

# A teacher's guide to understanding the role of the internet in radicalisation and extremism

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

**OGL** © Crown Copyright WG38350 Digital ISBN 978-1-83876-599-6

## Understanding the Prevent duty context

We have written this guide in the context of the Prevent duty as set out by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This makes specified authorities, including schools and childcare providers, responsible for having “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”.

The UK Government Home Office published Prevent duty guidance in 2015 which has since been regularly updated. You can read the most up-to-date version on the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk) which complements this guide. This details how schools and childcare providers can protect children and young people from the risk of radicalisation and access appropriate support to help those measures to be effective. Please note that paragraph 71 states “Specified authorities will be expected to ensure children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the Internet in schools, including by establishing appropriate levels of filtering”

You should read the Prevent duty guidance alongside [Keeping learners safe](#).

## What is radicalisation?

The UK Government’s definition of radicalisation, as set out in its Prevent duty advice, is “... the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism”.

## What is extremism?

The UK Government’s Counter-Extremism Strategy, 2015 defines extremism as “... the vocal or active opposition to our shared values. These include democracy and the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs. We also consider calling for the death of our armed forces either in the UK or overseas to be extremism”.

## What is the difference between radicalisation and extremism?

The key difference between radicalisation and extremism is that radicalisation refers to a **process** whereas extremism refers to a person’s **beliefs**. One of the difficulties with the term ‘radicalisation’ is that the end result is not clear. One common understanding is that a person has been radicalised once they hold extremist beliefs. Extremism, therefore, is the product of the radicalisation process. Another widely held belief is that a person has been radicalised once they engage in terrorist activity, picking up extremist beliefs along the way. The UK Government’s definition of radicalisation (see above) adopts the first understanding: extremist beliefs are the end result of the radicalisation process.

## Why should we be concerned about radicalisation?

Radicalisation is a concern both because of its effects on those who might be radicalised and become involved in terrorist-related activity, as well as those who fall victim to terrorist violence. We should also be concerned about radicalisation's impacts on community cohesion more generally. Terrorist propaganda seeks to create 'in-group' and 'out-group' identities. This paints the out-group as markedly opposed to the in-group and therefore a threat. In turn, this creates fractures in community cohesion and is used to justify violent action against a dehumanised 'enemy'.

## What are the tactics of radicalisation?

A common tactic is to emphasise the in-group's good properties and mitigate its bad properties, seeking to do the opposite for the out-group. Such polarisation means that both groups become 'homogenised'.

Terrorist propaganda then presses this stark identity choice on readers, listeners and viewers, urging them to decide whether or not they identify with the in-group. Such propaganda will assert that those who truly identify with the group will act to further its violent agenda.

## What can you do to help parents and carers prevent their child being radicalised?

One thing that parents and carers can do is to try to prevent their child/children from seeing the world in simple 'us' and 'them' terms. Helping children and young people to appreciate and celebrate different cultures is one important way of achieving this. If a child or young person begins 'othering' a different ethnic/religious group, highlight its good properties and challenge any homogenisation of that group.

## Other practical tips for parents and carers include encouraging them to:

- listen to their child, discuss and agree the sites they visit, know who their online friends are, and limit the amount of time spent online
- promote and celebrate the positive elements of different religions and cultures
- take a look on Hwb at "[A parent and carer's guide to talking to your child about staying safe online](#)"
- talk about any concerns with you or other teachers at the child's school.

## Using the internet to counter extremism

Modern communications have enabled extremists to become far more sophisticated at spreading their ideology – acting at a pace and scale not previously seen while targeting specific individuals. For example, Al-Qaeda often focused its communications quite narrowly, frequently using Arabic and closed forums. ISIS, meanwhile, has sought to reach a far wider audience by harnessing the internet, and particularly social media. Its highly professional online content can reach large audiences with the aim of recruiting in significant numbers.

The UK Government's Counter-Extremism Strategy details ways the internet can be used to present a compelling alternative to extremist ideology. These include challenging the extremist argument and highlighting its simplistic nature, repeatedly exposing the brutality of extremist groups, promoting a positive vision of how faith and national identity can be reconciled, and supporting vulnerable children and young people through participation in real-life activities.

[You can read more about the Government's Counter-Extremism Strategy here.](#)

[The Commission for Countering Extremism](#) has recently called for a review of this guidance.

## Questions around the drivers of extremism

There is widespread disagreement amongst academics as to what causes extremism, with the role the internet an often debated issue. What is generally accepted is that, for the majority of people who share extremist content (or drivers towards extremism), there's no link suggesting they go on to engage directly in extremism.

The recently published UK Government report [Challenging Hateful Extremism](#) explores these themes in detail, as well as outlining positive strategies.

## Further information

UK Government Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales, and Scotland.

[View the advice in full here.](#)

## Training

A [Prevent e-learning training package](#) is now available to help meet duty responsibilities under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This provides an

introductory foundation on which to develop further knowledge around the risks of radicalisation and how to support those at risk.

You may also wish to consider [further training resources available within the Prevent training catalogue](#).

## Reporting concerns

If you become concerned about a child in your care, you should follow your school's/college's safeguarding processes of Notice, Check and Share with your Designated Senior Person for Child Protection. In addition, any teacher is able to report concerns about an individual who may hold extremist views or be at risk of radicalisation using the [All Wales Partners Prevent Referral Form](#). It may be helpful to discuss your concerns with your School Beat officer or local Prevent officer.

## Sources

We gratefully acknowledge the help and support of Stuart MacDonald of the Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law, Swansea University, in preparing this content.