

# Young People who are Vulnerable to the Messages of Extremism

## Introduction

There is a continued threat from Terrorism in the United Kingdom which can often involve the exploitation of vulnerable people. This threat extends to children and young people to draw them into an extremist ideology and behaviours.

**Radicalisation** is defined as the process by which people come to support terrorism and extremism and, in some cases, go on to participate in terrorist groups and activities.

“**Extremism** is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths, cultures and beliefs. In our definition of extremism we also include calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas” ([HM Government Prevent Strategy 2011](#)).

## Equality and Diversity

It is important to ensure that no-one is treated in any way less favourably on the grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic or social origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, age, religion/belief or political/other personal beliefs.

## National Guidance and Strategies

**CONTEST** is the Governments counter terrorist strategy, its aim being to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism.

**PREVENT** is a key part of the CONTEST strategy, its aim being to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Early intervention is at the heart of “Prevent” in diverting people away from being drawn into terrorist activity. “Prevent” happens before any criminal activity takes place. It is about recognising, supporting and protecting people who might be susceptible to radicalisation. The Prevent Strategy objectives focus on the following core areas:

- **Ideology**- responding to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- **Individuals**- preventing people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
- **Institutions**- working with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that we need to address.

**CHANNEL** is a key element of the “Prevent” strategy and is a multi-agency approach to protecting people at risk from radicalisation. Channel uses existing collaboration between local authorities, statutory partners (such as the education and health sectors, social

services, children's and youth services and offender management services), the police and the local community to:

- Identify individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism;
- Assess the nature and extent of that risk; and
- Develop the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned.

Channel is about safeguarding children and adults from being drawn into committing terrorist-related activity. It is about early intervention to protect and divert people away from the risk they face before illegality occurs.

## Partnership Working

Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance specifies that Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB), OR Safeguarding Partnerships Boards should be commissioning and providing services for children who are likely to suffer, or may have suffered significant harm, due to radicalisation and extremism.

The [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 sections 36 to 41](#) set out the duty on local authorities and partners to establish and cooperate with a local Channel programme of 'Channel panels' to provide support for people, children and adults, vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It is essential that Channel panel members, partners to local panels and other professionals ensure that children, young people and adults are protected from harm.

Since Channel is designed to support and prevent young people and adults most vulnerable to being radicalised or involved in extremism, Channel referrals should therefore be a priority for local authority and other statutory partners in all their work to safeguard vulnerable individuals. Channel should be considered alongside early intervention measures such as work undertaken to support and divert young people from anti-social behaviour, gangs alcohol/ substance misuse and diversion from offending.

Both an awareness of Prevent and an understanding of its aims are vital to the effective management of risk to vulnerable people of getting involved with terrorism and/or extremism. Professionals can help to identify and to refer to the relevant agencies, children whose behaviour suggests that they are at risk of or being drawn into terrorism or extremism.

VPC can help to protect children from extremism and extremist views in the same ways that they help to safeguard children from drugs, gang violence, bullying or alcohol and the work schools undertake on the Prevent agenda needs to be seen in this context. The purpose must be to protect children from harm and to ensure that they are taught in a way that is consistent with the law and our values.

## Understanding and Recognising Risks and Vulnerabilities of Radicalisation

### Principles

A child is defined in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. For the purpose of this guidance, reference to child or children includes all children and young people up to the age of 18.

Children can be drawn into violence or exposed to the messages of extremism by many means. These can include the influence of family members or friends, direct contact with extremist groups and organisations or, increasingly, through the internet; placing the child at risk of being drawn into criminal activity and the potential to cause **Significant Harm**. Circumstances can make some children more vulnerable to being drawn into groups or being influenced by individuals who advocate violence as a means to a political or ideological end. Examples of groups that have used violence to achieve their ends include animal rights, the far right, internal and international terrorist organisations and some fundamentalist faith groups.

Most individuals, even those who hold radical views, do not become involved in extremism but a range of factors can increase and influence those behaviours that are defined as extremism. It is important to consider these factors in order to develop an understanding and recognise the risk factors alongside those factors that build resilience and protect individuals from extremist activity.

Many factors that increase a young person's likelihood of becoming radicalised are from the same as those seen in mainstream safeguarding and include:

- Family tensions;
- Sense of or experience of social isolation;
- Migration and distance from cultural heritage;
- Experience of racism or discrimination;
- Feeling of failure;
- Being excluded from social and peer networks etc.

Those in the process of being radicalised or drawn into extremist behaviour may:

- Be Involved with a new group of friends;
- Be searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging;
- Be searching for a sense of belonging;
- Possess extremist literature or advocate violence actions;
- Change their behaviour and language;
- Seek to recruit others to an extremist ideology.

It is important to note that children experiencing these situations or exhibiting such behaviours are not necessarily showing signs of being radicalised and could be signs indicative of alcohol or drug misuse, family breakdown, domestic violence, bullying etc. or something more minor such as peer conflict. Caution should therefore be exercised when assessing these factors to avoid wrongly labelling or stigmatising individuals. Professionals who have contact with vulnerable individuals must therefore be able to recognise those vulnerabilities and help promote young people making safe choices.

Some children may be at greater risk due to living with or being in close contact with known extremists or adults with extreme views. Such children may be identified by the police or through Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) processes, allegations against professionals, police enquiries or via Safeguarding Investigations and Child Protection Conference systems.

The purpose of the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) framework is to reduce the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders in order to protect the public, including previous victims, from serious harm.

The responsible authorities in respect of MAPPA are the Police, Prison and Probation Services who have a duty to ensure that MAPPA is established in each of their geographic areas and to undertake the risk assessment and management of all identified MAPPA offenders (primarily violent offenders on licence or mental health orders and all registered sex offenders).

The Police, Prison and Probation Services have a clear statutory duty to share information for MAPPA purposes. Other organisations have a duty to co-operate with the responsible authority, including the sharing of information. These include:

- Local authority children, family and adult social care services;
- NHS CCG's, other health trusts and the National Health Service Executive;
- Jobcentre Plus;
- Youth offender teams;
- Local housing authorities;
- Registered social landlords with accommodation for MAPPA offenders.

### **Vulnerability/ Risk Indicators**

**NB** - The following lists are not exhaustive and vulnerable children experiencing these factors are not automatically at risk of exploitation for the purposes of extremism. The complex relationships between circumstances and aspects of an individual's identity may however combine to increase vulnerability to extremism. Over-simplified assessments e.g. based upon demographics and poverty indicators tend to increase victimisation, fail to identify vulnerabilities and, in some cases, increase the potential for extremists to exploit, operate and recruit.

There is no such thing as a 'typical extremist' and those involved in extremism come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. The following indicators have been provided to help understand and identify factors that may suggest an individual is more vulnerable to extremism.

## Vulnerability

The following factors may increase an individual's vulnerability:

- **Identity Crisis-** Being alienated from cultural and or religious heritage and uncomfortable with their place in society, their community or their family;
- **Personal Crisis-** Family tensions; isolation; adolescence; low self-esteem; disassociating from existing friendship group, becoming involved with a new groups or friends; questioning faith or belonging;
- **Personal Circumstances-** Migration; community tension; events in country of origin; rejecting UK values; grievances triggered by experience of racism or discrimination;
- **Unmet Aspirations-** Perceptions of injustice; feelings of failure; rejection of civic life; lack of life chances;
- **Criminality-** Experiences of imprisonment; poor resettlement/reintegration, involvement with criminal groups.

## Access to extremism / extremist influences

The following sets of questions are helpful in assessing an individual's vulnerability factors:

- Is there reason to believe that the child/young person associates with known extremists - either through direct association with known individuals or by frequenting key locations? (e.g. in a relationship with someone linked with extremist activity);
- Does the child/young person access internet sites linked to extremist activity? (e.g. Closed network groups, extremist material, contact associates; or does the YP covertly contact risky individuals via Skype/email etc);
- Is it believed that the child/young person has been to or contacted extremist/military training camps/ locations?
- Is the child/young person known to have possessed or sought out extremist literature or other media likely to incite racial/ religious hatred or acts of violence?
- Does the child/young person express sympathy or support for illegal/illicit groups;
- Is the young person involved with propaganda distribution, fundraising, attendance at meetings?

## Experiences, Behaviours and Influences

- Has the child/ young person encountered peer, social, family or faith group rejection?

- Is there evidence of extremist ideological, political or religious influence on the child from within or outside UK?
- Have international events in areas of conflict and civil unrest impacted on the child/ young person resulting in a noticeable change in behaviour? NB we must differentiate between acceptable emotional responses or verbal sympathy being articulated and genuine support for extremist activity;
- Are there noticeable changes in behaviour or appearance indicative of political or religious influence?
- Has the child/ young person come into conflict with family over religious beliefs/lifestyle/ dress choices?
- Does the child/ young person express support for terrorist attacks; either verbally or in written work?
- Has the child/ young person witnessed, perpetrated or been victim of racial or religious hate crime?

#### **Travel**

- Is there a pattern of regular or extended travel indicative of links with extremist training or activity?
- Has the child/ young person travelled for extended periods outside the UK to locations linked to extremism?
- Has the young person used any ploys to disguise their true identity?
- Has the child/ young person used documents or cover to support this e.g. passports, social network ID?

#### **Social Factors**

- Does the child/ young person have experience of poverty, disadvantage, discrimination, social exclusion?
- Does the child/ young person experience a lack of meaningful employment appropriate to their skills?
- Does the young person lack affinity or empathy for others, or is isolated from peer groups?
- Does the young person demonstrate identity conflict or confusion normally associated with youth development?
- Does the child/ young person have any learning difficulties/mental health support needs?
- Does the child/ young person demonstrate simplistic, skewed or flawed understanding of religion or politics?

- Does the child/ young person have a history of crime, including episodes in prison?
- Is the child/young person a foreign national, refugee or awaiting a decision on their immigration/ national status?
- Does the child/ young person have insecure, chaotic, conflicted, displaced or absent family relationships?
- Has the young person experienced trauma in their lives, particularly associated with war or sectarian conflict?
- Does a significant adult, friend, role model or other have extremist view or sympathies?

### **Referral and Intervention Process**

If you are concerned about a cadet or leader and feel that they are vulnerable to radicalisation or extremism then it is important you contact your Unit or Force Safeguarding Lead and discuss it with them, following the National Safeguarding Reporting Process.

They should refer the individual to the Force Prevent Team or similar. For more information or advice you can contact the [National Safeguarding](#) Manager.