



Press release – Friday 24 November 2023

For Immediate Release

The Psychological Society of Ireland expresses concern for psychological wellbeing of children and offers guidance in wake of events in Dublin

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) expresses deep concern for the psychological wellbeing of individuals affected by the events that unfolded in Dublin last night. The events in question have undoubtedly left an emotional and psychological imprint on those directly and indirectly affected. The PSI offers its deepest sympathies for the victims of the brutal attack yesterday afternoon, as well as those who may have been impacted by the violence in Dublin city centre last night, some of which was explicitly anti-immigrant.

In the aftermath, the PSI recognises the crucial role parents play in supporting their children through challenging times. Understanding that children may be exposed to information and emotions that could impact their sense of security, the PSI is offering guidance to parents on how to initiate and navigate conversations with them about what happened.

1. **Limit and Manage Exposure:** For very small children who have not heard about yesterday's events, it is helpful to turn off the radio and play music instead while they are at home or in the car. For children who have already learned about the events, it may still be important to manage the content that they are exposed to. Turning off the radio when the incident is being discussed *and* talking with them about the events, at age-appropriate levels, can support their understanding and wellbeing.
2. **Psychological Approach:** It is helpful to listen to what your children know about recent events. You will learn what your child has already been informed about, and it offers an opportunity to correct anything non-factual. Allow your child to ask any questions that they may have and to answer as honestly as you can. Children are body talkers and body readers so they will naturally tune into your emotions. As a parent, it is okay to say, "a terrible thing happened, and we don't know why" and how unusual it is so we will have to wait to understand what and why this has happened. It is also okay to acknowledge

how you as a parent feel about it, for example, “I feel very sad or angry that this took place” or “I’m really confused and upset that people would behave like this.” Follow the child’s lead in the conversation and know that it is okay not to have all the answers.

3. **Security:** Children need to feel they are in a place of safety to learn and to thrive, and the greatest safety for children comes from the strength of relationships they have with parents and teachers. It will also be important to point out that the person in question is in custody and to outline that they are safe going in and out of school today.
4. **Compassion:** Children are kind-hearted, and it may be helpful for them to tap into their own agency and to feel they are doing something for the children who were hurt. You could write a get well soon card or a letter together to those affected. They can use the opportunity to process difficult emotions, to show support for others and to feel empowered.
5. **Empathy:** The events in the city centre last night will have meant some parents may feel fearful sending their child to school today, this may particularly be true for culturally and ethnically diverse people. It is possible that they will be at risk of vicarious trauma even if they are not personally targeted. It will be important that all parents hold measured conversations that look beyond people’s skin colour or ethnic background and instead focus on people’s actions, such as the community members that stepped in to help those affected.
6. **Manage Your Own Anxiety:** Children observe parents’ behaviours and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during times of stress and crisis. Sometimes when overwhelming events happen, adults understandably respond by slipping into automatic pilot mode, trying to cope by looking after everyone else and not paying attention to their own emotions. As adults acknowledging our own emotions, validating them, and engaging in appropriate self-regulation and self-soothing strategies is an important mechanism that not only facilitates the minding of ourselves, but also shows children how to attune to and mind themselves.
7. **Validate Children’s Worries:** Children will have their own worries and concerns about yesterday’s events. Although their worries may seem trivial to us, to them they are just as concerning as our biggest worries. As adults, we tend to respond to children’s worries by saying to them, “Don’t worry about that.” However, children are not able to control their worries in the same way as adults, and so telling them not to worry dismisses their feelings without addressing them and tells children that worrying is wrong. Instead, we need to acknowledge to children that their worries are valid (e.g., “That must feel scary”), normalise their worries (e.g., “I felt scared like that when...”) and then help them process their worries (e.g., “Even though we might feel worried, these are all the reasons why we are actually very safe...”). By doing this, we teach children how to process their worries effectively. We also teach them that approaching parents with their worries can be supportive and beneficial.

Most children, over time and with the support of consistent relationships and routine will settle in the aftermath of difficult experiences. Parents and supportive adults are also urged to tune into the cues of children who may be disproportionately affected, such as those who have experienced direct or indirect violence in their lives and those who are culturally and ethnically diverse. Support and guidance is available if children continue to experience acute distress that is not resolving in the weeks and months to come.

All organisations who work with people need to take a proactive approach in understanding race based traumatic stress. People who are culturally and ethnically diverse frequently experience racism and discrimination that impacts on their sense of psychological safety. This is compounded when there is violence which has a racial element. People do not have to have been directly involved to be at risk of vicarious trauma, therefore organisations that contain ethnically diverse people within their membership (businesses, schools, clubs) should offer solidarity and practical support to their diverse members.

The PSI remains committed to promoting mental health awareness, destigmatizing the seeking of help, and providing resources for individuals to cope with the psychological aftermath of distressing events. The PSI encourages the media and the public to approach the coverage of these events with sensitivity, recognizing the potential impact on the mental health of those directly affected.

Dr Anne Kehoe, President of the Psychological Society of Ireland, emphasizes the importance of seeking support and engaging in open conversations about the emotional toll of recent events. "Our thoughts are with everyone who has been affected by the events in Dublin. It is crucial that we come together as a community to support one another emotionally and psychologically."

ENDS.

For further information, or to arrange an interview please contact:

Jack Maguire

PSI Media and Content Coordinator

communications@psychologicalsociety.ie

+353 87 755 2409

Points to note:

- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), with over 4,300 members, is the learned and professional body for the profession in the Republic of Ireland, with the primary object of advancing psychology as an applied science in Ireland and elsewhere.
- Connect with the PSI through [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), and [LinkedIn](#).