



ADVICE FOR OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT THE PARIS ATTACKS WITH CHILDREN



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GENERAL ADVICE FOR OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT THE PARIS ATTACKS WITH CHILDREN

The January 2015 attacks in Paris have been troubling enough for adults to deal with; the effect on children can be just as scary and confusing. They may be hearing a variety of opinions, often not well-informed, and are in need of safe spaces to speak with adults about their feelings, the facts, and the implications for their own lives.

The following guidelines will help adults take a supportive role for the children with whom they have contact. Open discussion that avoids confusion and misunderstanding, while validating feeling and fears, is the first step. Ultimately, children need to understand that violence and hatred is never a productive way to communicate thoughts and disagreements.

INVITE DISCUSSION AND OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT THE ATTACKS

Invite open-ended discussion with children with questions, such as: “Has there been any discussion in school about the events in Paris, amongst the students?” “What would you like to know about the attacks in Paris?”. It is necessary to allow each child to express their feelings and concerns. During the discussion be aware of your tone and respond in an age-appropriate language to reassure children about their own safety.

BE PRECISE

It is often easy to make generalisations, and as is the case with many tragedies. Some may, for example, speak about the Paris attacks with sweeping statements, compare one person’s trauma to that of another, or pin blame on one particular community. The whole story actually includes many individual stories. Be as precise as possible about specific stories, to help humanise what happened, and avoid making stereotypes and simplifying events.

ANSWER WITH FACTS

Children’s understanding often comes from others, such as yourself, or other family members, at school, friends, as well as what they may pick up themselves from the media. With so many voices, these sources often contradict each other. It is, therefore, important to respond to your child’s questions about what happened with basic facts and point them to reliable information sources for further research. Your child may ask about death (in conversations about the at-

tacks), requiring honest and appropriate responses for their development.

UNDERSTAND THAT NOT ALL THE ANSWERS ARE AVAILABLE

The January 2015 attacks in Paris are hugely complex and it is important to acknowledge that not all the answers to every question are available. If your child asks questions for which you do not have the answer, be honest and open, making it clear that you are also in the learning process, and take the opportunity to explore the question together.

EMOTIONS VARY ACCORDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL

Responses to the attacks will vary widely from child to child, depending on their age, personality, actual or perceived ethnic or religious background, connection to the attacks, or to the city/country, and experience or understanding about previous tragic events. Be on the look-out for any change in mood, behaviour, and daily habits, being aware that if your child has any previous experience of trauma, even if unrelated, they are at a higher risk of being distressed.

MONITOR TV/RADIO AND SOCIAL MEDIA/ INTERNET USE

Programmes on television and radio, mainly aimed at adult audiences, discuss the attacks in some depth. Some programmes will include footage of the events, with scenes that are inappropriate for children to view, or at least view without supervision. It is also possible that your child will use the internet to find out more about the attacks. He or she may as well receive information involuntarily via social media. Take an active role in monitoring the quality and quantity of information your child consume.

UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN RESPONSES AND FEELINGS.

You will also have your own responses and emotions brought on by the attacks. Be aware of this and attend to your own feelings, memories, and connections to what happened. This is not an easy subject matter to understand, especially for a child let alone, and we all remain in the process of understanding the repercussions. Recognising your personal feelings and sharing them openly and honestly with your child enables them to understand their own difficulties / concerns (in conversations) which will encourage a safe and trusting environment. Seek assistance if you are

overwhelmed by the attacks and events surrounding them, or find them difficult to manage.

EMPHASISE HOPE

The attacks in Paris showed us the worst in people, while it also showed compassion and bravery in people. The shock and the sadness have brought people together in a way that feels special. It is important to remind children that we are acknowledging those times too. Help your child recognise how their own compassion may prevent future acts of violence and intolerance by reminding them to express their ideas respectfully and to treat people who are different from themselves with kindness.

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