



Psychologists: Understanding Radicalisation to Violent Extremism

There is support for psychologists if they are concerned that a client may be radicalising to violent extremism and potentially posing a risk of harm to themselves or others

What is radicalisation to violent extremism?

Radicalisation is the process of a person's belief system changing from relatively conventional to radical or extreme in nature. Individuals with radical beliefs usually want a drastic change in society. While diverse beliefs are part of living in a multi-cultural society, there are times when radical beliefs may promote terror and violence as legitimate or acceptable ways to achieve ideological, political or social change. This is referred to as **violent extremism**.

What are the signs of radicalisation towards violence?

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 to violence in Australia.

Most individuals begin the process of radicalisation to violent extremism in one of three areas of their lives: their **social relations** (e.g. changing behaviour or appearance to align with a particular group); **ideology** (e.g. statements of moral superiority over, or hatred towards, other groups); or **criminal activity** (e.g. assaults and hate crimes against those who are seen as different or who have opposing views).

If someone is radicalising to violent extremism, their behaviour or stated beliefs will frequently alter and will become more intense and extreme over time, when compared with their previous or 'normal' behaviour. This can occur over months, or just a few weeks, and may reflect their primary motivation. Individual circumstances and environment should be taken into account, as there may be a valid alternative explanation for the changes in behaviour. However, in some cases it could be a sign of radicalisation to violence.

What is your role?

The primary role of a psychologist is to avert harm to their client and to others, treat mental illness and manage other psychosocial risk factors. Psychologists are well-placed to identify when their client (or their client's family or friends) may be vulnerable to, or exhibiting signs of, radicalisation to violent extremism and to provide them with appropriate mental health support.

Whilst there is no causal link between mental health and radicalisation, recent cases indicate that mental health may be one of the factors that can make a person more vulnerable to radicalisation to violent extremism. Minimising harm to self and others (including the broader community) is a crucial component of ensuring safety and quality in the delivery of health services, and is the responsibility of all health professionals, not just those who work in a forensic context. If you suspect that a client is radicalising to violent extremism, it is recommended that you first assess the situation and then determine the level of intervention required.

1. ASSESS THE SITUATION

- **Facilitate open communication.** Individuals radicalising to violent extremism often become increasingly difficult to engage, refuse assistance, and exclude people who do not share their views. Building good rapport and developing positive communication channels can reduce social isolation and allow for better assessment of the radicalisation process and risk of harm.
- **Seek to understand the underlying issues of the person's situation and motivation.** A significant event, or a build-up of incidents, can trigger and/or accelerate the radicalisation process. Dealing with these issues before they escalate may prevent a person from radicalising further to violent extremism.

There are a range of motivations for using violence to advance change. Motivations can stem from a particular ideology (e.g. political movements, religious beliefs, environment or economic concerns, or ethnic or separatist issues) or a combination of ideologies. It is important to note that individuals who have radicalised to violent extremism may not follow an ideology in the strictest sense and may only subscribe to certain elements of an ideology.



- Issues may include:
 - **Personal functioning:** problems with self-worth, relationships, identity or disenfranchisement; health issues and addiction.
 - **Grievances:** fixated, personalised or eccentric grievances or those viewed through an established ideology; overseas events that are perceived to harm their community, family or friends.
 - **Ideology:** level of passion or preoccupation with an ideology; rejection of those not conforming to extremist views; identifying with extremists (e.g. joining an activist group); exposure to hateful attitudes and actions (as a victim or offender).
 - **Online activity:** reaching out or seeking validation from likeminded people with extreme views (online or offline); creating websites or posts championing their cause; engaging in video gaming that is violent or combative in nature.
 - **Other factors/behaviours:** changing their name or identity, appearance or demeanour; talk of travel to conflict zones; evidence of tangible steps to arrange travel (e.g. organising passports).

2. DETERMINE THE REFERRAL PATHWAY AND RESPOND, IF APPROPRIATE

The approach will depend on multiple factors, particularly ongoing assessment of risk, and may involve early intervention, referral to specialist services, or immediate action to avert harm to others or self. Ongoing assessment of risk is important, and when deciding the appropriate level of intervention, psychologists should consider the client's openness to communication, and whether they are currently expressing intent to use violence.

Early intervention may include stabilising mental health disorders, as well as addressing the following factors:

- **Social relations:** If the individual has withdrawn from close friends and family and is spending significant amounts of time with a group (including online groups), strategies could be focussed on connecting the client with positive social networks.
- **Ideology:** If an individual holds aggressive and hostile attitudes on ideological grounds, challenging these beliefs could be appropriate. Searching for meaning and belief is a part of human nature. However, some individuals are radicalised to violence on the basis of a highly selective understanding of an ideology. In responding to this, psychologists can encourage the client to connect with positive and credible role models to challenge radical beliefs.
- **Criminal activity:** Some people already involved with low level crime may adopt ideological or religious reasoning to justify their criminal actions. It may be useful to include strategies to help clients adopt more positive behaviours including through means such as referral to offending behaviour programs.

What happens if I remain concerned about a client?

Similar to other situations, if you are concerned about a client's behaviour, it is appropriate to discuss options with your manager, senior psychologist, or supervisor, and follow your organisational protocols. You may consider a referral to an acute mental health service, a police response, or a combination of these responses to address your concerns.

For psychologists who have not yet developed competency in working with vulnerable individuals who may be radicalising to violent extremism, it is recommended that you:

- Understand your legal, ethical and practice responsibilities when deciding what action to take.
- Consult with your supervisor or manager to ensure you adhere to internal protocols.
- Contact the Australian Psychological Society's Professional Advisory Service, which responds to a range of member enquiries including ethical assistance, legal issues and practical issues.
Ph: **1800 333 497**, E: professionaladvisory@psychology.org.au
- Contact an advisory or reporting service as per the following information.

If there is a risk of serious harm or someone threatens to harm, do not ignore it, take the threat seriously and act immediately by contacting Police on 000.



National Security Hotline

If you are concerned that your client: is becoming, or has already become, radicalised to violent extremism; is promoting violent extremist ideology; and/or making suspicious travel plans, you can inform the National Security Hotline on 1800 123 400 (24 hours). This reporting hotline is a vital component of Australia's national counter-terrorism efforts where matters and/or individuals can be referred to intelligence and/or law enforcement agencies for consideration. All calls are treated confidentially and can be anonymous.

State and Territory Intervention Coordinators

Another option is to contact an **Intervention Coordinator** (details below for each state and territory) for advice or to provide a referral. The Intervention Coordinators lead countering violent extremism activities in each state and territory to reduce the risk of individuals radicalising to violent extremism, including through the provision of tailored support services and case management.

Jurisdiction	State/Territory Intervention Coordinator Contact for referrals and advice
QLD	livingsafetogether@police.qld.gov.au
NSW	cve@justice.nsw.gov.au
VIC	CTC-CAPABILITY-CVE@police.vic.gov.au
ACT	ACTCVECoord@act.gov.au
SA	youth.inclusion.program@sa.gov.au
NT	DCM.NTCVE@nt.gov.au
WA	countering.violent.extremism.program@police.wa.gov.au
TAS	TasCVE@police.tas.gov.au

Step Together Helpline (New South Wales)

Step Together is a helpline and online service to help people who know someone that may be headed down the path to violent extremism. Step Together is a confidential support service, not a reporting service, and offers information, advice and referrals independent of law enforcement. The helpline is delivered by On The Line, a Melbourne-based NGO with over sixty years of counselling experience, and is staffed by experienced professional counsellors.

Step Together is a NSW Government initiative and provides counselling and service referral to NSW residents

Ph: 1800 875 204 (7am – 9pm 7 days)

Web: www.steptogether.com.au

What about privacy/confidentiality?

There are a range of Australian Government and state and territory laws that protect the privacy of individuals' personal and health records. These laws generally provide that information cannot be shared with enforcement agencies unless there is a concern of physical harm to individuals or the public. The Government recognises that health professionals have a professional duty of confidentiality. If you are concerned about a client's intent towards violent extremism or other forms of violence, you should disclose appropriate information promptly in accordance with your agency, sector and jurisdiction's privacy and information sharing arrangements.

*This fact sheet was developed by the Health Expert Advisory Group (under the auspices of the Australia New Zealand Counter Terrorism Committee – Countering Violent Extremism Sub-Committee) in partnership with the **Australian Psychological Society**.