

## **Guidance for education providers – supporting staff and students during the first anniversary of the Manchester Arena Attack**

**This guidance has been developed to provide education staff with advice on how the first anniversary of Manchester Arena attack may affect the emotional wellbeing of both students and staff. It has been developed by NHS professionals with experience of supporting people involved in traumatic events. The guidance should be adapted to suit the age range and nature of educational establishments.**

It is important to acknowledge that anniversaries can be emotional events. Whilst the focus of professionals is on supporting others, our ability to do that effectively depends on our ability to look after ourselves, and our colleagues.

### **Responses to traumatic events**

In the immediate days, weeks and months after the attack many of us were too busy to take time to reflect on the enormity of what happened on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Since that time many staff and students will have experienced one or more of the following common reactions to having been involved in the attack:

- Troubling thoughts, memories and mental imagery
- Disturbed sleep and/or nightmares
- Disturbed appetite, with either a marked increase or decrease in feeling hungry
- Sadness, despondency and apathy
- Irritability and anger
- Guilt and shame
- Emotional numbness
- Increased watchfulness or “jumpiness”
- Increased anxiety
- Poor concentration



Sometimes people who were initially unaffected may experience difficulties many months after an event. These reactions may become apparent for the first time around the anniversary. It is important to remember that this is a normal response and not something which should be responded to with undue concern or worry as they may well pass.

### **Talking to students about the attack.**

The attack has affected many children, families and communities. Children and young people may have had their beliefs about the world and their safety shattered. For those still experiencing symptoms many people are also questioning their ability to cope. Providing clear, age appropriate factual information will be helpful. Talking and marking the anniversary is also important, particularly if it holds significance for a pupil, staff member, school or community.

It may be helpful around the anniversary to share the following advice with both staff and students:

- It is okay to feel upset, guilty, angry or worried around the time of the anniversary and to have an increase in trauma responses
- Neither ignore nor dwell on intrusive thoughts, images or memories, but rather just notice that they are there. Remember that they are just thoughts and allow them to pass of their own accord.
- Spend time with loved ones and close friends, resisting any temptation to isolate yourself from others.
- Ask friends and colleagues how they are feeling, and where appropriate talk about how you are feeling.
- Keep active, by visiting the gym, going for a run or talking regular walks, ideally in the company of colleagues, friends or family
- Plan relaxing and comforting things to do and how you might manage if you are upset
- Keep in your usual routine
- Try a “digital detox” by switching off social media alerts on laptops, smartphones and tablets for at least some of the time around the anniversary
- Do not use non-prescription drugs or increase your alcohol intake to help in managing any difficult feelings, as this is likely to increase the risk of further difficulties in the future.

## **Supporting staff and students**

There are things that educational establishments can do to offer additional support to those affected:

- Reassure people that an increase in emotional responses and trauma symptoms are to be expected around the time of an anniversary
- Provide information around trauma responses
- Identify students and staff that have been directly affected by the attack and ensure there is a discrete system in place to support and monitor them.
- Recognise how different age groups may demonstrate increased distress – pay attention to changes in behaviour, friendships and performance.
- Identify a familiar trusted adult for the young person to talk to should they wish to do so.
- Listen to and validate any concerns – formal counselling is not necessary.
- Reduce any unnecessary demands.
- Consider supportive measures for SATs and any formal exams – such as a quiet room, seating where the pupil feels most comfortable, a trusted adult in the room and a plan to manage distress.
- Ensure there are clear lines of communication within staff teams and to pupils and parents.
- Avoid practice fire drills and any non-essential safety practices. If unavoidable let those affected know in advance
- Consider the curriculum in the weeks around the anniversary, avoid less helpful topics and retain focus on topics such as building resilience and overcoming challenges.
- Consider taking measures to manage any media interest and to support staff and students to manage their own exposure the media and social media.

## **Planning for anniversary events**

Those directly affected by the attack may wish to be involved with planning events. Attendance at any event should not be compulsory and alternative forms of reflection and remembrance will allow people to choose how they wish to mark the anniversary. Some staff and pupils may want to be with their family or at a community event on the anniversary. Themes such as coming together, building a better future or altruistic plans may be helpful.

For most people any reactions around the anniversary will soon pass. However, for some people feelings which emerge at the anniversary may persist, or be so intense that it will be worth discussing them with their GP, school nurse, occupational health provider or contacting the Resilience Hub for advice.

# Mental health **support**

Contact the Manchester Resilience Hub for mental health support after the Manchester Arena attack.

**Tel:** 03330 095 071

**Email:** [GM.help@nhs.net](mailto:GM.help@nhs.net)

**Wellbeing screening:**

[www.penninecare.nhs.uk/wellbeingscreen](http://www.penninecare.nhs.uk/wellbeingscreen)



**Manchester  
Resilience Hub**

