

SACRE Advice for Schools

The potential of RE and Collective Worship in responding to local, national and international crises





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Introduction

Violent and/or tragic national and international situations and subsequent reactive comments and events which occur as political and social reactions are shocking and disturbing. Following recent such events, SACRE has considered, reflected and formulated this support and advice for schools.

Living, growing up, being educated and working in a local authority and diocese that are proud to include a rich blend of faiths and cultures, unexpected and horrible events such as the tragic death of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013, international wars and crises, the damage caused by chemical weapons or the possibility of international military actions, make people question attitudes and relationships and look again at the way our communities work together. Such situations could challenge the trust we have in each other and be an attempt to destroy relationships between people of faiths and of no faith.

It is vital that people of all age groups, cultures and beliefs can talk through their fears and questions openly so that we can continue to work together to retain the cohesion of our community and protect what we hold dear.

Young people ask many difficult questions at home and in school. Teachers always endeavour to provide a safe space in which these questions can be articulated and engagement and fair, balanced and honest dialogue can happen. Schools and academies are uniquely positioned to be catalysts in their community to encourage links between faith communities and young people and their families in order to support conversations, question, have debate and discussion which should result in a positive understanding of each other.

Religious Education

Religious Education lessons provide many opportunities where questions arise and discussions happen. This is always very challenging for all teachers whatever phase they are working in, and particularly when a crisis happens but is an important opportunity for ensuring that this event does not cause lasting damage to the community. This is especially delicate where faith or belief is in some way, even mistakenly, reflected in a current crisis.

SACRE members and the Diocese wish to take teachers using the local Agreed Syllabus back to the following Aims of RE where, stated amongst other Aims it says:

Religious education in schools celebrates the diversity of religious and human experience. It encourages pupils to grow with the knowledge, skills, sensitivity and understanding to develop as confident and productive members of their local multifaith community and the world.

It is challenging for all members of a multifaith community to see in the news interpretations of their own and other faiths and beliefs that they do not recognise, particularly when these may have led to actions that are illegal, shocking and inconsistent with their own understanding of the faith in question. There may be as a reaction, teachers, governors,

pupils and parents/carers who question the validity of the way that RE appears to present faiths and beliefs through the syllabus. It is important at such times to remember that the syllabus has been constructed in partnership with faith and belief communities. It is also important as an initial response that we listen to and acknowledge the statements from the faith communities and trust that the core beliefs and practices presented in the syllabus are valid and expressed honestly.

Shocking incidents both abroad and on our own streets, show us clearly how vital it is that we learn to know and understand each other and are able to have informed and respectful discussions. This will help us to learn lessons from the events and appropriately consider their impact on and empathise with the communities involved. This in turn should contribute towards developing greater understanding between and of our multifaith community and strengthen community cohesion.

Pupils will begin to make judgements about religious and moral issues influenced by their developing knowledge and understanding, but also influenced by exposure to the media and those around them. This will make its way into school and may manifest in argument, disagreement and possibly fearful behaviour or intimidation. Schools need to be vigilant to instances of bullying or aggression as well as distress. Pupils at different ages and abilities may or may not have a broad enough vocabulary or repertoire to debate and try to organise their thinking. This may then take place in any school lesson but particularly in RE lessons.

Schools (of all types), as major institutions within their community, have a key role to play in supporting their pupils and the families of their pupils, along with other members of the school community, and part of that support will come through accurate, complete and honest RE which allows pupils to engage in asking difficult questions, considering challenging contexts but also learning an accurate and balanced understanding of faiths.

Honest dialogue and sharing of human values along with true understanding of the richness of the diversity of our multifaith community needs to be a core purpose and legacy of the RE in our schools. This will help goodness to come out of evil, hope to grow out of despair and develop in our young people a fair, accurate and balanced understanding of the essence of belief and of what is at the very heart of what it means to be human.

SACRE regrets that:

- Some elements of the media have frequently used unfortunate phraseology that encourages negative stereotyping of members of faith and belief communities
- the term 'war' appears in the media at times encouraging the perception that the world is engaging in a war between religions. This is not the case.
- Racist, 'faithist' and religious stereotyping and strong negative messages in the media including those from groups marching or demonstrating result in attacks on individuals, families, businesses, personal property, faith venues and faith communities across the country, sometimes targeting members of many different religious communities and cultural groups.

SACRE advises that schools:

- **do not** adjust their RE curriculum to exclude teaching about any faith during times of crisis as this may give or reinforce a negative message about this faith and its adherents.
- guard against religious stereotyping, ensuring that they do not allow their pupils to automatically assume that people committing terrorist attacks in any part of the world are typical of any faith or belief.
- are extremely cautious in their use of words like 'just war', 'holy war' or 'crusade' because of many bad historical examples and their total inappropriateness if in any sense they convey that current situations represent a conflict between religions. Please note that the Second World War would be seen by many as a just war but this in no sense implies that it was a religious war.

Supporting the Needs of Pupils

Dealing With Pupils' Anxieties

Everyone is affected in some way or another by tragic local, national or international events and in many cases people feel and express great fear both for the present and the future.

Pupils who read the newspapers or watch the news may be afraid for their personal safety in case they or people they know are going to be subjected to attacks similar to those seen in the media.

Some residents are refugees from religious intolerance. Many of these are refugees from different parts of the world where they have witnessed inhuman acts first hand. Pupils from these families may become very concerned for their own safety and that of their parents throughout the school day.

Many believers including members of local school communities, may find themselves placed in the position of considering that fellow believers are being accused of an atrocity without proof being made public. Older pupils particularly may wish to express their anger and confusion at what they consider an injustice to members of their religion.

SACRE members know that there have been at times examples nationally of pupils and their families being subjected to verbal and physical attacks on their way to and from schools and whilst being around in their local communities. There have also been demonstrations and marches and attacks on community centres and establishments that have been intimidating and have targeted particular communities.

SACRE members also appreciate that because there are people living in the borough who have links to intolerant groups such as the British National Party, this is a time of great anxiety for members of minority faith communities or residents from minority ethnic groups who fear that they and their families may encounter physical violence.

SACRE believes that pupils will need to express and deal with their fears and confusion. The members of SACRE are pleased to attach to their advice (Appendix A), the document: 'Talking with Children when the talking gets tough', distributed by Judith Myers-Walls, Purdue University, United States in the hope that this will support schools as they work with pupils who are afraid. These notes were produced following the shootings in Columbine High School in America and drafted to assist anyone working with children.

Schools and academies will also need to listen to the anxieties of parents and carers and help them to rebuild a sense of security and trust.

The SACRE advises that schools and academies:

- continue to treat religious intolerance and attacks on the basis of faith or belief in the same way as they treat racist incidents;
- need to be aware that some of their pupils may come from families involved with the National Front or the British National Party and these pupils may bring racist / faithist language and behaviour into schools;
- encourage their community to support families experiencing fear and difficulties , particularly those who are frightened for their safety.

Collective Worship - ideas for positive approaches

- Concentrate on how ordinary people from all communities experience the same feelings and fears.
- Light candles and talk about having good memories of people after they have died.
- Use texts from holy books of world faiths that focus on respect for God, human life and other people.

Appendix A:

Talking with Children - When the Talking Gets Tough

Wars, shootings in schools, natural disasters, deaths at sporting events—as adults we hope that these and other tragic outcomes will never happen anywhere and definitely will not impact the children and youth we care about. We would like to protect those young minds from the pain and horror of difficult situations. We would like to ensure that they have happy, innocent, and carefree lives.

So what is a parent, teacher, or other caring adult to do when disasters fill the airwaves and the consciousness of society?

- **Don't assume that the kids don't know about it.** They probably know more than you think. The reality of today's world is that news travels far and wide. Adults and children learn about disasters and tragedies shortly after they occur, and live video footage with close-ups and interviews are part of the report. Children and youth are exposed to the events as soon as they can watch TV or interact with others who are consumers of the news. Not talking about it does not protect children. In fact, you may communicate that the subject is taboo and that you are unavailable if you remain silent.
- **Be available and “askable.”** Let kids know that it is okay to talk about the unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support that they need. You do not need to explain more than they are ready to hear, but be willing to answer their questions.
- **Share your feelings.** Tell young people if you feel afraid, angry, or frustrated. It can help them to know that others also are upset by the events. They might feel that only children are struggling. If you tell them about your feelings, you also can tell them about how you deal with the feelings. Be careful not to overwhelm them or expect them to find answers for you.
- **Help children use creative outlets like art and music to express their feelings.** Children may not be comfortable or skilled with words, especially in relation to difficult situations. Using art, puppets, music, or books might help children open up about their reactions. They may want to draw pictures and then destroy them, or they could want to display them or send them to someone else. Be flexible and listen.
- **Reassure young people and help them feel safe.** When tragic events occur, children may be afraid that the same will happen to them. Some young children may even think that it already did happen to them. It is important to let them know that they are not at risk—if they are not. Try to be realistic as you reassure them, however. You can try to support them and protect them, but you can not keep all bad things from happening to children. You can always tell them that you love them, though. You can say that, no matter what happens, your love will be with them. That is realistic, and often that is all the children need to feel better.

- **Support children's concern for people they do not know.** Children often are afraid not only for themselves, but also for people they do not even know. They learn that many people are getting hurt or are experiencing pain in some way. They worry about those people and their well being. In some cases they might feel less secure or cared for themselves if they see that others are hurting. It is heartwarming and satisfying to observe this level of caring in children. Explore ways to help others and ease the pain.
- **Look for feelings beyond fear.** After reassuring kids, don't stop there. Studies have shown that children also may feel sad or angry. Let them express that full range of emotions. Support the development of caring and empathy. Be careful not to encourage the kind of response given by one child: "I don't care if there's a war, as long as it doesn't affect me and my family."
- **Help children and youth find a course of action.** One important way to reduce stress is to take action. This is true for both adults and children. The action may be very simple or more complex. Children may want to write a letter to someone about their feelings, get involved in an organization committed to preventing events like the one they are dealing with, or send money to help victims or interventionists. Let the young people help to identify the action choices. They may have wonderful ideas.
- **Take action and get involved in something.** It is not enough to let children take action by themselves. Children who know that their parents, teachers, or other significant caregivers are working to make a difference feel hope. They feel safer and more positive about the future. So do something. It will make you feel more hopeful, too. And hope is one of the most valuable gifts we can give children and ourselves.

Distributed by Judith A. Myers-Walls, Extension Specialist, Purdue University, United States

Developed in the days following the shootings at Columbine High School and distributed via list serves, web pages and handouts at training programs, and re-distributed on 11 September 2001.

Appendix B:

Faith and other Texts useful for collective worship

Christian

Some Christian responses might include the following but some are more appropriate for secondary than primary:

Christians believe that there is a place for righteous anger. God does not condone or bless any act of evil. Romans 12:19 *'Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord'.*

Rather than blaming God for all that goes wrong, Christians emphasise that God wants people to share their feelings with him and this includes our sadness, anger and questioning.

Psalm 139 begins- *O Lord you have searched me and you know me.*

You know when I sit and when I rise;

You perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

You are familiar with my ways.....

and ends with *Search me O God and know my heart;*

Test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

Anxiety

Christians believe that everyone is made in the image of God and that whether they are Christian or not God knows everyone by name:

Matthew 6: 25 - 34 *'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... God knows you and loves you'*

(Luke 12: 6-7)

'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are numbered. Don't be afraid, you are worth more than five sparrows.'

Use thoughts of love and reconciliation from the faiths:

Be open to the night...

Pray with open hand, not with clenched fist...

(Lord Dunsay, from The Lion Prayer Collection, by Mary Batchelor pub. Lion ISBN 0 745 93133 2)

Lord; make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is sadness, joy.

(Attributed to St Francis of Assisi)

Faith Hope Love Prayer.

God of faith, deepen our faith

so we may bear witness to Christ in the world;

God of hope, strengthen our hope

so we may be signposts to your transforming presence;

God of love, kindle our love

so that, in a fragile and divided world,

we may be signs of the faith, hope, love

which we share in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bishop Christopher, The Bishop of Southwark.

Muslim

Surah al-Baqara (Qur'an 2, v. 284 -285)

- (284) *"To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Whether you show what is in your minds or conceal it, Allah calls you to account for it. He forgives whom He pleases, and punishes who He pleases. For Allah has power over all things.*
- (285) *The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one of them believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His Messengers. They say: "We make no distinction between one another of His Messengers." And they say: "We hear and we obey: we seek Thy forgiveness Our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys."*

Surah al-Hujurat (Qur'an 49, v.13)

- (13) *Oh mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into Nations and tribes, that you might know one another (and not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).*

An unknown Muslim scholar reflects on interfaith:

*'I should become one with you
And you would become one with me.
I should be the body,
You would be the soul.
Then no one would be able to say
That I am different from you,
Or that you are different from me'.*

Appendix C:

Other Resources and Websites.

Use the text of '*Peacetimes*' by Scholes, published by Belitha Press [ISBN 1 85561 761 7], to explore issues around Peace and to provide a focus for reflection - teachers will be able to modify their use of this text for almost any age group.

The 3 Faiths Forum. <http://www.3ff.org.uk/>

3FF builds understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs.

They run education, engagement and action programmes that bring diverse communities together.

They say: Why is this work needed?

'In our diverse societies good relations between our communities are essential. Without these ties, myths and prejudices flourish, often leading to racism and intolerance. Our programmes break down barriers and find ways for people to work together to improve their communities and society. By building new intercommunal relationships we make positive social change possible.'

Insted Consultancy, <http://www.insted.co.uk/index.html>

"reflecting work on equality and diversity in education."

This website contains a wealth of useful background information and ideas.

REsilience. <http://resilience-england.recouncil.org.uk/>

REsilience is a self evaluation, planning and training opportunity for teachers of RE. The programme is school based and can be tailored to individual needs. Its purpose is to help increase teachers' confidence when addressing contentious issues, particularly where religious ideas are sometimes used to try to justify extremism and violence.

National Union of Teachers <http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/18572>

Countering Islamophobia through education, discussion and information

Following the highly publicised and tragic murder in Woolwich in May, there has been a rise in Islamophobic attacks and in particular of online harassments of individuals. Some of this harassment is carried out by young people. There have been attacks on some mosques and teachers have reported conversations in classrooms, corridors and playgrounds which have caused them concern.

It is important that teachers know where to find advice and information about: how to discuss issues around Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of racism; and what strategies can be used to prevent and counter prejudice and to challenge and reduce stereotypes about race and religion.

Information and resources to use in classroom are available including:

1. **Do not tolerate intolerance: racism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia**
2. **School project on racist and religious Hate Crime developed by the NUT, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Anthony Walker Foundation**
3. **Show Racism the Red Card**
4. **Love Music Hate Racism**
5. **Kick It Out**

This advice has been prepared for SACRE by Denise Chaplin, Religious Education Adviser and Shaun Burns, Primary Religious Education Adviser of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education to support schools and academies in their provision of Religious Education, collective worship and pastoral support in the light of the national and international crises and situations. It marks an important partnership between the SACRE and the Church of England Diocese of Southwark.