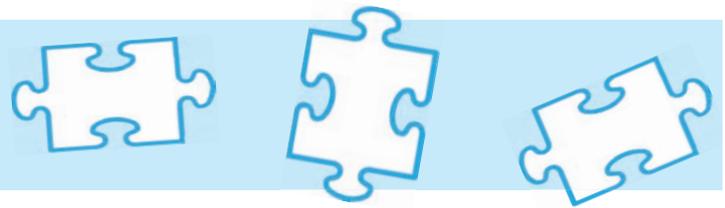


# Preface



Teaching professionals in Britain today face unprecedented challenges, of which the new safeguarding responsibilities with regard to terrorism are among the most demanding. Many teachers are uncertain about what is being asked of them, about how they should respond to questions about terrorism and how, or if, they should address extremist ideologies in the classroom.

Children's questions about terrorism and how to answer them was the starting point for the collaboration between Jane Flint and myself, and led to the publication of our Key Stage 3 teachers' resource, *Radicalisation and Terrorism: A Teacher's Handbook for Addressing Extremism*, in 2015. The enthusiastic response from teachers to the Handbook, followed by requests for special needs and primary level texts, encouraged us to proceed with *Talking about Terrorism*.

In fact, we had long believed that a separate resource text was needed for Key Stage 2, also intended for classroom use but with a simple question and answer format that would reflect children's concerns directly. Jane's experience of teaching in a primary school in Beeston, Leeds, at the time of the London transport bombings in 2005 had convinced us of this. As first responder in her classroom on the day of the attacks, she struggled without resources to cope with the questions put by her pupils: 'What do the terrorists want?', 'Why are they so angry?', and 'When will the next attack happen?' In the days that followed, the demands made of her and her colleagues multiplied. The children's anxieties deepened with news that three of the suicide bombers were from or had connections to Beeston, and that one had been a well-liked teaching assistant in a local primary school. Her school's many Muslim pupils required particularly sensitive care to protect them from victimisation as a small but vocal sector of the local community began an organised campaign of anti-Muslim hostility and abuse. Attempts to sow division and hatred within the community continued long afterwards.

In the confusion that inevitably follows a terrorist attack, adults search for the right words to reassure and to explain, but they can be hard to find. Many teachers feel they lack the skills to engage in open classroom discussion, relying instead on video clips made for children's TV or on occasional visits from police *Prevent* officers. While these can be valuable they are no substitute for meaningful dialogue between pupils and a trusted teacher.

Until now, there have been no resource texts about terrorism specifically dedicated to the Key Stage 2 age group. Existing school resources tend to focus on older age groups on the assumption that primary classes should be protected from unpleasant or difficult subjects, and that the issues are beyond their comprehension. We disagree. In our view it is precisely this age group that is most in need of simple, straightforward explanations. Younger children may be more anxious because of fears they cannot express verbally and more vulnerable to prejudice and manipulative influences because they lack the skills to resist them. We believe that these are the children who can benefit most from the information that this book provides.

We are unequivocal in our condemnation of terrorism: it is brutal, unacceptable behaviour. But our view, reflected in this resource book, is that terrorism is first and foremost a battle of ideas, and that in order to counter these ideas effectively we must understand what lies behind them. Trying to understand is not to tolerate, excuse or respect terrorism, but to equip ourselves with the skills to combat it more knowledgeably. We must not allow the words and actions of those who advocate hatred and violence to override the principles of democratic freedoms and shared values that define our society and make us proud to be its citizens. These ideas are our best weapon against terrorism.

We have written *Talking about Terrorism* to support teachers and school leadership teams in meeting their new challenges. Responding to children's questions about terrorism in the classroom is a tough one. Children have begun asking questions about these issues with some urgency, especially in the aftermath of the terror attacks in Britain in 2017. We want to prepare teaching professionals for the kind of questions that may be asked, and to help them give careful, well thought-out responses. We believe that our unique combination of experiences – of primary school teaching on the one hand and years of studying terrorists and terrorism on the other – will give teachers the confidence to tackle controversial issues in the classroom, to respond to children's questions and to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

Alison Jamieson