



Social Workers: Understanding Radicalisation to Violent Extremism

If you are worried that an individual or someone close to them may be radicalising to violent extremism, there are strategies and services that can assist.

What is violent extremism?

Violent extremism is a willingness to use unlawful violence, or support the use of unlawful violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or religious goal. It includes a willingness to use or support terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence (e.g. violent protests) and some forms of communal violence (e.g. racially motivated assaults).

What is radicalisation to violent extremism?

Radicalisation to violent extremism is the process by which individuals come to accept the unlawful use of violence, or support the use of unlawful violence by others, as a legitimate means of pursuing their political, ideological or religious goals.

What is your role?

The critical role of social workers as front line health care providers means that you may encounter people who are at risk of violent extremism, and who may or may not have concurrent mental health disorders. Social workers may need to:

- identify the signs of radicalisation to violent extremism
- know where to seek additional training, information, support services and advice
- refer people to tailored support services.

What are the signs of radicalisation to violent extremism?

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).

In some cases, social workers may notice changes in a person's behaviour. 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. Their circumstances and environment should be taken into account. There may be a valid alternative explanation for the changes in behaviour, but in some cases, it could be a sign of radicalisation to violence.

Radicalisation triggers

A significant life event, or a build-up of incidents, can trigger and/or accelerate the radicalisation process. If issues can be dealt with before they become large problems, this may prevent a person from radicalising to violence and being considered by law enforcement. These issues may include:

- confrontations with family members or close friends, or a death in the family or of a close friend
- changes in living or employment situation
- exposure to hateful attitudes and actions, either as a victim or as an offender
- overseas events that harm their community, family or friends
- personal issues such as health problems, addiction, anger or social problems
- negative changes in friendships and/or personal relationships
- dropping out of school or university, or losing a job, and
- experiencing discrimination or social unfairness.



Diverting people from radicalisation to violent extremism

The most helpful response involves early action by concerned families, friends and communities, with further assistance from specialised services where needed, in any of the three areas of a person's life impacted by radicalisation to violent extremism – social relations, ideology and criminal activity. Depending on your relationship with the person, you may be able to recommend courses of action in these three areas. You may also decide to refer the person to specialist support services.

Social responses

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

Most people who have been involved with violent extremist groups say that having a trusted person to talk to would have made the biggest difference in preventing them becoming involved. Examples of useful interventions could include encouraging role models in their life such as respected family members, coaches or teachers; involving local youth or social workers; encouraging enrolment in education, training or employment; and encouraging involvement in positive social activities with new peers.

Ideological responses

Searching for meaning and belief is a part of human nature. If an individual is embracing aggressive and hostile attitudes based on ideological (including religious or political) teachings, then an ideological response could help.

Examples of responses that could divert someone from the path of violent extremism include involving respected leaders to provide guidance and solid grounding in their particular religious, political or ideological tradition; and finding ways to get the person involved in constructive community or political activities that enable them to put their values and beliefs into positive action.

Behavioural responses

Some people become involved in inter-group violence and other illegal activities after becoming socially involved with an extremist group. In other cases, someone already involved with low level crime may adopt ideological or religious reasoning to justify their criminal actions.

Strategies to change the person's actions back to legal and non-violent methods may help, including involving the person in a behavioural program with a qualified health professional.

Training opportunities?

Countering violent extremism awareness training is also available to help health professionals to identify the signs of radicalisation to violence. For more information on training available to your organisation, please contact CVEdiversion@homeaffairs.gov.au

Additional information and support

Additional resources can be found on the Living Safe Together website, including information sheets available in languages other than English. For further information, visit www.livingsafetogether.gov.au

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 an individual: 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](tel:1800875204) (7am – 9pm 7 days)

Web: www.steptogether.com.au

What about patient confidentiality?

The Government recognises that social workers face complex ethical considerations in assessing and managing a person at risk of radicalising to violent extremism. As in a range of other clinical situations, maintaining confidentiality must be balanced against the need to disclose information to preserve the safety of the person and others in the community. The Government is working with health professional bodies to help clinicians to disclose information ethically and in line with community safety expectations.

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