

The PREVENT Duty

Since July 2015 all schools have been subject to a duty to have “due regard” to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 is an important piece of legislation to support the Government’s approach to reducing the risk of terrorism in the UK, and to reduce the number of “home-grown” terrorists. Section 26 of the Act places a duty on schools in England and Wales to prevent people being drawn into terrorism; this duty is known as the Prevent duty. The duty applies to all schools, organisations covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and children’s homes, and should be seen as part of the organisation’s wider safeguarding obligations.

What is radicalisation and extremism?

The Government has identified two meanings in the legislation:

Radicalisation is “a process by which someone has their vulnerabilities or susceptibilities exploited towards terrorism or crime – most often by a third-party with their own agenda.”

Extremism is “the vocal or active opposite to fundamental British Values, including call for the death of members of our armed forces whether in this country or overseas.”

Keeping Children Safe in Education (Sept 2023) includes information about **terrorism:**

an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Do you know the four general themes the guidance covers?

Risk assessment – assessing the risk for children and young people in a school/academy involves understanding the local context and environment – particular risks could include children missing education, child sexual exploitation, local politics etc. Schools need to listen to children, parents, governors and the local community. Identifying risk of radicalisation can be complex as not all “at risk” students are seen as vulnerable. Perhaps the biggest challenge is keeping all children and young people safe online.

Working in partnership - including with the police, local authority and social care. Effective engagement with parents/the family is also important as they are in a key position to spot signs of radicalisation. Schools should be able to assist and advise families who raise concerns and be able to point them to the right support mechanisms.

Staff training – to equip staff to be confident to identify children at risk of being drawn into terrorism and to challenge extremist ideas.

IT Policies – schools are required to ensure that children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet in schools. More generally, schools have an important role to play in equipping children and young people to stay safe online both in school and outside.

Staff responsibilities in relation to Prevent

- Schools have a vital role to play in protecting pupils from the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Keeping children safe from risks posed by terrorist exploitation of social media should be approached in the same way as safeguarding children from any other online abuse.
- If an adult in school has a concern for the safety of a specific young person at risk of radicalisation, they should follow the school’s safeguarding procedures, including discussing the concern with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, if deemed necessary, with children’s social care. Staff can also contact the local police force or dial 101 (the non-emergency number).
- The local authority or police might suggest a referral to the “Channel” programme, a voluntary Government programme which aims to safeguard children and adults from being drawn into terrorist activity.
- The Education Lead for PREVENT in Essex is Jo Barclay, Safeguarding Adviser to Schools.

British Values

All publicly-funded schools in England are required by law to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. They must also promote community cohesion. Schools must “actively promote British Values” and guidance has been published for schools. Schools can build pupils’ resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values - defined as: democracy, mutual respect, rule of law, individual liberty, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs -and by enabling them to challenge extremist views. It is important to emphasise that the Prevent duty is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments.

Ofsted

The Ofsted guidance, *Inspecting Safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings* (September 2022), states that inspectors will want to consider evidence that “there is a clear approach to implementing the Prevent duty and keeping children and learners safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, including by encouraging open debate about different points of view and beliefs.” In addition, the expectation is that the setting takes effective action to prevent and tackle discriminatory and derogatory language, including language that is derogatory about disabled people and homophobic, sexist and racist language.

Ofsted expects that, as part of the curriculum, children and learners are supported to understand what constitutes a healthy relationship both online and offline, and to recognise risk, for example risks associated with criminal and sexual exploitation, sexual violence and harassment, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, substance misuse, gang activity, radicalisation and extremism. Pupils should be aware of the support available to them.

Staff and governors should be prepared to discuss these expectations during an inspection and be confident about the school’s actions and policies in relation to the Prevent Duty.

Channel

Channel is a voluntary, confidential support programme which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Prevent referrals may be passed to a multi-agency Channel panel, which will discuss the individual referred to determine whether they are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and consider the appropriate support required. An individual’s engagement with the programme is entirely voluntary at all stage.

Far Right Extremism

In the UK the far right has varied in strength and organisation over the last few decades. The most prominent far right groups at present are the English Defence League (EDL) and Britain First (BF).

What causes radicalisation and how to spot the signs?

Radicalisation is the process of causing someone to become a supporter of terrorism, or forms of extremism that lead to terrorism

The concept of radicalisation is typically closely associated with ISIS (also known as IS or ISIL) but it does have much older origins

ISIS is said to have up to 20,000 “fighters” across Iraq and Syria with an estimated 2,000 Britons becoming radicalised and leaving the UK in the past couple of years. This includes at least 50 girls leaving to become Jihadi brides.

What causes radicalisation?

As yet, there has been no clear link or exact cause identified for someone becoming radicalised. This creates the sense that ‘it could happen to anyone’ which, in turn, increases the fear of radicalisation. The lack of an exact cause doesn’t mean we know nothing and it’s important to focus on what we do know and staying informed of current guidance.

Radicalisation is, after all, constantly shifting and changing.

What we know as of now is that the main risk factor identified in victims is vulnerability. Those who are most vulnerable are (but not limited to):

- Younger people from age 13 upwards;
- Those experiencing an identity or personal crisis;
- Individuals with feelings of unmet aspirations or a sense of injustice;
- People with a need for adventure or excitement;
- Pre-existing conviction that their religion or culture is under threat;
- Individuals who feel socially isolated and possibly suffering from depression;
- Those who have a history of criminal behaviour.

It is thought that, for some, ISIS satisfy that need for identity and/or the sense of belonging. For others, they are taken in by the ‘glory and honour’ of the battle or thrill of the victory.

The radicalisation process

This vulnerability is exploited, in a similar fashion to the way sexual predators groom young people online, with promises of excitement, empowerment, glory and freedom along with more material rewards, such as cash, pets and housing. A personal connection is formed: you can be sat at home in the UK talking directly to an individual fighter in Syria who is bragging about his military accomplishments and offering you help and encouragement to travel to join him. To someone so disaffected, this attention is understandably compelling.

The process of radicalisation is rarely the same for two people and can be anything from slow and gradual to fast and effective, but underpinning the process is the strong brand ISIS have created via social media. It’s a brand that paints a seductive picture and acts as a compelling recruitment drive that inspires thousands of people to embark on a one-way journey to join their cause. In fact, it has been argued that ISIS’ social media strategy could rival the biggest brands in the world with ISIS holding, at any one time, over 45,000 Twitter accounts.

How to spot the tell-tale signs of radicalisation

- Being overly secretive about their online viewing – this being one of the core ways in which ISIS is known to communicate.
- Displaying feelings of isolation or expressions of an ‘us and them’ mentality – a sign of the sense of social isolation.
- Becoming more argumentative or domineering in their viewpoints, being quick to condemn those who disagree and ignoring views that contradict their own.
- Questioning their faith or identity.
- Downloading or promotion extremist content.
- Social isolation – losing interest in activities they used to enjoy, distancing themselves from friends and social groups.
- Altered appearance – change in style of dress and/or personal appearance.
- Abnormal routines, travel patterns or aspirations.

Talking to someone you believe is at risk of radicalisation

If someone is exhibiting one, or more, of these signs, it still doesn’t necessarily mean that they are definitely being subjected to radicalisation. The first step would be to talk to the individual; be calm, open, and non-confrontational so that you encourage them to share their ideas and opinions with you. Remember that you’re likely dealing with a vulnerable person who is being groomed or manipulated so show acceptance for their views even if you don’t perhaps feel that way.

Ultimately though, radicalisation is a safeguarding issue and, as such, should be dealt with in accordance with any safeguarding policies and procedures within your organisation. In addition, further information on how to act will be available on your local authority’s website.

Additional guidance and further reading

- Prevent Duty guidance for England and Wales April 2021 [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92422/Prevent-Duty-Guidance-2021.pdf)
- Counter Extremism Strategy HM Government 2015
- Educate Against Hate <http://educateagainsthate.com/>
- E-learning training package [Prevent Awareness e-Learning - Educate Against Hate](https://www.essex.gov.uk/media/1894/doc-set-prevent-policy-guidance-v4.pdf)
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock Prevent Policy and guidance <https://www.essex.gov.uk/media/1894/doc-set-prevent-policy-guidance-v4.pdf>
- Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2023
- Hope not Hate <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/>
- Anti-Terrorist Hotline 0800 789321
- DC 2677 Tess Wisbey, Essex Prevent Engagement Officer tess.wisbey@essex.pnn.police.uk