

Talking to your children about a violent incident

**Ask questions, listen to
ideas and be responsive**



City of Westminster

Introduction

Public violence, tragic incidents and other traumatic events can make individuals, families and communities feel anxious, fearful and at risk. These events can be interpreted in different ways and not all of the information can be trusted.

Talking openly about violence, especially with children, and helping them see that their reactions are normal and understandable, can aid in easing the worries about personal safety, help them gain a sense of personal control as well as manage any rising concerns.

Here are some helpful tips to start and maintain these conversations, and receive timely help and support, if needed.

1 Initiate conversation

Start talking with your children about violence by asking them open-ended questions about what they know, what they understand and how they feel about a particular incident.

“After what happened the other week, I’ve been worried about you. Would you like to talk?”; “Why do you think this happened?”

2 Share personal concerns

Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding violence or the incident in question. Speak to them in an age-appropriate way and in a calm and confident manner. Try not to overshare or dwell only on your concerns and focus on the child’s questions and reactions, even silence.

“This makes me feel fearful and anxious, how does it make you feel?”

3 Encourage and listen

Encourage children to talk about their fear, worries and concerns and validate their feelings without minimising them. Normalise what they may be going through. Listen to them patiently. Try not to react straightaway and don’t rush into giving advice.

**“I care about you and am willing to listen to you.”
“It’s okay to feel angry or scared and have mixed feelings about it.”**

4 Reassure

Keep comforting them with your presence and support. Offer to help in specific ways. Demonstrate that safety and wellbeing is the priority for you.

**“You won’t get in trouble; I won’t be angry.”
“It seems like you’re going through a difficult time. Is there something I can help with?”**

5 Be open and honest

Keep the discussion open. It’s okay to not know all the answers. Remind your child that violence is never okay, and that acts of violence can lead to feelings that even adults have trouble dealing with. However, you will continue to ensure that the family remain safe and secure. Adjust the discussion based on their needs.

“I don’t know why this happened, but it shouldn’t have happened. Things like this can’t always be explained but can be prevented. It’s important that we focus only on facts and continue to share our thoughts and worries. It will help me keep us safe.”

6 Make a Safety Plan

Help your children identify trusted adults, such as a parent, carer, teacher, youth worker or a relative, who they can talk to if they feel threatened and speak about how things impact them. Create a mutual plan by discussing ideas on keeping safer.

Reinforce the safety procedures that are in place in the neighbourhood, school and other public places, for example, increased police activity, neighbourhood watch schemes etc. This could also include introducing them to helplines and support services where they can report anonymously or disclose any information.

“How can we ensure that all of us in the family remain safe and exercise necessary precaution?”

“Did you know that extra police have been on the streets since the incident, how does that make you feel?”

“Is there anyone you feel more comfortable talking about this to?”

7 Keep Talking

Keep the dialogue ongoing and make safety a common topic in family discussions rather than just a response to an immediate crisis. Also, adjust the discussions based on your children’s needs. Look out for their reactions and talk about it when they feel safe and comfortable. Try not to overshare and be aware when to end the conversation.

“Maybe we can talk about it another time. I will try and find some extra information and perhaps we can discuss it together. You can try and share the information you have as well?”

8 Keep things normal

A frightening event can make children unsure of what’s coming. Everyone feels safer when they know what to expect. You can do this by sticking to the family’s normal routines as much as possible. Start with yourself.

“I am going to the market to get the weekly groceries. I know terrible things have happened, but they don’t happen so often that we need to be scared all the time. Would you like to come with me?”

9 Additional support

Recognise behaviour that may indicate that your child continues to remain worried, such as not wanting to go out, becoming angry or argumentative, feeling a loss of control or being withdrawn or in denial. If you are concerned about your child’s reaction or behaviour, seek additional help which can help them cope better. You can speak to the child’s school or GP. There are additional resources available online and services where you can self-refer.

“I feel you’re going through a lot. I’m unable to support you in the right way that works for you. Can I help you to find the right help?”

10 Look after yourself

Look after your own wellbeing. You might want to talk to another adult about it or seek more support. Peer support groups can be helpful to talk with others who are going through similar experiences. Faith and community groups may be able to offer comfort, guidance and reassurance. Talking therapies or counselling can also help you better manage your thoughts, feelings and actions.

Where to go for support or information

Keeping safe

Emergency: 999

Report a crime in action or when your or somebody else's safety is at immediate risk.

Police: 101

Report crime or non-emergency concerns. To know your local team, type your postcode at [police.uk](https://www.police.uk)

Fearless: fearless.org/en

Anonymous online reporting of a crime which does not need urgent police attention. Translators also available.

Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111

[crimestoppers-uk.org](https://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

Independent charity that allows people to report crime 100% anonymously. Online reporting also possible.

Safer Schools Officer:

A designated police officer working alongside the school, parents and other departments to prevent young people from becoming either victims or perpetrators of crime. Ask school for details.

Westminster Anti-Social Behaviour Team:

Report online: [westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing/self-service/report-anti-social-behaviour](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing/self-service/report-anti-social-behaviour)

Report any anti-social behaviour concerns, such as nuisance, environmental or property damage, street drinking or drug use, begging or prostitution related activity, harmful vehicle use etc., which causes fear of crime or concern for public safety.

Access and Assessment Team: 0207 641 4000

[westminster.gov.uk/children-and-family-support](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/children-and-family-support)

Contact the team to raise an immediate concern about a child at risk and receive additional support through Children's & Family Services.

Specific advice and interventions

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000

help@nspcc.org.uk

National helpline staffed by trained professionals who can provide expert advice and support to parents and carers concerned about a child.

Victim support: 0808 168 9111

[victimsupport.org](https://www.victimsupport.org)

Free, confidential support to help people recover from the effects of crime and traumatic events.

Integrated Gangs & Exploitation Unit: 0799 7192 0552

integratedgangsunit@westminster.gov.uk

A voluntary service in Westminster which identifies and works with vulnerable and exploited young people aged 10-24 involved in group violence or on the periphery of gangs, or affected by knife crime and drug distribution, to improve their lifestyle choices and reduce incidences of serious youth violence.

Handbook on Advice and Guidance to Parents and Carers about Serious Youth Violence, Knife Crime and Gangs:

[westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/advice_for_parents_and_guardians_about_gangs.pdf](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/advice_for_parents_and_guardians_about_gangs.pdf)



Emotional wellbeing & Mental Health support for children & young people

Childline: 0800 1111

childline.org.uk

Free and confidential helpline for children under 19 to talk about any issues or worries they have, big or small.

Kooth: kooth.com

Online platform for young people aged 11-25 to safely access free, anonymous support from trained counsellors, and from a community of peers.

Shout: Text SHOUT to 85258

giveusashout.org

Free and anonymous texting service for young people going through a personal crisis.

Additional services are available at- search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/biborough/directory/files/knowning_your_mental_health.pdf

Mental Health Support Team in Westminster: 020 7259 8116

mhsteam@bwwmind.org.uk

Support with feelings of anxiety, low mood, friendship or behavioural difficulties.

Westminster Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS): 020 3317 5999

westminstercamhs.cnwl@nhs.net

Support with complex mental health difficulties and access to community mental health services.

Support for adults and families

Westminster Family Information Service:

fisd.westminster.gov.uk/kb5/westminster/fis/home.page

A free, impartial information service for parents and carers of children and young people aged up to 19 (up to 25 years for those with additional needs). This includes information, advice and guidance for any extra support you may need for your family related to parenting, schools & education, money matters, health or youth services.

Groups & Programmes for Parents:

Westminster City Council & partners run a number of free groups and 1:1 support for parents to help improve family relationships. Details of these groups can be found at fisd.westminster.gov.uk/kb5/westminster/fis/family.page?familychannel=7

Family Lives Westminster: 0207 641 5409

Fatimaa@familylives.org.uk

Targeted early intervention and crisis support to families who are struggling with family breakdown, challenging relationships and behaviour, debt, and emotional and mental wellbeing.

Samaritans: 116 123

samaritans.org

Free, confidential helpline that offers a safe space to talk about anything. They won't judge, or tell you what to do, they just listen.

SANE Line: 0300 304 7000

sane.org.uk

Confidential one-to-one support for those aged over 16, for when your own mental health, or that of someone you know, is affecting you.

Talking Therapies/ IAPT services:

Psychological assessment and treatment for anyone over 18 who is resident in Westminster or registered with a GP in Westminster. Interpreters available.

If you are registered with a GP in Westminster (except Queens Park and Paddington), contact:

030 3333 0000; westminster.iapt@nhs.net or complete the online form at: talkingtherapies.cnwl.nhs.uk

If you are registered with a GP in Queens Park or Paddington (including Kensington & Chelsea), contact:

020 3317 4200, cnw-tr.clw@nhs.net or complete the online form at: communitylivingwell.co.uk

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