

Hate Crimes and Racism

Tragedies in London and Kamloops in the Midst of a Worldwide Pandemic

June 8, 2021

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Overview

During the pandemic we focused attention on the effects of quarantine and how the “[Impaired Closeness-Distance Cycle](#)” would contribute to abuse dynamics within some homes because of unrelenting closeness without the reprieve of occasional distance to lower family anxiety. The opposite side of that coin was that quarantine had a temporarily and artificially positive effect on larger Canadian society: it also created distance between those who hate and their potential targets. We would say that some societal conflicts were frozen in place but with things opening up and the weather becoming warmer, distance has been replaced with proximity and possibilities to renew prior conflicts thus intensifying justification for violent acting out.

Remember in the field of [Violence Threat Risk Assessment \(VTRA\)](#) we state, “you can only engage in a serious act of violence towards a target, or type of target, you feel justified in attacking.” That means that random acts of violence are not so random. Even if a perpetrator does not know the target(s) personally the target is still symbolic of a “type of people.” Thus, the Muslim community; the Indigenous Community; the Black community and all other racialized and marginalized communities understand how, with hate crimes, ‘it could have been me.’ With generations of racist and hate-related violence it is too dismissive to say to those who are currently fearful, ‘it was an isolated incident.’ Instead we need to say “What do you need to feel safe right now?” and “What do **we** need to do for you to be safe and feel safe in the future?”

“What do you need to feel safe right now?”

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We have already seen a marked increase in the frequency and intensity in VTRA cases at all community levels. The complexity, in part, comes from the unabated access to the Internet and Social Media that young and old alike have had. The depth and breadth of threats and acting out behaviors from younger children has been alarming. As well, adults and some youth who were on the fringes of extremism before the pandemic have had time to saturate themselves in the justifications for violence offered up by online searches and online communities of likeminded individuals. If there is a family dynamic here, it is not always that violent extremists were raised that way: more often the family dynamic is that the perpetrator was an empty vessel who became a counter-model to a family they did not feel connected to. Nevertheless, we need to be concurrently engaged in VTRA and Trauma Response in the aftermath of the London tragedy and all the other traumas now being exposed in Canada. Remember all of these losses are overlaid on a society already tired from a year and a half pandemic that has intensified symptom development. Healthy post-pandemic mental wellness will not occur by

nature, it will need to be earned. Government leaders, organizational leaders and family leaders need to be aware that **delayed response** to many [silent traumas experienced throughout the pandemic](#) will begin to emerge more and more in our professional work.

How to Plan and Talk to Children and Youth

Since the higher the anxiety the greater the symptom development then it follows: “**the lower the anxiety the lesser the symptom development.**” This means that, with both VTRA applications and when looking at this Extended Critical Period through a [Traumatic Event Systems Model \(TES\)](#) lens, it will allow us to take steps to lower anxiety at a community level.

What to do

1. Identify those in need and seek them out: As leaders, identify any members in your communities who may be part of a group recently targeted by a single incident hate crime. In this circumstance, local leaders of systems and subsystems should be reaching out to the Muslim Community leadership to offer support in areas they can actually assist. This may be emotional support (“we stand with you”), it may be physical support to protect buildings including homes and places of worship, it may be to assess threats they have received or feel may exist. It may even be to resolve an old conflict we had locally and just left unresolved but is currently preventing those in need of support from either asking or accepting it when offered.

2. Do not avoid offering support because of being rebuffed by one leader. We are all engaged in the human experience and one leader may be traumatically closed and say “we are fine” when many others want help, so **be strategic**. Find other leaders or coleaders who may be able to bridge the gap and invite us in.

3. Reach out to other groups who have been targeted by hate in the past but are not the focus of the current incident. Many people will have “**rekindled trauma**” as the current tragedy reminds them of their own past experiences. In this media saturated generation we live in, groups that have been targeted by hate and violence are used to people showing up to help them when the cameras are recording, and the world is watching. But once the media has moved to a new story they are aware of how quickly abandonment can occur. This dynamic alone can generate hurt and anger in some and contribute to the Trauma-Violence Continuum.

4. Genuine support: Violence prevention and traumatic aftermath support are successful when all involved are engaged in **ongoing and genuine** relationship building.

5. Stay the course of support: Vigils held jointly by religious denominations around the world saying “an attack against you is an attack against us all” are wonderful to see if they are genuine. Even in these contexts, some leaders show up for the cameras and disappear just as quickly when the world is no longer engaged. Our young adults and children watch us and many notice the incongruencies of the adult world around them. Therefore, a theme for every group of religious leaders that have come together, as well as, government leaders, multi-stakeholder

leaders and our youth leaders should be: **“what are we going to do when the cameras are gone.”**

6. Parents and caregivers need to increase their interest in the children and youth in their care. Parents and grandparents of adult children need to increase their interest in their children and grandchildren respectively. The more we interact with children in this current climate the more we are seeing, that with many, their anxiety is very high because of both micro and macro dynamics are affecting their lives. However, because the adults are not talking to them about the current state of affairs, many are not talking with the adults. There is still this old-fashioned belief that “if my child needs to talk they know I’m here,” when in reality if we don’t **take the lead** they just learn we are not there. In otherwise well-meaning homes we have empty vessels who are not connected to healthy mature adult supports, and when it becomes apparent to them that they are alone, **they take up full time residence in social media!**

7. Promote meaningful conversations: Parents/Caregivers and professionals involved with school-aged children should be meeting to have “meaningful conversations” amongst ourselves about our local circumstances and then get organized to engage with our children and youth for meaningful conversations with the goal of more visible connection in each other’s lives.

8. Strategically increase our connection with individual(s) of concern: In VTRA we state “the more a troubled individual can identify with the aggressor the more it will increase their symptom development” and therefore their violence risk. But the reverse is also true that the more an individual can identify with the victims of violence and learn compassion it will lower their risk **if they receive compassion also**. This is why the Empty Vessel Dynamic is such an important focus for both VTRA and trauma intervention.

The greatest weight on some leaders in some communities is not knowing how to work to decrease the frequency and intensity of violence or how to respond if it was to occur in a high-profile way. That does not need to be anyone’s lot. We understand that we can, with effort, better identify threats and intervene before serious violence occurs. We also know that formal multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder teams with formal protocols in violence threat risk assessment (VTRA) and systems-oriented trauma response (TES) can slow down and eliminate, over time, the trauma-violence continuum.

How to Talk to Your Children About Hate Crimes

Dr. Marleen Wong, Senior Advisor, NACTATR

When we think about talking to our children about tragic and disturbing events, we must recognize how important it is for the adults to be clear about their own thoughts and feelings before communicating with children.

- **Take a moment. Take a deep breath.** Take stock of your own emotions before talking about the London tragedy with your child. The purpose of your conversation is to understand and to address your child's concerns. Your child needs you to be calm and to reassure them that their safety is of greatest important to you.

- **Listen to your child's fears, questions, and worries and try to understand what they are thinking or feeling without criticism or judgment.**

- o If they ask, "How did the family die or why did this happen?", they may be wondering "Might this happen to us?" A short, honest, and reassuring answer for a young child would be something like, "What happened to this family is wrong in every way." Most people are good but, in this situation, a man filled with hate attacked people he did not know but judged them by the color of their skin or the way they looked. We have laws against hurting or killing people. He has been caught and will be punished and will not be able to do it again.

- If appropriate, you might also share parts of what the Prime Minister had to say to all of Canada using ideas and words that are age appropriate: "To the loved ones of those who were terrorized by yesterday's act of hatred, we are here for you. We are also here for the child who remains in hospital -- our hearts go out to you, and you will be in our thoughts as you recover". He also said, "To the Muslim community in London and to Muslims across the country, know that we stand with you. Islamophobia has no place in any of our communities. This hate is insidious and despicable -- and it must stop,"

- Keep communication open. Let them know they can reach out to you if they feel afraid or have a question.

- **As you speak to them, remember you are teaching your children how to face a crisis. Be honest and provide reliable information. If you don't know, it's ok to acknowledge that. You can say, 'That's a really good question, let's think about how we can find the answers.** Don't overwhelm your child with more than they need to know at the time, your child will be reassured by your honesty. **Children can feel secure in a dangerous world if they feel they have a caring adult they can depend upon and trust.**

- Model kind and sensitive behavior. **Start slowly.** In the beginning, keep it brief. Your child will let you know what they are worried about which will change over time as more is known. **Think together about ways you and your child can reach out and make a difference.** You might decide to do a good deed. There may be children of all cultures and races in your community who can benefit from kindness and inclusion.

· **In your actions, show that you believe in your child’s courage, strength and resilience.** Yes, it is a dangerous world, and there are reasons for fear. But they are not alone and together you can use the lessons of the past to help your child feel empowered by helping to create a world that is safer, kinder, and more loving.

· **Share your belief that love is stronger than hate.** Help your child move toward constructive actions that fight every kind of bigotry and prejudice. Share stories of the courage of people you know in your family, at your place of worship, or in your community. There are heroes in everyday life who have stood up to racism and discrimination. Point out ways in which you have observed your child speaking out, reaching out or helping others at home, at school, in clubs, places of worship or in other activities.

Note: On 22 March 2017, a terrorist attack took place outside the Palace of Westminster, seat of the British Parliament. Here are a few words of advice that they gave to parents in London England which still has relevance today:

Most people would agree that there should be some limits to children’s exposure to bad news, in terms of language used and details given. But sometimes it happens and there is no way for our children to avoid hearing about it or talking about it at school or in the community with peers and other adults. This is the case with an event as serious as a terrorist attack. We have to think about what we do to help and support them.

When children say “I’m scared”. Pretending that nothing has happened is often no longer an option, and parents and teachers will often need to provide support to process something that is incomprehensible. Be honest in answering the questions you are asked; explain that anxiety and worry are normal emotions; reassure your children or students let them know that they are safe; frame answers to their questions based on their prior knowledge (don’t go into too much detail that maybe they didn’t already know).

“Don’t try to keep it secret”. There are no easy answers, but the same principles apply to encouraging them to speak about bullying, child sexual exploitation, inappropriate imagery and most other in-person or online realities. We need to be constantly developing an atmosphere where it is safe to talk about how we can deal with the problems in our lives and in the world in the most positive and constructive way possible.

Resources:

<https://www.nactatr.com/files/2020NACTATR-PFA.pdf>

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/age-related-reactions-traumatic-event>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/201811/how-should-you-talk-your-child-about-the-holocaust>

Resources from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Click on the underlined sections for the complete resource and more details

About Child Trauma

- Children who suffer from child traumatic stress are those who have been exposed to one or more traumas over the course of their lives and develop reactions that persist and affect their daily lives after the events have ended. Without treatment, repeated childhood exposure to traumatic events can affect the brain and nervous system and increase health-risk behaviors
- Traumatic experiences leave a legacy of reminders that may persist for years. These reminders are linked to aspects of the traumatic experience, its circumstances, and its aftermath.
- **Risk and Protective Factors**
 - o Severity of the event
 - o Proximity to the event
 - o Caregiver's reactions
 - o Prior history of trauma
 - o Family and Community factors – culture, race, ethnicity

Talking to children about mass violence

- **Start the conversation** - Talk honestly about the incident with your child. Not talking about it can make the event even more threatening in your child's mind. What does your child already know? - Listen carefully for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns.
- **Gently correct inaccurate information.** If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.
- **Encourage your child to ask questions**, and answer those questions directly. This may be a time to review plans your family has for keeping safe in the event of any crisis situation.
- **Limit media exposure.** Limit your child's exposure to media images of the stabbing, and do not allow your very young children to see or hear any TV/radio stabbing-related messages.
- **Common reactions** - irritable or defiant, trouble separating from caregivers, wanting to stay at home or close by them.
- **Be a positive role model.** express sadness and empathy for the victims and their families.
- **Be patient**
- **Extra help** contact local mental health professionals who have expertise in trauma.

Talking with your Children about Islamophobia and Hate-Based Violence

- Islamophobia is the unfounded fear, hatred of, or prejudice against Islam and Muslims. There are many factors that can heighten Islamophobia in society, including:

- o When a person labeled as “Muslim” commits an act of violence, others may blame or attribute aggression and violence to all Muslims;
- o When a violent or terrorist act is committed against Muslim communities, other Muslims may experience worry and fear that their community members or prayer places (masjids/mosques) may be targeted next;
- o Islamophobia and rhetoric against Muslims may increase during wars and election cycles.
- **Pay attention to your own reactions** - Your children will be watching you carefully and taking their cues from you
- **Seek your own supports** - take time to ensure you feel comfortable talking about the issues first
- **Talk to them about the event** – this will help them know that you are there for them in times of distress
- **Listen to your children** – ask what they have learned from the event, provide comfort
- **Focus on safety** – let them know that adults are working to keep them safe, when the person responsible has been arrested, and include comforting activities like praying
- **Monitor access to media**
- **Watch for behavior changes**
- **Maintain your routines**
- **Consider this a teachable moment**

*This article also covers **Age-Specific Guidelines** about how to speak to Preschoolers, 7-12 year-olds, and teenagers, as well as things to do before a traumatic event*

[Talking to Children about Hate Crimes and Anti-Semitism](#)

Discuss Anti-Semitism

- Answer questions directly
- Empower your children and teens
- Promote family values and beliefs
- Be a positive role model
- Keep in mind:
 - o School can be a place of safety or bullying
 - o Religious services will be addressing this hate crime
 - o Enhanced security in synagogues and temples – let them know that it is there to protect them

Similar articles:

[Talking to Children about the Shooting](#)

[Talking to Children about the Bombings](#)

[Talking to Children about War and Terrorism](#)

Violence Prevention: We Cannot Prevent Everything but We Can Prevent A lot

As the country opens up there will be renewed pre-pandemic dynamics and conflicts. We have already seen in Canada and the United States the intensification of gang wars and gun violence. We have also seen that the majority of perpetrators and potential perpetrators are “imitators” and not “innovators”. This returns us to the role of media and social media in intensifying the justification for violence. In the aftermath of the bodies found in Kamloops, this current tragedy and other more local stories that have not yet drawn national media attention, should result in having regular remote VTRA Committee meetings in every region of the country. This is to get the lay of the land as to how those “Individuals of Concern” (IOC’s) caught within the impact zone may be identifying with the current tragedies and deciding how to match “[resources to risk](#)”. VTRA teams should be asking two fundamental questions: “What are we hearing/seeing?” and “What are some current trends” as perception is reality.

The London, Ontario tragedy has elevated societal anxiety for a variety of reasons including the sadness of the losses and the realization that hate related violence is reaching many corners of the Earth. This leaves many feeling helpless or frozen as though there is a storm upon us that we cannot stop. As noted above, the failure to address how these traumatic events are affecting us is actually contributing to the problem. By avoiding or trying to underreact we are disconnecting from being open to the incredibly important pre-incident signs and indicators that someone is moving on a pathway to violence. We know that many perpetrators give conscious and unconscious cries for help before they finally attack. Even those more committed offenders who are not driven by emotional pain still give pre-incident signs and indicators that we must remain extremely vigilant to identify.

Violent extremism may occur at the hands of groups who firmly believe in the justness or divinity of their cause and hate may not always be the primary motivator (such as some international terrorist group conflicts). But there is clearly hate-related violent extremism where immature and narcissistic individuals elevate themselves by the dehumanization or depersonalization of others.

In many hate-related incidents the perpetrators are depressed, suicidal and homicidal, all at the same time, and intend on their planned attack being their “last act” before either being killed by police or killing themselves. In other hate-related incidents the perpetrators identity is fueled by their narcissism and the broader societal dynamics around them. By comparison, in workplace violence, the perpetrators are so focused on self that the violence is meant to harm those they feel have caused them pain: they are influenced by the micro-dynamics of their own lives. But perpetrators of high-profile hate-related violence are more often influenced by macro-dynamics including the language and perspectives of political leaders, mainstream media and especially social media that is consistent with and reflective of their own distorted or disturbed thinking.

Those not trained in Violence Threat Risk Assessment assume that the offender “just snapped.” The troubling reality is that there are many people who were “primed” for serious violence in

the past but didn't act out because they did not have that last bit of justification they needed to push them over the edge. For those already primed to kill, the existence of white supremacy and other forms of intolerance on public platforms is contributing to the risk of violence. While those who perpetrate the high-profile hate-related mass killings are often more in tune with macro dynamics, the triggering point for finally engaging in the offense is often a micro dynamic such as a break up, job loss or even a personal affront. Too many professionals have focused on the micro dynamics as the cause when it is the interaction between all the variables noted that contribute to serious violence. This requires us to be aware of **current high-profile cases** and **anniversary reactions** from past high-profile tragedies and how those interact with micro dynamics of individuals (or groups) we are concerned about.

What to do

1. **“Model Calmness.” - The first principle of crisis and trauma response:**

This Alert is meant to remind us to do our part in early identification and violence prevention as well as seek out those locally we feel may be influenced traumatically by these Canadian events and others. We have signed multi-stakeholder VTRA protocols that can be applied to all forms of violence so review them and use them as needed. The knowledge of our teams and protocols should allow us to model calmness. As such, we should be attending to any Individuals of Concern (IOC) through a VTRA lens and any groups or individuals we feel may be traumatized by current events or past traumas through a Trauma lens.

2. Discuss at the VTRA Committee level in each protocol region whether to do a special late-year “Fair Notice” to remind students, staff, parents and others that we have a VTRA protocol that can be applied to all forms of violence: local anxiety will decrease as your communities are reminded that you have a process and all threat-related concerns will be taken seriously. This extended critical period may exist until the end of June at the very least.

3. Stay hyper-vigilant when receiving any reports regarding a “Individual(s) of Concern”: (i.e. current or former students, staff, parents, coworkers, community members etc.) exhibiting “worrisome behaviors”. Because of now weekly high-profile incidents we should also be watchful of anyone who may be struggling at this time and consider ways to strategically engage them or at least monitor as appropriate.

4. Be aware if there is a shift in the baseline of a “individual of concern”: it is important to collect data in collaboration with local support agencies and conduct other assessments prior to taking any disciplinary or intervention measures. “Stage I (VTRA) overrides suspension.” This includes what the Secret Service referred to as the all-important **rehearsal behavior**.

5. Reinforce your working relationships: Multi-stakeholder agencies in collaboration with Police is the foundation for Stage 1 Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) process and VTRA Leads should be formally connecting with each other to review the VTRA protocol/process. As

noted in the 10th Edition of the “Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol: A Community Based Approach” the highest level of assessment and intervention is when these seven stakeholders are the foundational leaders: Hospitals, Police, Universities and Colleges, Schools, Mental Health, Child Protective Services, Probation.

6. Pay close attention to past and current VTRA cases where the IOC being assessed has inordinate knowledge of violent incidents worldwide or seems fixated on this incident, as well as other recent incidents.

7. Be alert to individuals who identify with the aggressor: Identification with the Aggressor: “The more a troubled individual identifies with the aggressor the more it will increase their level of risk”. Therefore, pay close attention to the media coverage about details of prior offenders and alleged perpetrators. The profile they create and/or glean from social media will provide insight to VTRA team members as to who may be contextually high risk, because they are caught within this current impact zone.

Remember that, in several cases, **conspiracy of two or more** began through online searches that resulted in “**virtual pairing**” as well.

8. Be mindful that a critical period is a ‘predictable time frame’ for increased threat-making or threat-related behavior that will extend at least **two weeks beyond** the extensive media coverage and social media reports of a single incident. But as noted earlier, because of overlapping impact zones from weekly tragedies in North America and their heightened and almost continuous repetition on social media sites, we have identified this as an “extended critical period.”

9. Review entirety of digital baseline: All VTRA cases that come to your attention need to include a comprehensive review of the individuals’ online behavior and digital footprint as that is where we find the most blatant pre-incident signs and indicators. The role that social media plays as both a risk enhancer as well as a prominent contributing source of VTRA data has never been more evident or compelling as justification for VTRA protocol activation. **An accurate VTRA risk determination cannot be made without reviewing the entirety of the person of concern’s digital baseline.**

10. “Strategically” intensify our connections with our highest risk children, youth and adults (or other IOC’s as appropriate) who may be “Empty Vessels”. Remember that proximity to others (family members etc.) does not denote the quality of relationship. Empty vessels are not connected to healthy mature adult supports and because the majority of offenders are imitator’s and not innovators we need to know what they are “filling themselves with”. As noted in the VTRA model, “no one can engage in a serious act of violence unless they feel “justified” in attacking that target or type of target”. But to counter those negative thoughts or ideas, we know that the power of ongoing positive and meaningful human connection is one of the best violence prevention strategies we can utilize, especially if someone is moving on a pathway to serious violence or “contextually” high risk.

11. Increase visible leadership: Local leaders from government, school jurisdictions, police, health, and others should be visible and reaching out in person to leaders from the all-targeted religious communities and assuring them we are truly friends and allies. Young people need to see and hear that ALL the adults are working together to protect them. We have learned in the past that when young people get the message that we (the adults) cannot protect them or are not taking their fears seriously, that an increase in weapons possession will occur as the youth will simply “arm themselves”. This is the dangerous dynamic present in too many cities already.

12. Connect with parents and caregivers: As VTRA and TES Leads, find ways to connect with parents and caregivers in general but specifically those who you feel may need support. Remind them that if they are concerned about their child (including adult child) they can reach out to us. We coined the term “Bedroom Dynamic” years ago because the vast number of single-incident mass shootings occurred at the hands of perpetrators where blatant evidence of their planning was in their bedrooms. Nothing has changed in that regard and the fact that we still find evidence of planning there confirms that parents and caregivers may have some of the best access to information about risk: many just don’t know where or how to ask for help.

13. Self-care: Both the weight and importance of the work of VTRA and Crisis/Trauma Response denotes we not leave the responsibility in the hands of one designated leader. Instead, we recommend formalized co-leadership structures so that the designated leader can be “freed from leadership responsibility” from time to time to ensure we do not burn out our key staff responsible for VTRA and TES leadership. Leaders and co-leaders who can model calmness and are the most hopeful can have a significant influence on system anxiety. Leaders must be able to instill confidence that we can very much manage our current circumstance and consequently lower the level of risk over time. With increased collaboration and organized multi-stakeholder protocols for violence prevention and trauma response, community enhancement becomes the system-strengthening outcome.

14. Collaborate and Consult: If any VTRA team finds themselves in a heated discussion whether to activate the Protocol or not, then you have already decided. **Better safe than sorry** – activate the VTRA Protocol. However, because there are so many new emerging dynamics associated with the modern-day evolutionary process and the manifestation of violence, in all its’ forms, our counsel is simple: CONSULT, CONSULT, CONSULT.

Bless Your Hearts!

Sincerely,

J. Kevin Cameron, Executive Director, NACTATR