

# Religious Leaders

# Dealing with Radicalisation: Aims

These recommendations are intended for religious leaders who may be in regular contact with members of the community.

After the course, you should:

- Be more aware of the possibility that an individual in your target group may be vulnerable to radicalisation;
- Understand some of the causes and possible signs of the process;
- Be aware of which other professional groups could help achieve a positive outcome from the process and could support you and the vulnerable individual;
- Feel empowered to contact these groups and correctly approach the vulnerable individual.

# Why You?

- Radicalisation is, essentially, a process of change, connected to a quest for identity and meaning.
- As someone working regularly with people searching for meaning and guidance, your profession puts you in a position where you may be confronted with signals of possible radicalisation.
- You may see people from your community change their behaviour, appearance or interactions with you or with their peer group.



A Community Approach

# Your Potential Role

- Your profession puts you in the innermost ring, close to individuals who may be at risk.
- You may observe their behaviours, their formation of beliefs about their position in society and their identity, and selection of peers.
- You could be someone they turn to with questions about meaning or certain aspects of religion.
- While not an expert on terrorism , you are an expert on teaching and caring for people in your community, which may help you to play a vital role in the counter-radicalisation process.
- Your knowledge of cultural and religious customs and beliefs may help others front-liners to better interpret behavioural signals they may have observed in an individual, and choose an appropriate response.

# What to look out for?

No specific checklist but some signs and possible behaviours you may be able to observe.

Be alert to changes in:

- Attitude towards society and authority;
- Friendship group;
- Clothing and appearance;
- Academic performance, school attendance or participation in leisure activities.

A radicalisation process may go very fast, be a gradual development spread over several years, or anything in between.

# The Ground Floor

Individuals who may be vulnerable to the influence of radical groups may be:

- Searching for an identity.
- Connected to someone within a radical group.
- The victim of discrimination.

Do:

- Help the individual form a positive identity- offer a safe environment, show an interest in their hobbies.
- Be aware that a person runs a higher risk of being radicalised if they have social connections to a radical group. Be extra attentive to their development.
- Respond proactively to any reports of discrimination.
- If you agree that the discrimination was genuine, make it clear to the individual that there are legitimate means of addressing the problem.

# On the First Floor

## A vulnerable individual may:

- Display a tendency to attribute lack of success (e.g. in achieving goals) to discrimination rather than personal failure.
- Display a loss of belief in the legitimacy in authority.
- Display a heightened sense of awareness of group identities.

## Do:

- Keep communication open and tolerant to maintain an open dialogue.
- If an individual is wrongly attributing lack of success to discrimination, it is vital you challenge and question their perception of discrimination.
- Connect the vulnerable person with role models from their own group to further challenge their attribution of lack of success to discrimination.
- Challenge their sense of 'us Vs. them' or lack of legitimacy of authority with counter narratives.
- Make sure young people going through a hard time feel supported by you and the religious community.

# On the Second Floor

A vulnerable individual's demand for a group providing a clear identity is met with supply: recruiting groups.

An individual's membership of a radical group may be made evident in several ways:

- Verbally- e.g. change in word choice or personal narrative.
- Behaviourally- e.g. change in religious practices or change of name.
- Physically, in their appearance- e.g. change in hair or clothing style.

Recruitment by extremist groups may also be detectable- e.g. appearance of new faces in the community or hanging around at places of worship; sudden or gradual withdrawal of individuals from the community.

## Do:

- Remain aware that changes (e.g. in peer group) could be more than a normal adolescent search for identity. Seek to discuss them with the individual.
- Raise awareness of tactics which may be used by terrorist groups in recruitment.
- Involve other front-line workers in addressing groups which may be attempting to find new recruits by targeting a school or youth club.

# On the Third Floor

**A vulnerable individual may show some fairly dramatic changes, such as:**

- Change in behaviour according to group rules, e.g. quitting smoking/drinking.
- Forcing such group rules on others or challenging non-conformists' behaviour.
- Increased sense of anger at/withdrawal from society.
- Consider violence a legitimate means of addressing societal unfairness.
- Clear definition of the in-group/out-groups.

**Do:**

- Take these signals seriously.
- Try to prevent the individual's isolation where possible- maintain communication, attempt to reconnect them with old friends.
- Discuss these changes and your concerns with the individual's family and law enforcement officers/other youth workers.

# On the Fourth Floor

At this stage, the individual may increasingly believe in the legitimacy of the actions/views of the radical group. The individual's actions may take place outside your view.

However, **you may witness them** :

- Abandon a more extreme look, to blend in.
- Glorify martyrdom or violence.
- Make actual preparations for an attack, e.g. gathering supplies.
- Recruit and train new members of the group; threaten members who try to leave the group.
- Become more extreme in expressions of hate about non-members.
- Possess propaganda material or produce their own, explaining their intentions.
- Make preparations for/actually travel to a foreign country to join a war.

**Do:** Make sure that law enforcement personnel are aware of your concerns. It is at this point that genuinely dangerous and violent activities may begin, so it's really crucial to inform the police.

**Don't:** Assume that the abandoning of their more extreme look means that the person has left the group and is reintegrating- quite the opposite may be happening.