

Intentional acts of violence that hurt innocent people are frightening and upsetting. Children will look to adults for guidance on how to react. Families and school personnel can, first and foremost, establish a sense of safety and security.

Follow these key reminders and visit www.nasponline.org/helping-children-cope-with-terrorism to learn more.



Reaffirm Safety

Reassure children that they are safe, their schools are safe, and (if true) so are the adults in their lives. If appropriate, share how the threat of terrorism is real, but the chance of being personally affected is low. Emphasize how trustworthy people are in charge—firefighters, doctors, police—to keep communities safe.



Model Productive Coping Strategies

Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened, and monitor your feelings (anxiety, fear, grief, anger). Know when to seek support, because you will be better able to help children if you are coping well. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Avoid drugs and alcohol as a strategy to manage your own feelings and reactions.



Encourage Open Communication

Allow children the opportunity to verbalize their thoughts and feelings, but do not force them. Be a good listener and remind children that it is okay to feel upset. Very young children may not be able to verbalize these often complex thoughts and feelings; they are typically looking for adult guidance on whether or not they should feel threatened.



Keep Explanations Developmentally Appropriate

Ensure the adults providing such supports are in control of their own emotions.

Early Elementary



Provide brief, simple information with reassurance.

Upper Elementary



Answer questions and assist in separating reality from fantasy.

Upper Middle & High



Validate opinions, and provide the facts needed to appraise the degree of personal threat.

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Observe Children's Emotional State

Some children will not express themselves verbally, but changes in their behavior, appetite, or sleep patterns can indicate anxiety or stress. Seek help from a mental health professional for children with more intense reactions and for those whose changes last for a week or more.



Maintain a Normal Routine

Keep a regular schedule to assure and promote physical and mental health. Encourage maintenance of schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but do not push children if they seem overwhelmed. Limit TV/media exposure, as crisis related scenes and images can be frightening.



Do Not Judge Groups by the Actions of a Few

Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be associated with the violence. While anger is a normal response felt by many, we must ensure we do not compound an already tragic situation and react against innocent individuals with vengeance and hate. There is a tremendous risk of unfairly stigmatizing people who are perceived to resemble the perpetrators because of their apparent race, language, religion, or manner of dress. Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice. Talk about tolerance and justice versus vengeance. Stop any bullying or teasing immediately.

Related Resources



Translated Handout

The companion handout is available in the following languages: Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese.



School Safety Resources

NASP has made several school safety resources available to the public in order to promote the ability of children and youth to cope with traumatic or unsettling events.