

# A Quick Guide to Understanding Extremism and Radicalisation in Children and Young People

*A toolkit for teachers, parents, caretakers and social workers*



**GROUNDWELL  
PROJECT**

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- Understanding Extremism and Signs of Radicalisation
- The Digital Dimension of Extremism
- Signs of Radicalisation
- A Case Study
- How to Get Support

## Introduction

Extremist ideas that promote violence and hatred, continue to pose a serious threat to our communities. This is particularly the case for young people who are at a phase in their lives where they are seeking sense of identity, belonging, answers to difficult questions and guidance. As such, they can be drawn towards extremist messages and groups that exploit their vulnerabilities.

One of the most effective ways to reduce this risk is through awareness and early intervention. Understanding how radicalisation can develop, and knowing what early warning signs look like, allows professionals, families, and community members to act before harm escalates. Early proportionate responses can make a real difference in safeguarding young people and preventing long-term negative consequences.

This toolkit is designed to support that process. It will help you recognise potential indicators of radicalisation, understand common pathways into extremism, be aware of what local support is available. Overall, it is designed to help frontline workers and parent feel more confident about responding in a timely and supportive manner.

## What Is Extremism?

Extremism is when people hold hateful or harmful political, religious, or ideological beliefs and/or promote the use of violence, hatred or intimidation to achieve their goals.

Extremists adopt an in-group vs out-group mentality in which their in-group is superior and others are not only inferior but also a threat. Extremism comes in many forms and guises and is not restricted to one community or identity group.

Key hallmarks of extremism include:

- *A 'Them vs Us' mentality*
- *Black-and-white thinking (no grey areas)*
- *Justifying violence or intimidation*
- *Feelings of superiority and entitlement*
- *Dehumanisation and blaming other groups*
- *Resentment and extreme feelings of injustice*

## How Do Young People Get Radicalised?

There are many different pathways into radicalisation, and it is important to remember that not every young person will follow the exact same trajectory or go on to commit acts of violence. Radicalisation is often a highly personalised process, shaped by individual experiences, personal vulnerabilities, and social circumstances.

It typically occurs when unresolved grievances, personal frustrations, or unmet social and emotional needs create a sense of isolation or disconnection, which can then be exploited by extremist narratives, content, or recruiters seeking to influence behaviour.

Some of the most common pathways into radicalisation include:

- *Consuming violent content (such as gore and mass attack videos) and finding extremist forums and groups that share this content*
- *Following charismatic figures, influencers, or ideological leaders who glorify violence and extremist views*
- *Being influenced by friends, siblings or other family members*
- *Over-identifying or empathising with attackers, perpetrators, or violent figures*
- *Accepting and spreading misinformation, disinformation, or conspiracy theories*

Understanding these pathways helps highlight that radicalisation is often gradual, subtle, and reinforced by both online and offline social influences. Early recognition and support can make a significant difference in preventing further escalation.

# The Online Dimension

Social media algorithms and online platforms can inadvertently steer young people toward radicalisation by prioritising high-engagement, extreme content that creates distorted "echo chambers." This grooming process is often gradual, utilising everything from encrypted apps to video game lobbies to slowly normalise extremist language and beliefs.

## 1. ALGORITHMIC RABBIT HOLES



Platforms often push shocking videos and conspiracy theories to maximise watch time, trapping users in "echo chambers" where they only see one-sided, radical views.

## 2. THE ILLUSION OF BELONGING



Online communities can provide vulnerable youth with a powerful but dangerous sense of identity and support for harmful beliefs.

## 3. TACTICAL GROOMING IN GAMING



Extremists use popular game lobbies, such as Call of Duty, to entice teenagers by slowly introducing slurs, misogyny, and "dark" humour as a gateway to radical servers.

## 4. IDENTITY DECEPTION



Many apps, including Roblox and Snapchat, allow adults to pose as children or permit older peers to manipulate younger users through unrestricted chat functions.

## 5. GRADUAL NORMALISATION



Radicalisation is rarely instant; it often begins with "edgy" memes or jokes on sites like TikTok and Discord that gradually desensitise young people to actual hate speech.

## Case Study: “Alex” – A Teenager Radicalised into Satanic Neo-Nazi Extremism

“Alex,” a high-achieving teenager from London, became immersed in extreme online spaces from around age 14, developing an interest in Neo-Nazism, satanism, violent ideology, and the occult. He spent increasing amounts of time on extremist forums linked to Fascist Forge and other far-right networks, where he consumed and shared violent propaganda.

By age 18, police discovered over 4,000 extremist images and hundreds of files on his devices, including:

- Neo-Nazi and satanist propaganda
- Antisemitic material
- Graphics encouraging terrorism in the name of Sonnenkrieg Division
- Documents on weapons and violence useful for terrorism
- Footage of the Christchurch mosque attack
- Images idolising mass killers such as Anders Breivik

He had also attempted to join an extremist group linked to a banned Neo-Nazi organisation, claiming he was willing to use violence “for the cause.”

During the investigation, officers also found indecent images of children on his devices. At trial, he admitted multiple terrorism offences and possession of indecent images. As a teenager, he received a suspended sentence and strict conditions restricting his online activity.

However, within months he repeatedly breached these restrictions by:

- Hiding online accounts and email addresses
- Failing to disclose cryptocurrency accounts
- Downloading extreme pornographic material
- Continuing risky online behaviour

A further investigation found he had made a new indecent image of a child while still under monitoring. At age 21, Alex was imprisoned for over three years and placed under a long-term Serious Crime Prevention Order.

This case shows how early, intense involvement in extremist online spaces can escalate, and highlights the importance of:

- *Early intervention*
- *Consistent monitoring*
- *Support for young people who may be struggling with isolation, identity, or online immersion*

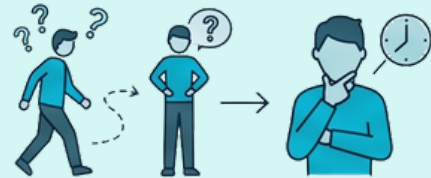
# What Are **Some Signs** That a Young Person Is Being Radicalised?

## 1. INCREASING CONTROL & ISOLATION



Growing influence by a person or group, social withdrawal, ostracisation, and disengagement from school, work, or community

## 2. LOSS OF DIRECTION



Lack of purpose, future goals, or increasing fixation on “making something happen”

## 3. IMMERSION IN EXTREMIST SPACES



Participation in extremist or violent chat groups, forums, excessive time online, or sharing extreme content

## 4. ADOPTION OF EXTREMIST BELIEFS



Blaming specific groups, repeating harmful stereotypes, and believing conspiracy theories

## 5. BEHAVIOURAL INSTABILITY



Withdrawal, a change in social circle or swings between low self-worth and entitlement

## 6. FIXATION ON VIOLENCE



Fantasing about attacks, expressing support for violence, or collecting weapons or related materials

## 7. WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH DECLINE



Poor sleep, poor hygiene, deteriorating mental health, self-harm or suicide ideation, or disturbing writing or imagery

# Sextortion, Violence and Extremism: A Growing Concern

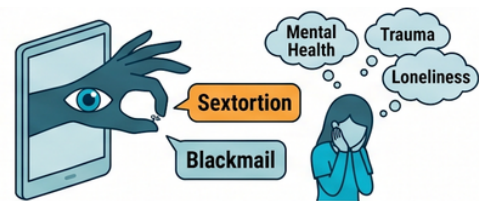
Online extremist networks are increasingly using psychological manipulation and exploitation to radicalise vulnerable teenagers across gaming and social platforms.

## DIVERSE DIGITAL REACH



These groups operate across social media, encrypted apps, and gaming platforms like Roblox, making extremist content and gore easily accessible to unsuspecting minors.

## DIVERSE DIGITAL REACH



Predators specifically seek out teenagers struggling with mental health, trauma, or loneliness (particularly girls) using sextortion and blackmail to exert total control over them.

## GAMIFIED HARM



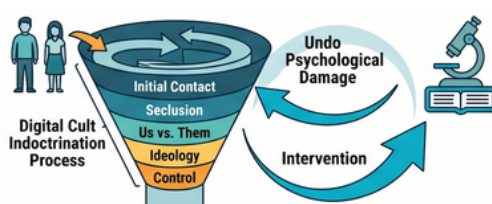
Harmful behaviours like self-harm, eating disorders, and violence are normalised through "competitions," where members are rewarded for increasingly extreme acts to gain group approval.

## EXPERT CONCEALMENT



Radicalised youth are often highly skilled at hiding their involvement from parents and professionals, frequently manipulating others into believing they have left the group when they haven't.

## CULT-LIKE INDOCTRINATION



These networks function like digital cults, requiring a deep understanding of their long-term indoctrination process to effectively intervene and undo the psychological damage.

## How to Offer Support

Young people involved in extremism often feel misunderstood, so it's important they feel heard while you gently understand their online behaviour.

The following tools can support communication and help you gather information, but they are not a substitute for professional help.

### Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)

- Coined by Carl Rogers, Unconditional Positive Regard is the practice of accepting and valuing a person without judgment, regardless of their behaviour or mistakes.
- It is a core concept in Person-Centered Therapy, emphasising empathy, authenticity, and non-conditional acceptance in relationships.
- The approach separates the individual from their actions and communicates "I care about you" even when setting limits on inappropriate behaviour.
- Unconditional Positive Regard fosters psychological safety, helping individuals develop self-worth, resilience, and the confidence to grow and change.

### The Socratic Method

- Developed by Socrates, the Socratic method is a form of cooperative dialogue that uses probing questions to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate underlying assumptions.
- It relies on disciplined, open-ended questioning rather than direct instruction, encouraging participants to examine contradictions and refine their beliefs.
- The method often exposes gaps in reasoning, leading individuals to recognise inconsistencies in their arguments and move closer to clearer definitions or truths.

***There are many resources and guides on both of these tools online.***



#### Tone Tips for Parents

- *Stay calm and neutral.*
- *Avoid sounding like you're cross-examining them.*
- *Praise effort in thinking, not just "right answers."*

When done consistently, this approach helps kids become thoughtful, confident decision-makers rather than simply rule-followers.

## Lighthouse Parenting

Lighthouse Parenting is one valuable tool to both demonstrate healthy behaviour around internet usage as well as building confidence that parents can be a safe refuge for children if they get into trouble.

|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Guiding rather than controlling</b>              | Lighthouse parenting is a term popularised by Kenneth Ginsburg in his book 'Raising Kids to Thrive'. It describes parents who provide steady guidance and protection while allowing children space to navigate their own experiences.                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Safety with independence</b>                     | Like a lighthouse, the parent offers a reliable point of reference stepping in when there is real danger, but not micromanaging everyday challenges.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Building resilience and confidence</b>           | By allowing manageable struggles and problem-solving, lighthouse parenting helps children develop coping skills, responsibility, and self-trust.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Demonstrating healthy behaviour and habits</b>   | By showing healthy screen and internet habits, parents can help children build responsible and safe attitudes towards the internet. This means showing, not just telling, children what you would like them to do in relation to internet behaviour.                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Consistent conversations about the internet:</b> | Online safety should be taken seriously by families and conversations about online safety should be consistent and recurrent. These conversations should include repetition of core points around protecting personal information, being cautious with speaking to strangers, keeping passwords secure, critically analysing content that might be suspicious or harmful. |



**Tip:** Put an event in your Google Calendar or diary to have a conversation about online safety every two months. It might feel like overkill, but kids have shorter attention spans and may not remember conversations that take place several months ago.



## What Is Prevent?

- Prevent is one of the four strands of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST.
- It operates in the pre-criminal space and focuses on stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, particularly through early intervention.
- Prevent works with schools, local authorities, health services, and communities to identify and support individuals vulnerable to radicalisation before harm occurs. It focuses on all forms of extremism.
- The aim of Prevent is to provide safeguarding advice and support for those who need it and to ensure extremist ideologies do not exploit young and vulnerable people.

## Accessing Help

- Seek advice from your local Prevent team by contacting 101 asking to speak to your local Prevent team, or calling the national Prevent line on **0800 011 3764**. You don't need to give specific details and can remain anonymous when seeking advice.
- Discuss your concerns with your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead who is trained to help you navigate this situation and seek support.
- Look up the Newham or Waltham Forest Prevent page at [newham.gov.uk](http://newham.gov.uk) or [walthamforest.gov.uk](http://walthamforest.gov.uk) or email Prevent at **prevent@walthamforest.gov.uk**, **prevent@newham.gov.uk** or **community.resilienceteam@newham.gov.uk**

## Further Reading

- NSPCC Radicalisation and Child Protection: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/radicalisation>
- Educate Against Hate : <https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>
- RCGP Safeguarding Toolkit: <https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=15290&chapterid=900>
- Safer Internet: <https://saferinternet.org.uk>
- Childline: <https://www.childline.org.uk>
- Act Early: <https://actearly.uk>