

Radicalisation: A Guide for Parents and Front-Line Workers

As young people grow and seek their identity, they can be greatly influenced by those around them. **Changes in behaviour, peer group or ideology** are more obvious to us since we see these young people every day. Parents, for instance, are able to observe when their child changes friends, appearance or behaviour in an obvious manner.



Teenagers are **vulnerable** to all sorts of influences: at a time when they may feel more **isolated** or **misunderstood**, it is vital that parents and professionals all work together to support young people as they grow up to **make the right choices**. Contact, communication and transparency between young people and their carers can help reduce the risk of **exploitation, crime and other dangers** that can affect teenagers.



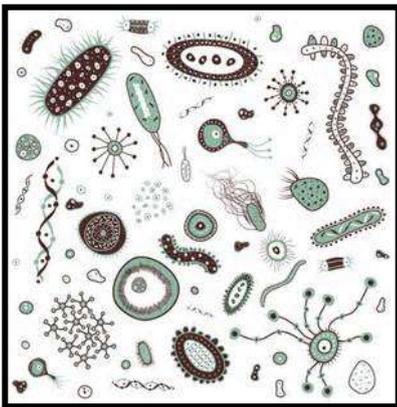
Anyone can potentially **radicalise**. However, research suggests that young people are more vulnerable than others. Most terrorists are young and male, usually between the teenage years and the mid-twenties. Terrorist activity can seem exciting for young people who are seeking their identity and who want to be noticed. Radical groups offer a pre-packaged identity to their groups: the clear-cut rules they offer and the sense of belonging can be appealing to someone who feels very lost.

Although there is no set list of 'symptoms' of radicalisation and no one cause, it is possible to keep an eye out for signs that may indicate the radicalisation process is underway. Many of these signs are also indicative of other problems a young person may be going through.

Even if there is nothing more sinister going on, being aware of changes that a young person is going through can help that person to grow safely and securely. Sometimes, a sudden change in identity is nothing more than a desire to be noticed, or simply trying on a new identity for size. The key is to communicate with young people and help them develop a positive identity throughout their life, rather than simply wait for a potential problem to arise and react to it.

Resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’ when confronted with adversity. It is important for young people to have high self-esteem and resilience in order to be protected from harm. Young people must be taught to be **critical thinkers**, so that they are not vulnerable to radical messages, and have a **sense of belonging and strong sense of identity**.

Teachers, parents and others who work with young people have a responsibility to protect and prevent. Being aware of the causes of radicalisation allows us to protect young people and having an awareness of possible signs that radicalisation takes place helps us to tackle radicalisation once it has already begun.



**CAUSES & RISK
FACTORS**

**‘VACCINATION’ &
PROTECTION**

**DEALING WITH
RADICALISATION**

CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

It is impossible to name a set list of causes of radicalisation. People who become radicalised come from widely different backgrounds and hold very different ideologies. However, there are background factors which can increase risk for a **host of different issues that affect young people**.

- **Searching for identity:** To some extent, all teenagers go through a process of seeking their identity and finding their place in the world. Teenagers who have low self-esteem and feel a lack of belonging are particularly vulnerable, whether it is to gang influence, sexualisation or exploitation by extremists. Radical groups deliver a clear pre-packaged identity and provide a sense of belonging. A person who has begun to be radicalised may change the way they **dress** or **speak** to match the new group they are interested in. For example, they may start to use quotes or new vocabulary that seems out of place, get new tattoos or change their hair and even their name. On its own, these changes may not mean anything, but it is important to be aware of them.
- **Peer influence:** Young people who have been radicalised tend to withdraw from their previous social and leisure activities. They are likely to have been groomed or introduced to radical narratives by someone close to them or a new friend of a friend. A change in friends is likely and this will be accompanied by a **heightened awareness of group identities** e.g. 'me' versus 'them' ideas. They are likely to attend school less and their hobbies are likely to change as well.
- **Experiencing discrimination:** Young people often display anger towards authority and society in general. These views may become more vocalised when a young person begins to be radicalised. They are likely to have experienced discrimination, whether real or perceived, and feel targeted and resentful. For this reason, they may welcome hearing the message of others who share their negative experience of wider society and offer a proposed solution. Radical ideologies play on perceived discrimination and try to provide a way of explaining disadvantage. Young people may begin to search for material from extremist groups more on the internet, join groups where these ideas are discussed and possess propaganda material.
- **Isolation:** Young people often feel isolated and lack in self-esteem. These experiences make them vulnerable to a range of risks. When someone lacks in confidence, they are vulnerable to anyone who might exploit this trait for their own agenda. Extremist groups use persuasive messages and misleading information to attract young people. They may offer a group that will support them, increase their status, or even, in the case of girls, promise them love. Adolescents who are socially isolated, or who feel low, may seek out the comfort and protection of a group identity. It may also offer them an easy way of being noticed if they feel that they lack attention.

‘VACCINATION’ & PROTECTION

- **Talking to young people:** Like most people, young people want their voice to be heard. A first step on the path towards radicalised is feeling frustrated, angry, misunderstood and isolated. They look towards other answers or advice. It is important that communication with young people is always tolerant and open. Maintaining an open and regular dialogue is vital in picking up on any changes and in supporting good mental health. For instance, family dinner times or tutor times at school allow adults to spend more time with young people and get to know what issues are present in their lives. Asking questions to allow the young person to clarify their viewpoint. Keeping the dialogue positive and open can help young people reveal their ideas and be more open to discussion.
- **Educating young people:** It is vital that young people are educated on these issues so they have the necessary information to critically analyse extremist narratives. To this end, parents and teachers will also benefit from gaining more knowledge on topics. For instance, if a child discusses immigration, parents and teachers can engage in a more fruitful conversation if they already know the facts. Similarly, a good knowledge of religion can be helpful in challenging extremist viewpoints. Where we lack knowledge, we can recommend people who know more and can help to answer the questions that young people have. Extremists tend to use facts that have been mixed with opinion. The use of psychological techniques such as using facts that are taken out of context can make their messages very persuasive. If we do not have the answers, it is impossible for us to challenge these ideas, no matter how misleading they might be.
- **Improving e-safety and media awareness:** Young people are often radicalised online. This may be because they have questions and look for answers on the internet or because they have messaged people who are already radicalised on social networking sites. It is important that adults make young people aware of the risks of the internet: they should understand the process of grooming and signs that they must look out for but also have an understanding that sources are not vetted online and are often very biased. Parents can, of course, look at browser histories and put parental locks on computers. However, maintaining an open dialogue with young people and ensuring that they use the internet critically can prevent these issues from arising in the first place.
- **Challenge discrimination:** Individuals who are undergoing the radicalisation process or who are at risk often see discrimination as being the root cause of many of their problems. For instance, they may feel that they are having trouble at school because of this, rather than their own lack of work. It is vital that teachers and parents challenge this perceived discrimination. Exploring common

ground between groups in society and teaching critical thinking so young people can explore different narratives is very important. For example, if a young person blames immigration for the lack of jobs in the UK, show them statistics and different case studies that will challenge this stereotype.

- **Provide role models and activities to boost self-esteem:** Connecting young people with role models from their own group can be a very positive step. This can challenge ideas they may have about discrimination as well as give them a sense of belonging. There are a wide range of groups operating in the area that provide a forum for young people to meet each other, discuss the issues that concern them and to engage in new hobbies that can give them a sense of purpose. Giving young people the means to express themselves and show their talents in a positive way can increase self-esteem e.g. voluntary organisations, youth groups, sporting clubs and community clubs. It is important for young people, as with adults, to feel appreciated, respected, complimented for their achievements and an important member of society.

DEALING WITH RADICALISATION

- **Pay attention to change:** It is important that adults take change seriously and maintain open dialogue with young people to establish whether anything is wrong or not. It is important that young people do not become more isolated and they should be encouraged to interact with positive role models. If a parent is concerned, they should discuss their concerns with their child and contact the school. At this stage, the important thing is to judge if there is a problem. If there are real concerns about a young person, the school safeguarding officer will be able to meet with them and find the right support. Often a young person is simply curious and teachers can help to answer questions, as can other experts in the community.
- **Show concern and engage in dialogue:** It is important to respond proactively to any perceived discrimination and to make sure that young people feel listened to and supported whatever they are going through. It is important to balance paying attention to concerns whilst not seeming too suspicious or judgemental. Avoid ignoring, pressuring, moralising, trying to be persuasive, judging or chastising young people as these ways of reacting cause resistance and can cause further polarisation. Rather, when a young person feels as though you are listening to them sympathetically, you will be in a better position to investigate and challenge any extreme views they may harbour.

- **Share concerns:** It is important not to try and deal with a possible case of radicalisation single-handedly as it may make the problem worse. Asking other professionals to help you decide the degree to which you intervene can help you to make the right decision. Similarly, parents may wish to discuss the issue carefully with the school or with other friends when deciding how to respond. Often our initial reaction to radical statements or worrying internet searches is one of shock and judgement. However, acting in a very judgemental way or being angry can make a young person feel even more isolated and cause them to retreat further rather than open up. More often than not, the school or parents are able to deal with initial concerns, either by answering questions that a young person might have or supporting them. For instance, in light of the media's representation of ISIS, it is unsurprising that many young people are searching for videos online. However, if a serious problem is identified, the school will contact the police and PREVENT, the government programme that is aimed at tackling radicalisation, so that a support programme can be put in place to help the individual. If a parent wishes to make a referral directly, they can do so by contacting the non-emergency helpline of the police (101) or, if necessary, the emergency helpline (999).

FURTHER SUPPORT

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