

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN AUSTRALIA



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Introduction

Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse nations in the world. Australians identify with more than 100 different faiths or religious traditions and more than 300 languages are spoken in Australian households.

The challenge for Australia is to accept difference while also promoting social cohesion. A breakdown in social cohesion can lead to a breakdown in community resilience. This in turn can lead to a wide range of social problems including those outlined in this booklet.

What is violent extremism and who may benefit from this booklet?

This booklet looks at the issue of violent extremism in Australia. It is designed to inform the Australian community about how individuals might become engaged in violent extremism through the process of radicalisation and provides information on how to help them disengage from violent ideologies.

Individuals who work in schools, youth clubs, religious centres, community organisations, social services and non-government organisations sometimes encounter young people vulnerable to radicalisation.

Many people who become radicalised to violence may have personal welfare problems or have encountered social marginalisation. They may also be the victim or the perpetrator of vandalism, harassment and violence associated with extremist ideas and groups. Professionals and key community members are therefore in a position to assist vulnerable people and by doing so can help keep these vulnerable people, their families and friends, and the wider community safer.

The booklet offers specific information on the following:

1. Violent extremism
2. Radicalisation
3. The Australian context
4. Disengagement
5. Referral and support.



What is radicalisation?

When a person's beliefs move from being relatively conventional to being radical, and they want a drastic change in society, this is known as radicalisation. This is not necessarily a bad thing and does not mean these people will become violent.

Everyone in Australia has the right to express their beliefs openly, including people who belong to minority political, religious and ethnic groups.

However, it becomes a concern to everybody, including families, communities and law enforcement, if a person begins to advocate or use violence to achieve a political, religious or ideological goal. In Australia only a very small number of people ever have or will ever use violence to promote their cause. Those who do have undergone a process called radicalisation.

Radicalisation is a complex process that can occur for people across a diverse range of ethnic, national, political and religious groups. The process involves a series of decisions which, in certain circumstances, will end in an act of violent extremism.

As a person radicalises, they begin to develop and adopt attitudes and behaviour that seek to substantially transform the nature of society and government. These attitudes differ significantly from how most members of society view social issues and participate politically. In most instances such behaviour does not pose a danger and can even benefit the Australian community.

Australians can exercise their right to express their opinions and ideas through peaceful protests and demonstrations.

However, when a person radicalises to the point of justifying, promoting or threatening violence for their cause, both the community and governments have a responsibility to act.

Those who radicalise and display threatening behaviour, incite hatred or promote the use of violence for their cause require some form of intervention. This may come from family, religious or community leaders or law enforcement. Communities play a vital role in assisting people to move away from violent extremism and intervening to stop acts of violence before they occur.



Research conducted over many years points to the conclusion that violence is a response to frustration, to feelings of not being cared for, and thrives among those cut off from family, friends and the larger community. Some ideologies, both religious and secular, promote the use of violence. The potent combination of frustration, isolation and being introduced to highly charged motives for violence leads some to acts of violence.

Acts of violence occur at the end of a process that often starts quite some time before. It is during this 'time before' that preventive measures can be taken. At the very early stages these measures simply involve caring for vulnerable individuals. Such acts are motivated less by preventing violence than simply wanting to support and assist persons in distress. This type of care is a responsibility of all citizens but is also offered by social service agencies where more professional attention is required.

Emeritus Professor Gary D Bouma AM, Monash University

Does radicalisation always involve violence?

Some movements advocate and attempt to implement positive, non-violent attitudes and actions to change politics and society. For example, the suffragettes who struggled to get the right to vote for women in the early twentieth-century can be seen as a radical movement and those involved would have gone through a process of radicalisation to come to these beliefs. Groups that advocate such attitudes often offer a challenge to conventional understanding that can radically transform a country's social and political landscape. This is different from radicalisation towards violent extremism where individuals advocate or use violence or other unlawful activity to support their beliefs.

Case Study: Erin

Erin grew up in a small town. She had troubles at home and felt she did not belong. In hindsight she thinks she probably had some issues with self-esteem and depression, and wishes she had an adult she trusted to talk to. When she started high school it was difficult and lonely. She was drawn to the local 'nationalist' group at school who were loud and tough. She said she could 'sort of identify with not belonging. She pulled away from her old friends and family and increasingly identified with the extreme right-wing movement. She participated in racist vandalism and hate crimes directed at immigrants and Muslims. She found it reassuring and exciting to be part of a strong group.

After two years of intense involvement she began to notice the lack of leadership and lack of real politics in the group – it seemed people were just drinking, fighting and hating. They weren't making any changes. She began to wonder whether immigrants were really responsible for many of the problems in society. As soon as she voiced any doubt though her 'friends' in the group turned hostile and aggressive towards her. Erin didn't feel she could turn to her family so she stayed in the group a while longer. She was arrested for hate crimes and spent time in prison. As a part of her community service she attended counselling and kept it secret from the group.

She began to address some underlying personal issues. When Erin stopped drinking, regained some self-esteem and had some of her ideas respectfully challenged, she realised her fit in the group was not so good after all. It was still some months until she broke with the group completely. This occurred with the help of a family member, a community organisation and community police officers who provided back-up in case there was retribution from the group.

It is now a number of years since she left the group and Erin has sought treatment for her depression, reconciled with her family, is studying and has made some new friends. However, it was a difficult and slow process. She has moderated her beliefs significantly and makes a point of educating herself on issues rather than just accepting what others tell her. She does not entirely trust the government or police yet – it takes a long time to change some habits of thinking. But a community program helped her to learn how to protest and advocate for change in legitimate ways rather than dissenting by breaking the law or resorting to violence. She is beginning to feel that she really is a part of society and can have a say on things that matter to her.



Understanding the signs of radicalisation

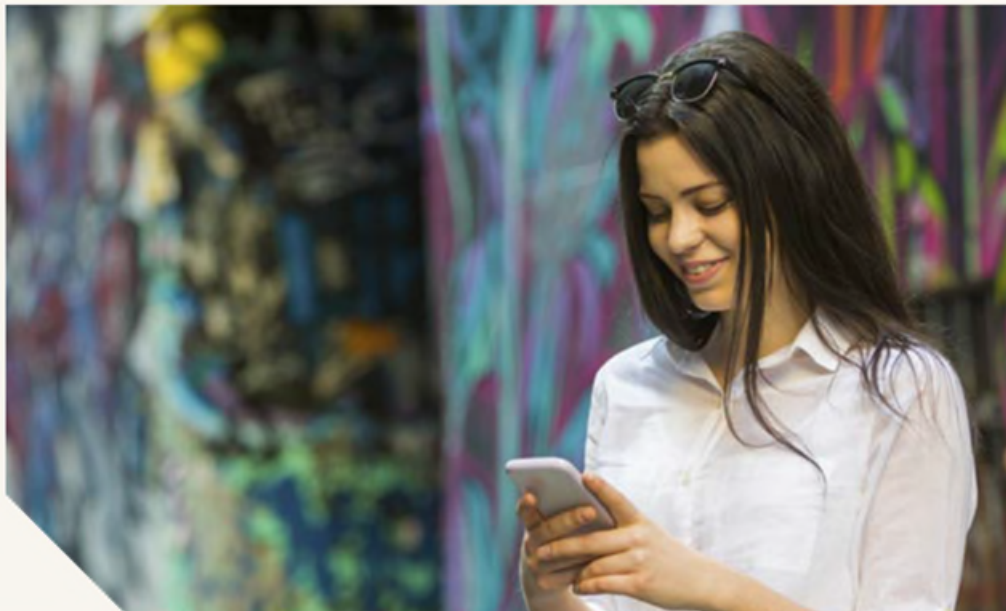
In order for families and communities to help prevent acts of violent extremism it is important for them to understand what the radicalisation process looks like.

There is no single pathway for radicalisation to violent extremism and the process is unique to each person. However, there are some common elements in the experiences of most people who have become radicalised in Australia, regardless of their beliefs or motivations.

These elements include significant behavioural changes in major areas of a person's life including their ideology, social relations and criminal activity. If someone is radicalising towards violent extremism, changes can often occur in all three of these areas.

If they are radicalising, a person's behaviour will also become more intense and extreme over time, when compared with that person's previous or 'normal' behaviour. Their circumstances and environment should also be taken into account. If there is a valid alternative explanation for the changes in behaviour, these changes should not be considered a sign of radicalisation.

Most individuals begin the radicalisation process in one of three areas of their lives: their social relations, ideology or criminal activity. The individual's radical behaviour will therefore be likely to be more pronounced in one of the three areas, reflecting their primary internal motivation. It is rare that a person will radicalise at the same pace across all three areas simultaneously.



Social relations

Many people join extremist groups for social reasons. In Australia, people are most vulnerable to involvement in violent extremism through the influence of close personal relationships. This is especially true for young people.



As people start to become radicalised, they will often pull away from their normal, mainstream activities and friendship groups. They may also disagree and create conflict with family and friends over political or ideological views.

At the same time, some people will start to interact more often with smaller, tight-knit networks of people who share their specific beliefs. Some extreme groups may even require a person to go through an initiation or take an oath of allegiance to prove their commitment to their cause.

Radicalisation is most often led by personal face-to-face relationships, but there are some examples of people becoming involved in radical groups through the internet. A person may become part of an online community of people who share their views and radicalise in a virtual environment.

Ideology

In the process of radicalisation, a person can experience a significant ideological shift which changes the way they view the world. Ideologies are only concerning if they advocate the use of violence or other unlawful activity to promote particular beliefs.

As the radicalisation process builds, some people will promote an increasingly strict and literal understanding of a given belief. They may increasingly use ideological language that vilifies or discriminates against others. In Australia, the small numbers of people who radicalise and promote violence often do not have a genuine understanding of the ideology they claim to represent.

As an extreme ideology becomes part of a person's identity they will increasingly use ideological language and 'hate' rhetoric. Extremist ideologies typically refer to a chosen or enlightened group, and often blame 'others' or identify an enemy which is blamed for causing problems in the chosen group's lives. When a radicalised person dehumanises an opposition group this enables them to simultaneously blame a victim for deserving violent treatment, while also justifying its enforcement.

Increasing religious devoutness or commitment to unconventional beliefs is not the same as radicalisation towards violent extremism.

The use of the internet to view, download and spread material promoting violent extremism is often part of the radicalisation process. Some people may occasionally view such material out of curiosity, but people who are radicalising tend to collect and share this material with others who hold the same beliefs.

Hateful ideology and anti-social ideas might be disturbing or offensive, but if someone has not committed to using violence or promoted its use, they have not radicalised to violent extremism.

Criminal activity

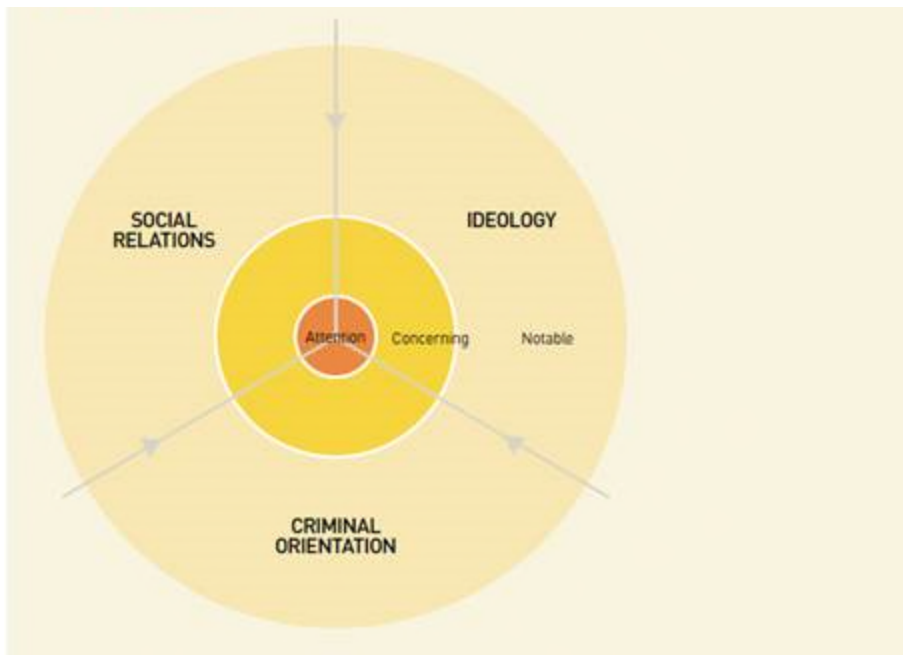
During the radicalisation process, a person may start to 'act up' to draw attention to their beliefs or send a message to a specific group. These activities might not cause serious harm but might still be illegal. They might include actions like vandalism, minor property damage, trespassing or protesting in a violent way.

More radicalised individuals might try to influence governments or a section of the community by making threats. If someone begins to support the use of violence to promote a cause, radicalisation to violent extremism becomes a serious concern.

Once a person becomes committed to violent action, an actual violent attack may take place very quickly. If a person considers unlawful and criminal activity to be acceptable, they might also become increasingly suspicious and cautious. This might mean that they become nervous about the activities of governments, security and intelligence agencies or law enforcement.



Model of Radicalisation



Source: Global Terrorism Research Centre (GTRC), Monash University

Behaviours that illustrate increasing levels of intensity

Notable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The individual begins to identify with a group or ideology that is very different from the mainstream. • Changes in normal behaviour may also occur. • At this level those close to the individual may notice these changes.
Concerning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The individual becomes more removed from society and more committed to a radical ideology. • The person may become closed to those whose explanations or views do not agree with their ideology. • They may begin to use language advocating violence or aggression. • This level requires intervention from a combination of sources: family, friends, religious authorities, social services and/or law enforcement.
Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person is completely engaged in a group or ideology and does not relate to previous friends, family or maintain other relationships. • They are very hostile towards people they see as the 'enemy', including law enforcement and the government. • They see using violence as a way of achieving their ideological goals as acceptable and necessary. • They may ultimately plan or prepare for a violent act.



Reactive group radicalisation

Reactive group radicalisation is a process where a group has an extreme reaction to a real or perceived danger posed by another group. Consequently, the second group reacts and there is a mutual escalation towards violence involving both groups.

An example of this can be found in the relationship between radical anti-Islamic movements and radical pro-Sharia groups in the UK. The English Defence League (EDL), a right-wing movement protesting against what they see as the 'Islamification' of England, was formed after an incident in 2009 where a group known as al-Muhajiroun publicly protested against soldiers returning from duty in Iraq. Over time demonstrations held by al-Muhajiroun (and other groups holding similar beliefs) became a focal point in the EDL's narrative. The EDL began to act aggressively and even violently towards groups they felt threatened their national identity.

Conflict escalated to a point where, in 2012, six men were found to have plotted a lethal attack on an EDL rally. Fortunately the operation was interrupted. Tensions boiled over again in 2013 when EDL members clashed with riot police in London following the killing of a British soldier in Woolwich. A statement on the EDL website noted 'we are at war' and there was an increase in racially motivated criminal damages and assaults in response to the incident.



Violent extremism

If a person or group decides that fear, terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, and then acts on these beliefs, this is violent extremism.

Australia has enjoyed a peaceful history, relatively free from violent extremism. Though the threat to the Australian community from violent extremist behaviour is small, it still exists.

The actions of violent extremists threaten Australia's core values and principles, including human rights, the rule of law, democracy, equal opportunity and freedom. The Australian Government rejects all forms of violent extremism and promotes a harmonious and inclusive society.



There are many different types of violent extremism and examples can be found across many cultures, societies and religions. The motivations of those involved in violent extremism vary — people are motivated by particular ideologies (for example, interpretations of political movements or religious beliefs), issues such as environmental or economic concerns, or ethnic or separatist causes. People can also be motivated by more than one issue. What is common across all types of violent extremism is intolerance and hatred for other points of view.

All forms of violent extremism seek change through fear and intimidation rather than through peaceful means.

Ideological violence

Violent extremists in Australia are often motivated by political beliefs, supported by particular ideologies. This may include right-wing or nationalist extremists who aim to preserve the perceived majority culture at the expense of other cultures. These individuals justify their use of violence based on patriotism or a belief in their superiority to other cultures and races.

In Australia there are a small number of extreme nationalist groups, some of which promote Neo-Nazi-type beliefs. They are sometimes called 'hate' groups because of their negative racist propaganda, and their beliefs which are often anti-immigration, anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic. While their



beliefs are offensive to many, their words and actions are not necessarily unlawful. Using or advocating violence to promote these or other beliefs, however, is always against the law.

Ideologically-based violent extremism can also be motivated by religious beliefs. In such cases the underlying motivation is usually political, but is justified using interpretations of religious texts and teachings, or following guidance from influential people both here and overseas.

In Australia, acts of violence have been committed in the name of many different religions. Some have been planned by small groups or individuals acting alone, and others have been inspired by overseas organisations such as al-Qaeda.

Christian fundamentalist and anti-abortionist Peter James Knight, who killed one person in an attack on an abortion clinic in Melbourne in 2001, is an example of how an individual can be motivated to violence by their religious beliefs.

Issue-based violence

Violent extremism related to a specific issue or cause such as animal liberation, environmental activism or anti-gun control, is known as 'issue-based violent extremism'.

Supporters of this type of violent extremism can include groups that are anti-government, anti-globalisation or anti-capitalist.

Many forms of activism on these issues can be disruptive but are often used simply to draw attention to a cause through peaceful means. This is a legitimate expression of freedom of belief and free speech in Australia.

However, violence, threatening behaviour and/or criminal damage are sometimes advocated by people who want to take their cause a step further. People or groups that use or support violence to promote their cause are of major concern.

Ethno-nationalist or separatist violence

The actions of groups or individuals involved in violent political or independence struggles based on their race, culture or ethnic background are often described as ethno-nationalist or separatist violent extremism. An example of an ethno-nationalist or separatist violent extremist group is the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), a Basque separatist group seeking independence from Spain for the Basque people.

Countries like Australia, with large culturally and ethnically diverse communities, are often directly affected by international conflicts and civil wars.

In the 1980s and 1990s Australians travelled to the former Yugoslavia to engage in the conflict in that region, and more recently Australians have participated illegally in conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon and Somalia. Some people who have trained or fought overseas have also attempted to carry out acts of violent extremism in Australia after returning home from conflict zones.

Individuals have been arrested in Australia for raising money to assist banned international organisations involved in ethnically motivated conflicts. For example, in the past people were convicted of raising money in Australia to support the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka.

While such conflicts can evoke strong emotions in communities in Australia and many people feel compelled to help those affected by them, it is important to be make sure any actions you take are legal.



Case Study: Karen

Karen grew up in a loving family who never participated in activism of any sort. When she moved out of home to attend university Karen became involved in the alternative music scene, student politics and left-wing activism. In hindsight she thinks this was just 'typical teenage rebellion' that went further than most. One afternoon Karen attended an environmental protest with some of her friends. It was exhilarating, fun and she felt like she was doing the 'right thing' for society. She enjoyed spending time with this crowd. During the next six months Karen progressively dropped out of university to live full-time in a forest camp, where she remained for a year. Her family were confused and disappointed and stopped supporting her financially.

The goal of the forest camp was to disrupt logging activities by barricading areas that were being logged, spiking trees, and sabotaging machinery. There was no intent to harm people but inevitably fighting broke out between protesters and loggers. Sometimes the locals and the police became involved in these incidents. Karen was arrested on numerous occasions for trespass, damaging property, assault and obstructing police. She said at the time she felt like she was a 'soldier for the environment so breaking the law didn't matter'. It became all-consuming for Karen and she became totally cut off from her family and previous set of friends.

After years of participating in direct-action campaigns, Karen finally became disillusioned by persistent in-fighting. She also began to question the effectiveness of the protesting methods used by the group. It seemed they might make short-term gains but that there was no sustainable change unless it was translated into wider community support and government policies. She took a paid job with a mainstream environmental organisation and was subsequently rejected by her group who felt completely betrayed.

This was the beginning of a painful transition out of radical activism, where Karen struggled to recover and define her identity and her role in society. Over the course of a number of years she began making new friends, trying out new interests and hobbies and eventually made contact with her family and non-activist friends again. She completed her university studies and now works broadly in the environmental field. Karen also explored her beliefs and adopted a more moderate eco-philosophy. She now thinks illegal or aggressive direct-action campaigns only produce short-term solutions, and she is much more interested in working towards developing a sustainable solution using the legal system.



Violent extremism and the internet

The internet has changed the way we communicate and interact with each other as individuals and as a society. The internet also plays an important role in allowing people to express their views freely to a global audience.

In Australia, we enjoy one of the highest internet user and access rates in the world. Approximately 84 per cent of Australians use the internet at least once a day, with 62 per cent also using social media, such as Facebook or Twitter. This increased use in social media has been accompanied by a blurring of users' online and offline worlds.

The use of the internet to view, download and spread material promoting violent extremism is often part of the radicalisation process. Some people may occasionally view such material out of curiosity, but people who are radicalising tend to collect and share this material with others who hold the same beliefs.

A small number of individuals and groups use social media to engage in hate speech or disseminate messages of an extreme or violent nature. While the majority of online material is often generated by individuals, there are also groups who use their online presence to spread hate and gain support for their organisations.

It's on the internet so it must be true...

Developing and promoting online critical thinking skills, especially among young users, can play a vital role in combating problematic online behaviour. This is important not only to safeguard against violent extremist messages but also things such as online child exploitation and online scams. Individuals are likely to be better equipped to make an informed decision about the information they are viewing and downloading if they are encouraged to investigate and question the source of messages they encounter online.



Case study: Khazaal

In 2008, Australian Belal Khazaal published a 110-page booklet on an internet site endorsed by al-Qaeda. Among other things, the document promoted and outlined potential methods to assassinate members of governments from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

In sentencing Khazaal, the Judge noted that whether or not Khazaal 'was to engage in terrorist activity himself, entirely misses the point ... literature of the type sourced by the prisoner is capable of, and has been shown to, foment terrorist activity'. Khazaal successfully appealed against his conviction but in 2012 the High Court unanimously upheld the original conviction. The High Court found that the purpose of the book was to assist in an act of violent extremism.

It is important to remember that online interactions between those who share extremist ideologies can have real life consequences.

Along with physical social networks, literature and music, the internet is often used by individuals to seek out perceived justifications or rationalisations for their use of violence. Chat rooms, social media and violent extremist websites can act as an 'echo chamber' where individuals can reaffirm the messages they are hearing in the offline world and become desensitised to violent messages, ideology and imagery.

Signs of radicalising to violent extremism online

There is no checklist to help recognise people who may be radicalised by viewing material online. However, family members, friends and members of the public can look for behavioural signs that may indicate they need to seek help if they are concerned somebody they know may be radicalising. These signs may include:

- using online social networking platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to promote violence or other criminal behaviour to advance a cause, or
- looking at or downloading large amounts of violent extremist content including:
 - online instruction and training manuals about making explosives or other methods to undertake violence
 - violent extremist literature, images and/or video clips that advocate the use of violence or other illegal behaviour to promote a cause.

Problematic online use can develop in a variety of different ways that may be noticeable within the individual's family or social group. A teacher or lecturer may discover a student sharing or promoting online violent extremist materials to a select group of people via the student's mobile phone, email or computer. A parent may notice their child downloading violent or hate speech videos and becoming more secretive about their online viewing habits, or friends may notice a change in an individual's social network profile affiliating with or promoting extremist views.

It is important to remember that some of this problematic online behaviour in isolation may not be cause for concern. An individual may have legitimate reasons for downloading concerning material, including for a research project. This behaviour may also indicate some other problem in a person's life. However, if accompanied with other 'offline' signs of potential radicalisation, it would be a good idea for family and others to seek help for the individual before they become a danger to themselves or the community.



Myths about radicalisation and violent extremism



Myth: Anyone who experiences radical thoughts is a violent extremist

Having extreme or radical thoughts is not a problem. Advocacy and legal protest are legitimate ways to seek change in a democratic society, and radical ideas and actions have had a positive impact in Australia's history. Radical thoughts are only considered dangerous, and are of concern to the Australian Government and law enforcement agencies, if they justify or promote the use of violence or other illegal activity.

Myth: You have to be in a group to be radicalised

Many of those undergoing the radicalisation process associate themselves with national and international organisations, or become part of a community of like-minded people online. However, there are examples of individuals who have radicalised and undertaken acts of violent extremism without support from a group. One example of this is the case of Anders Behring Breivik in Norway who murdered 77 people on 22 July 2011 by bombing government buildings in Oslo and carrying out a mass shooting on Utoya Island.

Myth: Radicalisation is always linked to religion

Major religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam overwhelmingly advocate inclusion and peace. Unfortunately this message is distorted by a very small number of individuals who attempt to justify acts of violence using selectively literal interpretations of religious texts and teachings. There are many examples of violent extremist organisations around the world that have no links to particular religions or religious groups. These include the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy. Both of these groups had the stated aims of dramatically changing the political landscape in their countries and have undertaken acts of violence in the past, but do not act in the name of religion or a religiously motivated cause.





Myth: ASIO has unrestrained power to arrest those they believe may be radicalising

There are concerns that ASIO has extraordinary and unaccountable power. A review by the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor has found that ASIO's powers have been used appropriately and effectively, with no evidence of abuses. Coercive questioning powers are not extraordinary or unusual and have been granted to organisations such as the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and various Royal Commissions.

For further information on ASIO's special powers go to: [With great power comes great responsibility](#)



Deradicalisation and disengagement

Once someone is involved in violent extremism, it is important to help them leave or disengage from violent influences as soon as possible.

Ideally they will leave before they break the law, hurt themselves or harm someone else. By remaining engaged with violent extremism they risk their future employment, reputation, relationships and life, not to mention the lives and wellbeing of other people in their community who may also be at risk.

The consequences of radicalisation towards violent extremism seem obvious to those on the outside. However, those on the inside can be blinded by positive feelings associated with belonging to a group that explains why the world seems unfair, says who is to blame and gives permission to exact justice on them. Such individuals do not realise that violence is the least effective way to achieve political, religious or social change. Even if the goal seems righteous, violent or illegal methods will never achieve sustainable change in a liberal democracy such as Australia.

The most common reason for a person moving away from violent extremism is disillusionment, typically with:

- leadership and internal politics within the group
- hypocritical behaviour of group members, or
- ineffectiveness of violent or illegal methods.

Many people leave violent extremist groups because they reject the groups' beliefs, goals and ideology, but this is not always the case. Some people reject the violence but retain the ideas and ideological perspective advocated by the group they left. Unless an ideology promotes hatred and endorses violence, ideas themselves do not pose a problem. The most important thing is that individuals stop using and promoting violence and other illegal methods to achieve change.



When a person stops using violence but maintains a non-violent radical ideology, this is called disengagement. When they change or moderate their beliefs, and no longer subscribe to a radical ideology, this is called deradicalisation.

Walking away from violent extremism is a natural thing to do

Most members of extreme political, religious or activist groups do not stay in these groups. People often leave violent extremism behind on their own.

People who plan or undertake violent acts are usually arrested. This can result in a prison sentence and a criminal record. However, in Australia the vast majority of people involved in violent extremist groups will leave before they ever commit an act of violent extremism or do something illegal. People often leave these movements when they realise the group does not offer true friends, true beliefs or true solutions.

There are many things family and friends can do to help a person pull away from hateful and violent extremist influences. The most valuable thing to do is to maintain open contact, and to respond when the person reaches out.

Like gangs, the shorter the time that someone has been involved, the easier it will be for them to leave.



What happens next?

It is good news when a person disengages from violent extremism. It is a relief for family and friends because the individual has chosen a safer and more positive path for their future. And while the transition can be smooth, there are often challenges. This is another reason why family, friends and community are so important in assisting people to move away from violent extremism.

The same three areas of a person's life that are affected when they radicalise towards violent extremism are influenced when they disengage or move away from violent extremism. This means that it can be useful to focus support on building new social relations, reassessing ideology and stopping criminal activity. Additionally, people disengaging from violent extremism often need to deal with psychological or physical health issues that are related to their involvement in violent extremist groups, and need to address these issues to rebuild their personal and social identity.



A person who has left an extremist group might need:

- help learning how to relate to people in a positive way again. Leaving a group where you have felt a sense of belonging is hard, but rejoining mainstream society can be especially difficult when you have genuinely felt both hated by, and hateful towards, the community you are now trying to return to. The individual may need to learn or relearn how to form positive relationships and who to trust. It may take time for the person to stop viewing the world in terms of “us and them” and may take time for automatic negative thoughts to stop. This will involve learning to relate to others on an individual level rather than in terms of which group they do or do not belong to.
- help to learn about genuine faiths and non-hateful ideologies. Given that all people need purpose and meaning in their lives, immediately after a person leaves an extremist group they may be vulnerable to replacing one extremist ideology with another. The individual may therefore benefit from learning how to be able to respectfully challenge ideas and beliefs.
- help finding constructive and lawful ways to pursue their cause. Community groups in particular can assist a person to make a shift away from using violence and other illegal methods to achieve their ideological goals (towards using democratic methods such as education or raising money).
- professional support for physical or emotional issues. It can take a year or longer for a person to adjust emotionally after leaving a tight-knit extremist group. It is common for them to be distressed by a loss of purpose, friendships, belonging and identity. Some people feel paranoid that the group will want to punish them; others will be paranoid that everyone in the community rejects them. Depending on their personal history, the individual may experience depression, anxiety, trauma, trust and relationship difficulties. Being in an extremist group is not good for anyone’s mental health, so they may need help to access professional assistance if they need it.
- help discovering who they are again and what they identify with. Depending on how intense the experience was, and how strongly merged the person’s identity was with the group, it can be a challenging task for them to find or create a new identity. Identity has a basis in individual attributes and personality, but it is also about who and what we identify with. If a person has pushed down their personal self and identified exclusively with a hateful ideology, then leaving an extremist group represents a critical time for personal reflection, and this can be overwhelming.

They will need to grow multiple new threads of identity to explore where they belong. This means they will need to form new friendships and test out new ideas; friends and family and community can assist them in this process.

What to do?

It is in all of our interests to help people disengage from violent extremism before they hurt others or themselves. There can be a delay between when a person begins to have doubts about the violent extremist group to which they belong and when they feel able to leave safely. A person who has left violent extremism will also almost certainly need some kind of support, whether that is from existing family and friends, or from social services or other community members.

Family, friends and communities can help a person who is trying to disengage from violent extremism by:

- maintaining open communication
- rejecting the hatred / behaviour but accepting the person
- helping them to relate to people in a positive way
- helping them learn about genuine beliefs and non-hateful ideologies
- helping them find constructive and lawful ways to pursue their cause
- helping them get professional support for any physical or emotional issues, and
- helping them discover who they are and what they identify with.



If the person's old group threatens to punish them for leaving, or try to force them into returning to the group, the police may be able to help.

And finally, remember your role in helping someone walk away from violent extremism is very important. You are not alone and it is okay to get some support for yourself.

Case Study: Jay

Jay was born in Australia but at the age of just 20 he was arrested for knowingly being a member of a terrorist organisation. He had no previous criminal record but as a consequence of the actions of members of his group in preparing an act of violence, he was prosecuted under terrorism laws and went to prison.

Jay had become close to two older men in the group, from whom he often sought advice and guidance. One in particular he saw as a father figure following the death of his own dad. He was often seeking advice from this senior figure (who was also the leader of the group) on issues ranging from whether or not to get married to whether he should travel overseas. He even sought guidance regarding viewing pornography on the internet. Some of the men who he spent increasing amounts of time with attended paramilitary training camps in the bush where they practised with weapons and attempted to build explosive devices. One of the men had also attended a training camp overseas.

Jay's youth and impressionable nature led him to trust the religious teachings of the leader. He began to advocate for the use of violence to change government policy and idolise those who used violence overseas. Jay began to view large amounts of extremist literature, instructional manuals and material from overseas conflicts. This, combined with the leader's teachings, began to change his view of the world. In his mind, conflict became necessary and inevitable and he showed an eagerness to perform a big, public act of violence in Australia.

Since being in prison Jay has spent time with people who are not extreme in their political views and begun to reconnect with his family and previous friends again. He has begun to think for himself and take the advice of his brother and other community mentors. They have helped him learn how to respectfully question authority and religious doctrine. He started playing sport again, and soon found that his social interactions with non-Muslims were actually fine, contrary to the teachings of his previous 'leader'.

Now released, Jay lives with his wife and is getting to know his first child who was born whilst he was in prison. Jay's adjustment back into society has been difficult. He has to rebuild the trust of people who feel scared by what he did. Jay regrets his involvement and his past decisions. He thinks he was vulnerable at the time because of his age and grief about his father. He wishes someone could have stepped in and helped him spiritually and emotionally. He now has a small number of supportive friends and family and is working towards a fresh start in life.



What to do if someone is radicalising to the point of violence

If you are witnessing someone who may be undergoing the radicalisation process there are a range of services which may be of assistance, there are lots of things you can do.

Maintain open communication

The most important method that family and friends can use for dealing with the problem of radicalisation is to maintain open communication with the person who is radicalising. A positive relationship is the basis on which all other types of help and support can be built, and can be an effective intervention in itself. Even if the individual decides to break contact with close friends or family, these people are likely to provide a lifeline that can help them to disengage from violent extremism in the future.

It is important to listen to and understand an individual's reasons for becoming involved in violent extremism in order to later assist them. It is also important to make the distinction between their behaviour and who they are as a person. Even if you disagree with what they are saying, it is important that they know they are accepted and supported as a person.

Prevention is always better than a cure. As a caring society we have a duty to ourselves to protect the society we value and to assist those needing help. By acting early and helping to build resilient communities we can address core drivers of violence before they become more powerful.

Community leaders and workers play a particular role in this process. Leaders and people delivering services know their communities. They are likely to notice when someone begins to withdraw and are able to direct attention to potential problems well before they reach dangerous levels.

This resource booklet aims to help everyone understand the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation in Australia. Being informed is the first step to ensuring that problems are addressed before they become an issue for the whole community.

Emeritus Professor Gary D Bouma AM, Monash University





Deal with issues early

Early intervention is best, but to do this we must understand the person's situation fully. A significant trigger event, or an accumulation of incidents, can lead to radicalisation. If some of these issues can be dealt with before they become big problems, this may prevent a person from radicalising further.

Issues that can help push someone onto a path of radicalisation may include:

- changes in living or employment
- anxiety, depression, paranoia, suicidal thoughts or other mental health issues
- personal issues such as health problems, addiction, anger or social problems
- dropping out of school or university
- negative changes in friendships and/or personal relationships
- confrontations with family members
- discrimination and social unfairness
- exposure to hateful attitudes and actions, either as victim or perpetrator, and
- overseas events that may harm their community.

It is important not to assume that any one of these problems will lead a person to radicalise. However, dealing with such issues early may prevent this from becoming a possible trigger for this pathway for them. Assistance from immediate family and community can be most valuable. Some people who are at risk of withdrawing from their families and community may require support in multiple areas of their life and there is a wide range of social and health services available to all Australians which you can call on.

If you feel you cannot approach a service provider directly, then ask a friend or colleague to assist. The purpose of these services is to help all Australians deal with issues, reach their potential and become constructive members of their community. Once specific issues have been identified and addressed, it may be that no further intervention is required as the behaviour you were worried about might stop.



What if I am still concerned?

If someone continues to promote the use of violence and other illegal activities to achieve an ideological, religious or political goal, then stronger intervention is required. The most helpful response is early action by concerned families, friends and communities, with supplementary support from government and other services where needed. We know that radicalisation affects three areas of a person's life. Most forms of assistance will provide responses that fall into these same three broad areas.

For example:

- **Social responses** – appropriate for personal and social issues.
- **Ideological responses** – appropriate in cases of misguided religious, political or philosophical understandings.
- **Behavioural responses** – appropriate where someone is using or proposing to use violent or illegal methods.

Social Responses

If someone has withdrawn from close friends and family, and is spending significant amounts of time with a radical group that is hostile towards others, then a social response may be appropriate.

- Spend time with them. Most former extremists say that having a trusted adult to talk to would have made the biggest difference in preventing them from getting involved with violent extremist groups.
- Get them involved in active and fun social activities with friends who have a positive influence on them.
- Reconnect them with encouraging role models in their life such as respected family members, mentors, coaches, spiritual guides or teachers.
- Ask for help from local youth or social workers.

Ideological Responses

Searching for meaning and belief is a part of human nature. However, if someone does not have a strong background in their belief tradition (eg religion), their incomplete knowledge may make them susceptible to negative ideas and violent extremism. Proper guidance is important. If an individual is embracing aggressive and hostile attitudes based on ideological, religious or political teachings, then an ideological response could help.

- Involve respected leaders to help provide guidance and give solid grounding in the religious, political or ideological tradition they are interested in.
- Continue to have spiritual, political and philosophical discussions with them.
- Find ways to get them involved in constructive community or political activities that enable them to put their values and beliefs into positive action.
- Teach them how to respectfully question ideas, texts and leaders without resorting to violent attitudes.
- Help them interact respectfully with others of different belief systems.
- Encourage them to participate in free lessons or programs available for people who feel disconnected or don't have a voice in society.

Behavioural Responses

Some people become involved in inter-group violence and other illegal activities. In some cases this occurs after they become socially involved with an extreme group and is justified by their particular religious or political beliefs. In other instances someone already involved with low-level crime may adopt an ideology to explain and legitimise their criminal actions.

Diversionary and other behavioural interventions to change the person's actions back to legal and nonviolent methods may help. Suggestions include:



- Help them get involved in any community actions that legally and peacefully address their political or social justice concerns.
- Help them comply with any existing court orders so that they avoid being 'breached' and being sent to prison.
- Help them find different things to do with their time that do not get them into trouble with the law, such as joining a local sporting club.
- Find out what their life goals are and help them to constructively work towards them.
- Assist in enrolling them in relevant education, training or work experience.

If violence or other illegal activity is being undertaken, then the authorities will become involved at some stage.



What if actual harm is threatened?

In the event that someone indicates they want to harm themselves or someone else, this is serious and must be acted upon immediately. Whilst this level of radicalisation is very rare, it is not helpful to the person or your community if you ignore these actions.

- Take them to hospital or call the ambulance and/or mental health crisis team on **000** if they are suicidal or hurting themselves.
- Call the police on **000** if they have threatened to harm someone else.
- Call the National Security Hotline on **1800 1234 00**.
- You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Hotline on **13 14 50** and ask them to contact the National Security Hotline and interpret for you.

Support for the supporter

As a concerned friend, family or community member providing assistance, it is important for you to look after yourself as well as the person you are assisting.

Speak with wise and trusted people in your community, other families who have had similar experiences counsellors or social workers. You are not alone.

One source of assistance is **LIFELINE**, which you can call on **13 11 14**.



Violent extremism and the law

After the events of 11 September 2001 legislation was introduced to prevent acts of violent extremism in Australia.



Australia's national security legislation has been used to interrupt planned acts of serious violent extremism. While committing murder and destroying property were already crimes in Australia, there were gaps in Australia's laws which meant it was not illegal to finance acts of violent extremism and train with groups like al-Qaeda.

In the past authorities had to wait until a terrorist attack was imminent or underway before they could intervene to stop it. However, it is too risky to act only at the last minute as some attacks can occur in a very short period of time. For example, the Madrid train bombers began assembling their explosives on 10 March 2004 and the following day used them to kill 191 people. Australia's national security legislation means that Australian authorities are better able to disrupt acts of violent extremism while they are being planned rather than when they are about to be executed.

Acts committed by people engaging in advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action are legal where there is no intent to use violence or cause harm to others, and are important aspects of freedom of expression in Australia. Australian law does not criminalise beliefs, and nobody in Australia today can be prosecuted for their beliefs or thoughts. Laws to protect our national security focus instead on actions, including inciting or advocating violence or planning, facilitating or carrying out an act of violent extremism.

For example, legal evidence presented in Melbourne in the case of the Holsworthy Barracks plot demonstrated that several of the men involved had violent intentions and, most importantly, carried out actions to further those intentions.

This included seeking to buy weapons, travelling overseas to train in paramilitary camps, conducting reconnaissance of Holsworthy Army Barracks and sourcing permission from senior leaders of a banned



international violent extremist organisation in Somalia to attack Australian targets.

The *Criminal Code Amendment (Terrorism) Act 2003* (Cth) made it an offence to:

- commit a terrorist act
- plan or prepare for a terrorist act
- finance a terrorist group or act
- provide or receive training connected with terrorist acts
- possess materials connected with a terrorist act, or
- collect or make documents likely to facilitate a terrorist act.

Further legislation was passed in 2005, in the aftermath of the London bombings in July 2005, to better deter, prevent, detect and prosecute acts of terrorism. This included the introduction of preventative detention orders and control orders, as well as new powers for police to stop, search and question people, and seize items and for the police to obtain information and documents in relation to terrorism and serious crimes.

In 2014 further amendments were made to national security legislation to ensure the necessary tools are available to law enforcement agencies, modernise legislation to effectively counter the current threat, make it easier to prosecute foreign fighters and prevent people from leaving Australia to fight in foreign conflicts.

A list of the legislation used to combat terrorism is available at www.nationalsecurity.gov.au.

As a safeguard against misuse of these laws, the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor was established in 2011 to periodically review the legislation and its use. Several independent reviews by the Monitor and the former Council of Australian Governments have since noted that the legislation has been used to foil several serious terrorist plots within Australia.

Foreign incursions and recruitment

In addition to the terrorism offences contained in the Criminal Code, there are also offences which make it illegal for Australians to engage in hostile activities in foreign states or to enter a foreign state for the purpose of engaging in hostile activity. These offences were previously found in the *Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Act 1978* (Cth) and have recently been moved to form part of the Criminal Code. This legislation means it is a crime under Australian law to fight in an insurgency overseas. The penalty for breaking this law is up to life imprisonment.

The foreign incursions offences contain exemptions for any person serving in the armed forces of a foreign state. This means that it is legal for an Australian to serve in, for example, the Indonesian armed forces or the Israeli armed forces. However, it is not legal for an Australian to carry out war crimes on behalf of another state, or to serve in the armed forces of a state that Australia has current sanctions against relating to the provision of military equipment and assistance.



Glossary

Community: a unified group of people with diverse characteristics who may be linked by where they live and work, by their social ties and common perspectives or by engaging in joint action in geographical or online locations or settings.

Criminal orientation: the general direction or tendency of an individual's approach and thoughts towards criminality or involvement in criminal activity; a general inclination towards criminality and criminal activity.

Deradicalisation: the process of fostering a change in an individual's belief so that they accept that violence is not justified in pursuit of an ideological, religious or political goal. Some individuals abandon their extremist mindset and adopt mainstream views through this process.

Disengagement: when an individual steps away from involvement in, or stops providing material support for violence as a method of achieving a political goal, even though they may continue to believe that such violence is justified.

Ethno-nationalism: nationhood as defined by ethnicity, race, language, religion, customs and traditions. According to ethnic nationalists, it is not the state that creates the nation but the nation that creates the state.

Hate crime: a criminal offence against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against an individual or group on the basis of race, religion, disability, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. Note there are different laws in each state and territory.

Ideology: a set of conscious and unconscious ideas that make up an individual's goals, expectations and actions. An ideology is a comprehensive vision and a way of life that imposes a pattern, structure and interpretation on how we read facts, events, occurrences and actions.

Radicalisation: a process during which an individual's beliefs move from being relatively mainstream to being supportive of drastic change in society that would have a negative impact on the rights and freedoms of others. It does not necessarily mean a willingness to use violence to realise those beliefs, but some individuals come to believe that violence is justified to achieve ideological, political or social change.

Resilience: resilience refers to harnessing the strengths of Australia's inclusive and open society to challenge divisive violent extremist narratives. Resilience also refers to the ability of the population to challenge violent extremism and to recover from a potential violent extremist or terrorist attack.

Terrorism: terrorism is acts or a threat to commit an act that is done with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause and intimidating the public or coercing or influencing the government by intimidation.

Violent extremism: the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence. If a person or group decides that fear, terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, and then acts accordingly, this is violent extremism. There are many different types of violent extremism. The motivations of those who engage in violent extremist acts vary and usually relate to particular ideologies (for example, political movements or religious beliefs), issues such as environmental or economic concerns, or ethnic or separatist causes. People can also be motivated by more than one issue to commit violent acts.



More information

Copies of this booklet, information sheets and additional resources can be downloaded from the Living Safe Together website. There are also information sheets available in other languages.

Visit the **Living Safe Together website** to see what you can do to counter violent extremism.



TOGETHER WE CAN BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT
EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES TO MAKE AUSTRALIA AN EVEN SAFER, BETTER
PLACE TO LIVE.

The Australian Government is working with communities to reject violent
extremist ideologies and protect those most vulnerable to these influences.

Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use
violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes
terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence.
Australia has enjoyed a peaceful history, relatively free from violent
extremism. Though the threat to the Australian community from violent
extremist behaviour is small, it still exists.

The Australian Government is committed to challenging all forms of
extremism that pose a threat to our community, whether they are politically,
religiously or ideologically motivated.



Australian Government



www.livingsafetogether.gov.au