# Terrorism and War

A summary of the scientific literature on the impact of terrorism and war on children.



**How This Impacts Children's Development**

Terrorism involves actions (whether by nations, states, insurgents, or rebels) that use violence or the threat of violence against noncombatants to instill fear and manipulate people for political purposes. Children

exposed to both direct and indirect forms of terrorism suffer significant mental health issues, with the most severe impact occurring when they experience direct loss or harm.

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**Talking Points from the SRCD Brief**

- State terrorism—terrorism committed by government and quasi-government agencies—accounts for most of the terrorist actions worldwide.
- Many children exposed to terrorism recover with the support of trusted adults, reassurances of safety, and a return to normal routines.
    - Children with severe or prolonged reactions may need professional mental health interventions.
- While adults and children can be adversely affected by media representations of terror, children can be particularly affected because they may lack the developmental ability to appropriately understand representations in the media.
- Therapeutic techniques help children who experience trauma following exposure to terrorism realize that things are returning to normal; these efforts are most successful when used within a few months of exposure.
    - Parents are an important buffer against severe reactions in children, positive parenting can help improve outcomes for children.

**Policy Considerations in the Brief**

- Federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that are in contact with children after a terrorist attack or threat should maintain policies that identify and assist children.
- Appropriately train first responders and social service workers to help children during a terrorist event.
- Implement procedures at the community level to identify children at risk for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

- Federally funded television programs that promote positive coping strategies could mitigate some impacts of trauma exposure.

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