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Guidance

Understanding and identifying radicalisation risk in your education setting

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Applies to England

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To safeguard children, young people and adult learners who are vulnerable to radicalisation, designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) will need to take a risk-based approach.

The DSL should understand the risk of radicalisation in their area and educational setting. This risk will vary greatly and can change quickly, but nowhere is risk free.

To understand the risks or threats in your area, contact your:

- Prevent coordinator or Prevent education officer in your local authority (if applicable)
- [HEFE regional Prevent coordinator](#) (if you have one)
- local policing team
- local authority or safeguarding children partnership
- local authority or police Prevent partners (for access to your counter-terrorism local profile)

The threat of terrorism

The [Terrorism Act 2006](#) defines 'terrorism' as an action or threat designed to influence the government or intimidate the public. Its purpose is to advance a political, religious or ideological cause.

In summary, terrorism is an action that:

- endangers or causes serious violence to a person or people
- causes serious damage to property, or seriously interferes with or disrupts an electronic system
- is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public

The Prevent duty provides a framework for specified authorities to respond to the changing nature of threat in the UK. The government's [counter-terrorism (CONTEST) strategy 2018](#) says the main threat to the UK comes from Daesh or Al Qa'ida inspired terrorism, although extreme right wing terrorism is a growing threat.

Some groups and organisations are proscribed. This means they're banned under counter-terrorism measures introduced under the Terrorism Act 2000 (for example, Daesh and National Action).

The Home Office has published a list of [proscribed terrorist groups or organisations](#).

The extremism threat

The [counter-terrorism (CONTEST) strategy 2018](#) defines 'extremism' as vocal or active opposition to the fundamental British values of:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect
- tolerance of people with different faiths and beliefs

Extremism also includes calls for the death of members of the armed forces, whether in this country or overseas. Some groups and organisations that promote extremist ideologies are not proscribed terrorist groups or organisations.

These groups support divisive or hateful narratives towards others, but may not promote extreme violence. For example, they may hold views that support the distrust or hatred of people with different faiths or undermine the principles of democracy.

We have published resources to help explain:

- [Islamist extremism](#)
- [right-wing extremism](#)
- [left-wing, anarchist and single-issue extremisim](#)

Mixed, unclear or unstable cases

Some children, young people and adult learners may appear engaged with, or have adopted, a mixed, unclear or unstable ideology that supports extreme violence.

Mixed, unclear or unstable cases could include individuals who:

- show an interest in multiple extremist ideologies at the same time

- switch from one ideology to another over time

- target a 'perceived other' of some kind (perhaps based on gender or another protected characteristic), but do not otherwise identify with one particular terrorist ideology or cause - for example, involuntary celibates (incels) who direct their anger mainly at women

- are obsessed with massacre, or extreme or mass violence, without specifically targeting a particular group - for example, high school shootings

- may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism out of a sense of duty, or a desire for belonging, rather than out of any strongly held beliefs

Online radicalisation

Children, young people and adult learners are at risk of accessing inappropriate and harmful extremist content online. This could include downloading or sharing terrorist material, which could be a criminal act.

The internet and social media make spreading divisive and hateful narratives to millions of people easy. Extremist and terrorist groups and organisations use social media (for example, apps, forums, blogs, chat rooms) to identify and target vulnerable individuals.

You do not need to be an online expert to understand when a child, young person or adult learner is at risk of harm. You should deal with harmful online behaviour in the same way as offline activity.

Concerns that a child or young person is being radicalised online

Any child, young person or adult learner who uses the internet can be at risk of online abuse.

Education settings need to be aware of the risks and talk to children, young people and adult learners about staying safe online.

If you're concerned that a child, young person or adult learner is vulnerable to radicalisation online, you should follow your normal safeguarding procedures.

Radicalisation is like grooming. Whether this happens online or offline, you should treat it in the same way.

How children, young people and adult learners become vulnerable to radicalisation

There's no single way of identifying whether a child, young person or adult learner is likely to be susceptible to an extremist ideology or vulnerable to radicalisation.

The process of radicalisation is different for every individual. It can take place over a long period, or it can be very quick.

Children, young people and adult learners who are vulnerable to grooming for sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation or county lines, may also be vulnerable to radicalisation. Factors could include things like being a victim or witness of crime, abuse or bullying, or having personal or emotional difficulties.

Adverse childhood experiences, combined with specific influences from family and peers or online connections, may make someone more vulnerable to radicalisation.

Extremist influences could include, but are not limited to:

- family members having direct contact or involvement with extremist or terrorist groups
- staff members of an education or community setting promoting an extremist ideology
- peers promoting an extremist ideology or sharing extremist material
- access or exposure to online extremist material via social media or the internet - for example, propaganda including pictures, videos, blogs and fake news
- exposure to extremist, terrorist or other violent activity in overseas settings
- access or exposure to extremist leaflets, magazines or stickering
- exposure to extremist groups hosting marches, protests or stalls

Risk factors

Push and pull factors can make a child, young person or adult learner at risk of extremism or radicalisation. Often there are several risk factors present that, seen together, can cause concern.

Push factors

Push factors may include a child, young person or adult learner feeling:

- isolated
- they do not belong
- they have no purpose
- low self-esteem
- their aspirations are unmet
- anger or frustration
- a sense of injustice
- confused about life or the world
- real or perceived personal grievances

Pull factors

Pull factors could include an extremist or terrorist group, organisation or individual:

- offering a sense of community and a support network
- promising fulfilment or excitement
- making the child, young person or adult learner feel special and part of a wider mission
- offering a very narrow, manipulated version of an identity that often supports stereotypical gender norms
- offering inaccurate answers or falsehoods to grievances
- encouraging conspiracy theories
- promoting an 'us vs. them' mentality
- blaming specific communities for grievances
- encouraging the use of hatred and violent actions to get justice
- encouraging ideas of supremacy

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