

# How To Talk To Children About Southport's Tragic Incident

## Should children be protected from the news?

**YES – As much as you can and is realistic**

0-8 year olds – Children will struggle with making sense of words such as 'death' and 'knife attack' linked with words such as 'children' and 'Taylor Swift'. Their brains are still developing abstract thinking and will blur fantasy with reality.

8 years plus - Children have greater access to technology and they understand death is final. They are more likely to understand 'knife attack' and feel scared for themselves and others.

## How to have this conversation

If your child asks you about the news or mentions something they have heard, always begin with curiosity:

A child who asks a question has already considered an answer. Focus less on having answers and more on listening to your child:

- What have they heard
- What they understand by it
- How they feel
- What they are scared of / worried about
- How you will reassure and support them

Stay honest (always! What you don't tell them, they will make an answer for or someone will tell them)

Keep it simple and age appropriate

Normalise all feelings (theirs and yours too)

Reassure your child that they are safe

You do not need to have all of the answers. Your presence and offering a safe space to talk is the most important

### **How to answer things you don't know**

“Will this happen again?”

“What if someone tries to stab me at my club?”

Do you have the answer? No.

Uncertainty is hard to sit with AND we know what happened is extremely rare.

“It sounds like you are feeling scared. It is scary, and it is normal to feel this way. What I know is that we are safe right now, and that adults at your club / school will do everything they can to keep your club / school safe.”

### **If your child is personally affected**

Experiencing distress after trauma is entirely normal. This might include struggling to sleep, thoughts about what happened intruding into everyday life, irritability, feeling low and avoiding activities. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Continuing a normal routine is helpful because it increases their sense of safety. Don't avoid talking about what happened. Talking does not make things worse – it helps children know they can talk about their experiences and all their feelings are valid.

### **Get support**

If your child continues to have disruptions to their everyday life for more than 6 weeks, let them know that you care about their wellbeing and what they are experiencing is normal. Lots of people struggle after an event like this. There is support for them.

### **Look after you**

What happened in Southport affects everyone. An attack on children is always a tragedy that feels personal to parents. This is in addition to horrific stories about child death in other parts of the world. We know that over-empathising can be detrimental to mental health. Set strict boundaries on the news if it is affecting you.

Incidents like this can shift our sense of safety. Remind yourself, “Right now, I am safe, and my children are too”. It is a privilege and we can embody more gratitude than fear.

## Sharing the news with children when a child they know has died

There are some scripts provided below that we hope can help you with those initial difficult conversations. These are not exhaustive scripts and questions will arise – there is advice for answering questions underneath the scripts.

### General Tips

- Use words such as ‘death’ and ‘dead’. Avoid ambiguous language such as ‘passed away’, ‘lost’
- Encourage questions
- Give as much truth to pupils in a developmentally appropriate way
- Let children know it is ok to show their emotions

### Example scripts – when child knows about the incident that happened on 29th July

‘I have some really sad news to tell you today and it might upset you. You know that earlier this week there was a really horrible incident and someone hurt some children.

Most of those children are getting better in hospital, but very sadly, three children have died. One of those children was in your class – it was \*\*\*\*\*.

It’s really, really sad news and I know it will feel very horrible, and it is normal to feel this way.

I want you to know that this sort of thing happening is very, very rare. The person that hurt the children has been arrested by the police.

It is scary but what I do know is that we are safe right now, and we / school / holiday clubs will do everything we can to keep you and your school / club safe’

## Example script – when child does not know about the incident that happened on 29th July

'I have some really sad news to tell you today and it might upset you. Earlier this week, something very rare happened. There was a really horrible incident where somebody hurt some children while they were at a club. Some children were badly hurt.

The police and ambulances came to help them and most of those children are getting better in hospital. Very sadly, three of the children have died. One of those was in your class – it was \*\*\*\*\*.

It's really, really sad news and I know it will feel very horrible, and it is normal to feel this way.

I want you to know that this sort of thing happening is very, very rare. The person who hurt the children has been arrested by the police.

It is scary but what I do know is that we are safe right now, and we / school / holiday clubs will do everything we can to keep you and your school / club safe'

### Answering Questions

Be truthful – in a developmentally appropriate way

'How did the person hurt the children?' – 'With a knife. The knife has been taken by the police and the person who did it has been arrested'.

'Why did someone hurt children?' - 'We don't know. Sometimes, people do things that we don't understand. This doesn't happen often. The police will be trying to find out why they might have done this and making sure they can't do it again.

There are lots of rumours online that aren't necessarily true so it's important that you speak to me or your teachers if you are worried'