

Advice to Parents and Carers

Keeping Children
and Young People
Safe From
Radicalisation and
Extremism

ADVICE TO PARENTS AND CARERS

*Much of the content from this pamphlet has been taken from the Educate Against Hate website. For the latest advice please visit www.educateagainsthate.com.

Keeping children and young people safe from radicalisation and extremism

We all want our children to live in a safe and nurturing environment so that they can grow up to become happy, confident adults. You will already know that your children can be vulnerable to risks both inside and outside the home, and will have taken steps to protect them so they can grow, learn and develop to their fullest potential.

Protecting your children from radicalisation and extremism is similar to protecting them from other forms of harm you may be more familiar with such as drugs, gangs and sexual exploitation.

What is extremism and terrorism in the UK?

The Government is determined to protect young people from extremism and terrorism. This includes all forms of extremism across the spectrum: violent and non-violent, from Islamist Extremism to the Extreme Far Right.

What is Extremism?

“Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.”¹

What is Terrorism?

“Terrorism is defined as action designed to influence the government, intimidate the public, and done for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause – that endangers or causes serious violence or harm to people, property, or seriously disrupts or interferes with an electronic system.”²

This booklet has been produced by the
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Prevent Team

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Telephone: **020 8753 5727**
Email: prevent@lbhf.gov.uk

¹ HM Government, [Counter Extremism Strategy](#), October 2015

² [Terrorism Act 2000](#)

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Why are young people drawn toward extremist ideologies?

Radicalisation is a process where someone has their vulnerabilities exploited towards crime or terrorism. Often the radicalising influence is a third party who has their own agenda. Radicalising influences will prey on a wide array of vulnerabilities.

There is no single pathway to radicalisation. Every case is different and the process is unique for each individual.

In general terms, four elements are present. A **vulnerable person** will be introduced to an **extremist ideology** by a **radicalising influence** who in the **absence of protective factors**, such as a supportive network of family and friends draws the individual ever closer to extremism.

Potential path to radicalisation

i) **Vulnerabilities or local factors** — these are the personal factors that could potentially make an individual more susceptible to extremist messages. These factors can be extremely diverse and could include issues such as behavioural or family problems, lack of a sense of belonging, involvement in criminality or grievances stemming from real or perceived injustices. These factors are not rare and can make someone potentially vulnerable to all sorts of harm and crime, not just radicalisation specifically and in many cases may never result in anything negative.

ii) **Ideology** — often underpinning the radicalisation process is an idea, ideology or set of beliefs that the individual has been exposed to that appears credible and appeals to the person in question. Ideology in itself is not a negative thing, but it can be exploited / misconstrued and used in a negative or harmful way. Often a radicaliser will promote an ideology which purports to offer a remedy or solution to an individual's vulnerabilities or grievances but these remedies may have harmful consequences (i.e. a call to violence).

iii) **Radicalising influence (physical or virtual)** — this is an external influence that encourages others to develop or adopt beliefs. This could be a group, an individual (a peer or older person), video content, audio content, a book, a website or a forum. The internet is increasingly being used as a means by which to radicalise and spread extremist messaging without the need for individuals to meet in person.

iv) **Absence of protective factors** — this means a positive influence in a young person's life that is able to intervene in the radicalisation process. This could include factors such as a parent or teacher who spots a child is displaying worrying signs or behavioural problems and intervenes to help. Or it could be a more formal process such as Channel intervention programme (see pg. 4) which aims to address the individual needs of the particular person for example through mentoring and other supportive schemes.

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What is Prevent?

Prevent is about stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It is about supporting those vulnerable to the terrorist's appeal and challenging ideologies that underlie them. It is about all forms of terrorism, safeguarding both adults and children from ideologies across the extremism spectrum (from Islamist Extremism to the Extreme Far Right).

Why does Prevent work with schools?

Keeping our children safe and ensuring our schools prepare them for life in modern, multi-cultural Britain could not be more important.

Schools already play an important role in safeguarding young people from various harms including physical, sexual and drug abuse. Similarly school staff can also play a role in identifying vulnerabilities in young people to harm caused by radicalisation.

Schools should be safe spaces where children and young people can challenge and discuss ideas around extremism and develop the critical thinking skills that allow them to become resilient to extremism.

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 sets out a statutory Prevent Duty on a number of specified sectors including Education. To read more about the Prevent Duty visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance.

What is Channel?

Channel is a voluntary Government funded programme which aims to identify and provide support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism. Channel is a multi-agency safeguarding programme run in every local authority in England and Wales. It works to divert vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism and provides a range of support including mentoring, counselling, and participation in diversionary activities.

Channel is about early intervention to protect and divert people from being drawn into committing terrorist related activity and addresses all forms of extremism.

Channel is a voluntary programme. It is up to an individual, or their parents where appropriate, to decide whether to take advantage of the support it offers.

Channel is NOT a criminal sanction and is completely confidential. Participation will NOT show up on any checks or shape an individual's future in any way.

You can find out more about this programme, including case studies of people it has helped here www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-guidance.

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What vulnerabilities are radicalisers looking to exploit?

It is possible for any child to be exposed to extremist influences. Children from very different backgrounds have been radicalised, including those from stable or supportive homes who were doing well at school. However, it's important to keep things in perspective and remember that for most young people, the risk that they will become involved with extremist groups is very low.

To be in the best position to protect your child, you should be aware of the factors that sophisticated radicalisers are looking to exploit. These factors do not exclusively relate to radicalisation and can be potentially exploited towards all sorts of harm and crime. You should bear in mind that these factors are a guide only, and you should also use your judgement as a parent to decide whether your child might be vulnerable.

Struggling with their sense of identity

- Uncertainty or conflict about identity, culture, faith and belonging
- Isolation and alienation (from UK values and culture for example)

Personal circumstance

- Family tensions and negative family dynamics (domestic abuse; substance misuse etc...)
- Experience of a traumatic event
- Low self-esteem or unmet aspirations, including perceptions of injustice and a feeling of failure
- A sense of grievance that is triggered by personal experience such as racism or discrimination
- Lack of strong role models
- Contact with individuals who hold extremist views
- Special educational needs – difficulties with social interaction, empathy with others and understanding the consequences of their actions

External factors

- Local community tensions
- Grievance derived from geo-political events (international conflicts for example)
- Anger with Government Policy (foreign or domestic)
- Unresolved real or perceived injustices
- Having family or friends who have travelled abroad to join extremist groups
- Exposure to a learning environment which does not present balanced arguments and diverse points of view

Criminality

- Negative experiences relating to young offender institutions or imprisonment
- Poor reintegration into society following a period of imprisonment
- Previous involvement with criminal groups

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What are the warning signs to radicalisation?

There is no single pathway to radicalisation. It can occur quickly, or over a longer period of time. Sometimes there are clear signs, and in other cases changes in attitude or behaviour are much less obvious.

The list of warning signs below is intended as a guide. We all know that teenage years are an exciting but challenging time in which young people develop their identities, judgment and critical thinking skills and form important relationships. As a parent you will be best placed to recognise when changes to your child's behaviour feel out of character. Some of the examples below will simply be normal teenage changes or rebellious behaviour but you as parent or carer should have confidence in your instincts if something feels wrong.

Attitudes and opinions

- Argumentativeness or aggression, and an unwillingness to listen to/consider points of view which contradict their own
- Refusal to engage with, or being abusive to, peers who are different to themselves. This could include differences in race, religion, gender; sexuality or political view point
- Susceptibility to conspiracy theories and a perceived feeling of persecution

Changes in behaviour and peer group

- Distancing themselves from friends and peer groups, both online and offline
- A significant change in emotional (often angry) or verbal (use of intolerant language) behaviour
- Regular unexplained absences

Secrecy and harmful materials

- Excessive time spent online or on mobile phones, and a secretiveness or reluctance to discuss what they are doing
- Changes in online identity, including a social media profile image or name. Some people may even have two parallel online profiles, one their 'normal' or old self, the other an extremist identity, often in another name
- Support for extremist ideologies and groups or justification of their action
- Expressions of sympathy or understanding for other individuals who have joined or attempted to join these groups
- Accessing extremist material online, including violent extremist websites, especially those with a social networking element (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
- Possessing or accessing other forms of extremist literature
- Being in contact with extremists or joining / seeking to join extremist groups

Passports

- A small number of children have travelled to conflict zones without their parents or carer knowing. Some young people have asked for their passports falsely under the guise of needing the document to prove their age or identity. A passport is not usually needed for this and young people can apply for an identification card at www.validateuk.co.uk or by calling 01434 634 996.

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What can I do to protect my child?

As a parent, keeping your children out of harm's way is always your first priority. Keeping young and impressionable minds safe from the risk of extremism is no different. Of course, you know your own child best, but this guidance may help you.

Talking to your child, openly and regularly, is the best way to help keep them safe. You might find it helpful to start with a family discussion to set boundaries and agree what's appropriate. Or you might need a more specific conversation about something you are worried about.

How do I talk to my child about extremism?

You might find it difficult to talk to your child about extremism, especially if you're concerned about them. But, whatever the subject, and however old the child is, there are lots of ways to make it easier and more useful for you both.

Ultimately, it's always going to be a case of using your judgment on the best way to address an issue with your child, but the following could give you a few pointers. This is based on NSPCC advice on talking to your child about any difficult issue.

Creating the right situation

Think about where and how to talk about extremism so that your children will listen. You might want to have the conversation in a relaxed and neutral place and you might want to consider having it at a time when siblings are not around to interrupt.

Starting the conversation

It's never easy to start a serious conversation with a child. If you do it too forcefully they may well clam up. But if you take a too subtle approach you might find the chat gets derailed and you're soon talking about something entirely different. It can be a good idea to try to make the conversation relevant in some way. For example, if you're watching TV together and the on-screen content has something to do with extremism, you could kick things off by asking your child what they would do in the same situation. Another good way to get your child's interest could be to say that a friend of yours needs some advice about a particular issue and to ask them if they have any ideas. It's a really nice way to show that you value their opinions while also finding out how much they know about a subject.

Listening is important too

When you want to have a serious conversation with your child it can be easy to forget that it should be a two-way thing. Start by asking questions that do not just have "yes" or "no" answers. This is going to give your child the chance to tell you what they really think. Then give them as long as they need to answer without interrupting. They may be nervous or still working out what they really think and that could take a little time. Do not be afraid to let your child ask you questions too. Be honest with them about how you feel about extremism and talk about your own experiences of it, if you have any. It's also really important to let them know that they can talk to you, other people they trust or organisations like [ChildLine](#), when anything is worrying them.

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How can I keep my child safe from extremism online?

The principles of keeping your child safe from extremists online are no different from keeping them safe from other online threats. The following advice has been produced by the NSPCC to help keep children safe while using the internet and social networks.

As already stated, talking to your child is one of the best ways to keep them safe. However, you can also use parental controls on social networks, online games and browsers and on both hardware and software that can filter or monitor what your child can see. Preventing your children from using the internet or mobile phones will not keep them safe in the long run, so it's important to have conversations that help your child understand how to stay safe and what to do if they ever feel scared or uncomfortable.

Have the conversation early and often

Children and young people spend [an average of 12 hours a week online](#), so online activity is very much part of their routine early on in life. That's why it's important to start talking to your child about keeping safe online at an early age.

It's easier to have conversations about online safety little and often, rather than trying to cover everything at once. As your children get older, and technology changes, make sure you keep talking to them about what they're doing online and how to stay safe.

Explore online together

Ask your child to show you their favourite things to do online, and show an interest in what they do – just like you would offline. This will give you a much better idea of what they're getting up to. And it serves as a useful way to support and encourage them while learning what they know.

Know who your child is talking to online

Children do not tend to think of people they've met online through social networking and online games as strangers. They're just online friends. So it's important to keep track of who your child is talking to. Ask them questions like:

- Who do they know that has the most online friends?
- How can they know so many people?
- How do they choose who to become friends with online?

Explain to your child that it's easy for people to lie about themselves online because you have never met them. You could also become 'friends' with your child so you can see their profile and posts, but your child may not want to 'friend' you, especially as they get older. You might agree that your child will 'friend' a trusted adult on their social networks or online games – such as a family member, so they can let you know if they see anything worrying. However, as your children get older this is unlikely to be appealing to them. Simply having a good dialogue with your children about their online use and safety will mitigate the risk of harm down significantly.

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Set ground rules and boundaries

It's useful to agree on some ground rules together. These will depend on your child's age and what you feel is right for them, but you might want to consider:

- the amount of time they can spend online
- when they can go online
- the websites they can visit or activities they can take part in

Use parental controls to filter, restrict, monitor or report content

You can set up parental controls to stop your child from seeing unsuitable or harmful content online:

- Internet Service Providers (ISPs), such as Virgin Media, TalkTalk, Sky or BT, provide controls to help you filter or restrict content.
- Laptops, phones, tablets, game consoles and other devices that connect to the internet have settings to activate parental controls.
- Software packages are available – some for free – that can help you filter, restrict or monitor what your child can see online.

Check they know how to use privacy settings and reporting tools

Check the privacy settings on any internet accounts your child has, like Facebook or online games, and remind them to keep their personal information private. And talk to your child about what to do if they see content or are contacted by someone that worries or upsets them. Make sure they know how to use tools to report abuse.

There are some great websites for parents that can help you learn more about child online safety, such as www.internetmatters.org.uk , www.saferinternet.org.uk or www.childnet.com If you are ever concerned about something you can also call the NSPCC's online safety helpline on 0808 8005002.

Useful websites

- www.internetmatters.org
This website has lots of information, advice and resources which can be used to help children stay safe online
- www.ceop.gov.uk
CEOP works with child protection partners across the UK and overseas to identify the main threats to children and coordinates activity against these threats to bring offenders to account, protecting children from harm
- www.nspcc.org.uk
The NSPCC offers helpful advice and tools to help keep your child safe online
- www.bbc.co.uk/webwise
The BBC offers information and support for safe use of the internet
- *For more advice on cyber safety visit:*
www.childline.org.uk
www.cybersmile.org
www.childnet.com

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Who can I turn to for help if I am worried about my child?

If you believe that your child is at risk you should talk to them. There is advice in this booklet about how to initiate and facilitate that conversation, and the NSPCC can also provide free, confidential advice if you would like to talk it through with someone impartial.

As well as talking to your child, you could raise the issue with their teachers or a friend or family member who know them well. Explain your worries, and find out if they have noticed anything out of the ordinary. Hearing other perspectives may help you decide if something is wrong.

Your local authority can also provide advice and support. If your child has not committed a criminal offence you should not be worried that you will get your child into trouble by speaking to the local authority. They will discuss your concerns with you and suggest how they can best work with you to protect your child.

The London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham has dedicated officers who work on preventing extremism and they will be able to provide you and your child with specialist support and advice. The local authority will be able to recommend mainstream support options (programmes; youth clubs; advice centres) and depending on the circumstances they might suggest referral to the Channel programme where more specialist support can be provided. The Family Services department at Hammersmith & Fulham can also advise on wider safeguarding concerns you may have about your child.

LBHF Prevent Team

Telephone: **020 8753 5727**

Email: **prevent@lbhf.gov.uk**

LBHF Family Services

Telephone: **020 8748 8588**

Email: **familyservices@lbhf.gov.uk**

If you think a child is in immediate danger or see or hear something that may be terrorist related, trust your instincts and call 999 or the confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321.

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