

Dear colleagues

Our thoughts are with the victims, their families and everyone affected by the devastating events in Southport this week. While details are still emerging, the Educational Psychology Service is here to offer support to schools and settings who are impacted by this tragedy. Further planning and support will be needed and will require careful coordination across the authority with relevant partners.

In the meantime, this guidance note is intended to support all schools and settings in the area to respond sensitively and appropriately to the events. There are a number of things for senior leaders to think about and the following is a list of some of the issues that may be helpful to consider; it is by no means exhaustive.

Key messages:

- **Communication with the wider school/setting community/ victims/children and young people - messages of safety and reassurance**

It is important to acknowledge the event so children, young people, families and staff know they can talk to schools/settings about it.

Ensure you have a way of communicating to parents/carers what is happening in your school/setting and to let them know how they can support their child.

Ensure you have identified any child, young person, family or staff member that has been affected (either directly or indirectly).

Ensure anyone directly impacted has a point of contact within your school/setting who will provide any liaison.

- **Support and need for routines**

It is helpful to have some offer of support which is proportionate to the impact of the incident on your school/setting. For example, this can range from having an assembly when schools return in September, to having areas and adults available for children, young people, parents/carers and staff to be together.

Following a traumatic event, it is important to continue with routines as these will make children and young people feel safe and secure. We usually advocate for a balance between continuing with routines and providing support. Given that it is the summer holidays, school routines are not in place right now. Schools/settings can advise parents/carers to stick to daily routines if possible. Schools/settings where children and young people have been directly affected may wish to open for a few hours to provide a hub where affected families can come together and have a listening ear. *The Educational Psychology Service can support with this.*

- **Identifying and monitoring vulnerable groups**

Children and young people who have been hurt or have a sibling or relative that has been hurt or killed will clearly need additional attention from school/setting staff and it's important to keep lines of communication open, acknowledge their experience and identify a key adult to liaise with the family and welcome the child/young person back when the time comes.

Experience and research suggests that children, young people and adults with additional vulnerabilities such as recent bereavements, a history of trauma or mental health issues (whether they have been directly involved in the incident or not) are impacted by such events and would benefit from additional attention and monitoring. *The Educational Psychology Service can assist with identifying vulnerable children/young people and advise on appropriate support.*

- **Containing trauma**

Some children and young people will want to talk about what they have seen and heard. It is important that they are allowed to ask questions and talk. Adults need to be honest about the situation. It is helpful to give messages of safety e.g. Nobody is allowed in school that we don't know and the police are working hard to keep everyone safe; events like this are extremely rare and unlikely to happen again in our community. Encourage families to limit their child's exposure to social media and the news at this time.

It may be that children and young people in your school/setting have had direct experience of the incident and in this case it is helpful to make sure as much as possible that they can talk to adults but that they are not sharing the traumatic details of their experiences with other children and young people; this can risk children and young people that weren't actually witness to the incident having secondary trauma. This is a balance between ensuring the child/young person is supported by peers and not isolated, whilst also protecting the peers.

If adults have witnessed or listened to a witness's account it can be beneficial for them to have a debrief with another adult or a psychologist, if done with care.

- **Community cohesion/ post traumatic growth/ hope**

In situations like this it is important that we give out key messages of solidarity and togetherness to children, young people, their families and staff. Leaders can feel isolated. It is essential that you gain support for yourselves in order to support your community. *The Educational Psychology Service can help with this.*

Please reach out to us if you have any questions or there is anything you feel we can support you with.

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