

Dear Parents / Carers,

As a school community, we have all been affected by the tragic events that took place in Forbury Gardens on Saturday 20th June. Our students will have seen the news or heard people talking about the incident, and some may have questions about it or worries they would like to talk about.

In conjunction with **Brighter Futures for Children's Psychological Service**, and other schools in Reading, we thought it would be helpful to share some information about speaking to your child/children/young person about this traumatic event and also to include information on where to seek more support if this is needed.

Supporting children and young people following a traumatic event:

Be honest. As most adults know, children and young people are often more aware than adults might realise. Avoid speculation and embellishment – stick to the facts. Remember that children at various stages of development may need different information.

Very young children – preschool age – need only brief explanations and many reassurances.

School-age children understand reality but lack perspective. Their fear is real and often focuses on the fact that this could happen to them. Their safety and security and that of their loved ones are of primary concern.

Adolescents need facts and discussion.

Make your children feel safe. Maintain routines where possible and let your children know what is happening if there are changes to plan.

Be a good listener. Communication is the key. Be ready to answer questions if they come, but don't feel the need to force your child to talk about the event.

Be accepting and allow your child to express their emotions. Ask open ended questions (e.g. "How are you today?") or just sit with them, offer hugs, if this is what you feel is appropriate.

Reflective listening: It might be appropriate to use **reflective listening** (i.e. repeating back to the child what they have said) and/or summarise what they have said. This gives an opportunity for the child to elaborate and/or modify what they have said as well as an opportunity to hear a perspective on their own experiences. Sometimes it is helpful to give a name to the emotion that you are hearing being expressed (e.g. "That sounds very sad", "Did you feel angry then?" etc.).

Sympathetic and supportive approach: Knowing what to say is far less important than being able to **listen in a sympathetic and supportive manner** – don't feel that you have to "solve" a tragic situation but do offer reassurance that your child is safe now if this is needed. If it seems more appropriate to offer advice, rather than strategies you might want to suggest:

- Talking to their family and friends.
- Crying and expressing their emotions in a suitable safe context.
- Maintaining normal routines.
- Eating normally.

- Taking physical exercise.
- Maintaining normal sleep patterns.
- Talk to friends.
- Listening and playing music.
- Maintaining interests and pastimes.

Remember that there are **many expressions of grief and distress**. Not all children/young people will cry, and not all will be fearful. Keep an eye out for changes in behaviour. Having experienced a personal tragedy or other trauma (such as being bullied or abused) can worsen the reaction in some children.

Most children will only need some brief discussion and then will be able to **settle back into normal life**. However, some may be more deeply affected so watch out for **warning signs** in children such as intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, dreams, anxiety, helplessness, sleeplessness, depression that go on for a longer period of time (at least a month). If you notice these signs interfering with your child's day to day life, they may need further support so talk to your child's Head of Year or the SENDCO in school who will help you to find appropriate support.

As part of our care and support for the children, we have been able to make arrangements involving outside agencies to provide **counselling and support for children in school** if needed.

In addition, for school staff and parents who feel that they need further support and advice around supporting children following this incident, **Brighter Futures for Children** has set up a **helpline** for more urgent queries: 0118 937 2080.

Ms Christine Kattirtzi
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