemma is that we through this attitude may become less available and sensitive to children’s utterings of threat and fear. How can we solve this dilemma? A simple answer is to allow oneself to feel and admit one’s fear. With kids who obviously challenge us, we can admit that we experience discomfort and fear in certain situations, big gatherings for example, and then discuss this openly with kids that are old enough. We then can explain that RISK is something different! One may feel fear, but the risk of experiencing a terror attack is so small that if you start continued on a journey from city to city over many years, there would be almost no risk of being exposed to a terror event. You can explain that it is best not to think about it, but admit that sometimes you have fear pangs and that you need to reduce your fear by reminding yourself of the low risk.

Children’s needs at various ages

What **the smallest children** (3 to 6 years) primarily need to hear is that they and we are safe. The youngest children are both protected and more vulnerable because of their limited language comprehension. They are partly protected because they think that mom and dad arrange everything, and everything is safe. The dangerous world has yet to enter their own world. Although they may be far away from where terror happened, their understanding of distance is limited, and they may fear that it will happen where they are. They may struggle to understand what is happening, and

they observe and take their cues about own safety and what to do from their mom and dad. Children are easily smitten by fear in adults. If parents keep calm, reassure them of their safety, and provide information that helps them to understand parents' reactions, they cope well.

Remember that small children are vulnerable to separation, especially when facing stressful situations. They have not developed the adult understanding of time and even short separations can feel like an eternity. Being together and providing physical contact is calming. Clear explanations of upcoming parental absence train them to regulate emotions.

School age children (7-12 years) understand more and they become increasingly more active users of different media. This means that their exposure to what goes on in the world increases. Although they access news and information themselves, they do not have adequate experience or the concepts to understand and process this information.

They can have distinct concepts about what a country is, about distances and where cities are located on the globe, and they are developing understanding of politics and the impact of terror acts. They can also understand that people can plan to kill others, they can be concerned for their own security, and have political opinions regarding cause and effect.

In this age they may have many questions relating to good and evil, they start thinking more about long-term consequences of what people experience (i.e. death), and they can be preoccupied by justice. They are much in need of adult explanations of world events in order to integrate the world around them, and their emotion regulation is immature and still under development. They still need comforting by adults, even though they are trying to be more independent.

Adolescents (13-18 years) access different news media, discuss a lot between themselves and emotions can rapidly spread in a group. With less adult input, they can form strong, but sometimes very superficial opinions about world events. Although their understanding of events is more advanced than in children, their ability to think ahead about ramifications of events can still be limited. As they can be very political and argumentative and with emotions sometimes running high, it may not be easy to inform them or discuss terror events with them.

Because they can be secretive, seek out their room to be alone, spend hours on their own searching or playing internet games, or only seek out friends, adults sometimes have to try really hard to establish contact to understand the ideas that might be affecting their everyday behaviour. They might feel fear of terror events, but don't communicate this to adults, as this might threaten their feeling of independence.

Though we will not address age issues in everything we write in the following, explanations must be framed according to the child's developmental understanding.

The use of two perspectives in explaining to children

When we explain dramatic news to children, especially following terror events, there are two perspectives that we will emphasize.

The first and most important is what we can call the "therapeutic" perspective. When we explain, we should curb unnecessary fear and anxiety regarding what can happen to the child/youngster themselves. As a rule, it is not enough to say that we adults are not afraid, although it is important to emphasize or convey this. Part of the therapeutic perspective is to accept that your child may seek more adult attention from adults, for example at bedtime, or will need more information from you to feel safe.

The other perspective, we call "educational". News about terrorism upsets adults and children, but although it is terrible news, it can lead to important learning. It provides parents and teachers with an opportunity to educate their child about the world and other people, as well as teaching them how to regulate emotions and bodily reactions. This is learning for life. We need to help them establish pegs that increase their understanding of what has happened, and strategies for regulation of emotions that they can use throughout life.

Providing the children with pegs to understand

It is hard to fathom that anyone can do something so terrible as to execute a terrorist attack. As adults we have 'pegs' we can put our anxieties on that prevent us from thinking a terrorist attack is imminent in our own near future. It is this adult confidence we want children to share. By explaining that such terrorist acts are very rare, we do not make the terrorist act less terrible, but it means that children will not be exempted from constantly thinking that it can happen here and now, anytime. Good information dampens children's anxiety. However, explaining "rarity" or probability is difficult with children under 10. Throughout childhood, they gradually understand what rare and frequent means. They know for example that Christmas comes only once a year, as does their birthday. In explaining frequency and chance by referring to "rare" events they know, they can get an understanding of why we adults are not afraid that it can happen anytime.

Although there have been several terror attacks in our part of the world over the last few years, we should explain that very few people die from terrorism compared to illness and accidents. If they are over 10 years of age, we can also tell them that over a few months many more people in Europe die from illness, accidents and suicide than the number being killed in terror attacks. This is not to make them more afraid of other kinds of deaths, but to explain that whenever there is a terror attack or a disaster, the media depict it in such graphic detail that we as humans tend to think it is more frequent than it is. We tend to fear what is featured as spectacular in the news, more than what most humans die from.

Appendix C:

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 Faiths and Belief Forum (formerly the 3 Faiths Forum) **<https://faithbeliefforum.org>**

They build understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs. They run education, engagement and action programmes that bring diverse communities together.

Check out what they offer to schools.

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 for teachers.

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.

Other information and resources to use in classroom are available including:

Show Racism the Red Card

NSPCC - supporting children worried about Terrorism

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/supporting-children-worried-about-terrorism/>

PSHE Association – Guidance on discussing terrorist attacks with pupils Primary & Secondary

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/guidance-discussing-terrorist-attacks-your-pupils>

BBC Newsround – advice if you are upset by the news

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13865002>

Humanist Resources

<https://www.npr.org/2013/05/03/180855412/humanists-on-surviving-crisis-without-a-prayer>

NPR interview with the former Humanist Chaplain of Harvard University on hope without prayer (for older pupils)

Schools can book a Humanist speaker at : <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/school-speakers/>

Appendix D:

Faith and other Texts useful for collective worship

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 that whether they are 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.

Grenfell Tower: A prayer

From the United Reformed Church written following the Grenfell Tower fire disaster. This can be adapted to other circumstances.



We pray for all who have suffered because of the dreadful Grenfell Tower fire.

We pray that those who have died and been taken from us are remembered and treasured. We pray for healing and support for those who have survived, and for everyone affected by this tragedy.

We pray for physical healing for all those injured, especially those in hospital, the elderly, and infirm.

We pray for emotional healing, recognising the shock, trauma and grief to be lived through.

We pray for the revival of human spirit, with faith, hope and love surrounding each in peace.

We pray for justice to help us accept mistakes made and warnings ignored, for lessons to be learned.

We pray that all who suffer are granted the opportunity to cry out in their pain and be listened to.

When all is lost, all is lost, no words can ease the pain. But we are carried through that pain by those who come around us, helping us back onto our feet, walking with us, listening to us, or just being there with us. We see the presence of God's love through them.

And so we give thanks and pray for all those who have offered healing, support and comfort:

For the emergency, medical and social services, working sacrificially and with courage; For those in authority, responsible for taking a lead in facing the challenges this fire has revealed;

For local residents, churches and charities, for the community itself, expressing such tangible love.

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'.*

Humanist

Quotes in times of difficulty

"Now it is time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

Marie Curie - Nobel Prize-winning scientist

"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced."

James Baldwin - gay African American civil rights activist and author

"Love all, trust a few and do wrong to none."

Shakespeare

"Look at the Earth from afar you realise it is too small for conflict and just big enough for co-operation."

Yuri Gagarin - first human in outer space

"Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart."

Virginia Woolf

This advice has been prepared for SACRE by Denise Chaplin, Religious Education Adviser and Shaun Burns, Primary Religious Education Adviser of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education to support schools and academies in their provision of Religious Education, collective worship and pastoral support in the light of the national and international crises and situations. It marks an important partnership between the SACRE and the Church of England Diocese of Southwark.