

Parental
guidance

Safeguarding young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions from extremist ideologies



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Guidance



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Introduction and background

Welcome to the Crawley Borough Council Parental Guidance Booklet and Toolkit, written in partnership with West Sussex County Council to support you in safeguarding young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) from extremist ideologies.

Research has clearly demonstrated that individuals with an ASC are no more likely to commit a violent act in the name of a particular cause than any other individual. However, what is key is that those with an ASC can be more vulnerable to a whole range of safeguarding concerns - including individuals and groups that seek to groom and recruit young people into extreme and potentially dangerous belief systems.

Some of these vulnerabilities are explored in **Section 4** of this guidance booklet, but the objective of this resource is to equip you as parents with the confidence and effective strategies to have meaningful conversations with and develop the resilience of young people going forwards. Consequently, they will be able to effectively recognise and counter extremist points of view.

This resource also directs you to a 'Toolkit' of high quality, adaptable ASC friendly resources for you to use with young people in order to discuss some of the themes and issues within this booklet in an appropriate manner. This will hopefully encourage critical thinking and transferable life skills they can draw on in future to build personal resilience to propaganda and concerning beliefs that may lead them into harm.

This Guidance Booklet and Toolkit was developed with a range of partners from both Crawley Borough Council (CBC) and West Sussex County Council, as well as a range of organisations and young people. I would like to thank them in so generously lending their expertise in order to create this important resource.

We hope that this guidance booklet and toolkit will help you to understand some of the risks and practically apply the information and ASC specific resources to ensure your child has a reduced risk of harm in this area.



Autism affects at least 1 % of the population, although it is likely that this is under-estimated, particularly in non-males.

Autism, UK Parliament,
January 2020



Source: researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0612/POST-PN-0612.pdf



Summary

- Individuals with an ASC are no more likely to commit a violent act in the name of a particular cause than any other individual.
- However, they may be more vulnerable to being groomed and recruited into extreme belief systems which are potentially dangerous for them and for others.

- The online and digital world is an excellent way in which young people can communicate with their peers, however it also provides the perfect platform for radicalisers to exploit the vulnerabilities or talents someone with an ASC may possess. Make sure you are having regular conversations with your young person about their online activity. Have a look at the **'Online Safety'** section of this booklet to help you do this.
- All young people need safe spaces to explore their own thoughts, ideas and concerns – help them to have these conversations by giving them time to process their thoughts and really listen to their points of view. Have a look at the **'Having difficult conversations'** section of this booklet for further advice and support.

If you think a young person might be being radicalised, the most important thing is you can do is tell someone your concerns. You can:

- Ring your young person's school or college and ask to speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Have a look at www.actearly.uk to share your concerns in confidence
- Speak to the Sussex Police Prevent Team by ringing **101** and asking to speak to them.

You can find further advice as to where to report your concerns in the **'What do I do if think my child is being radicalised?'** section of the booklet.



Some of these vulnerabilities could include:

- Difficulty understanding another's perspective and therefore not questioning radical points of view
- Obsessions with particular topics – perhaps even dark interests
- 'Black and white' thinking
- Potential social isolation
- Potential social naivety
- More likely to think literally and therefore be unable to figure out another's motives
- Hypersensitivity – making the online world more appealing as this can be shut off when necessary
- Learning difficulties
- Low self-esteem





Key terms

Radicalisation

The action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues. This is no bad thing. However, this is a problem if someone uses **fear, terror or violence** to achieve their aim (whether ideological, political or social) and begins to support and engage with extremist ideologies associated with terrorist organisations.

Extremism

The Crown Prosecution Service defines this as: “**The demonstration of unacceptable behaviour by using any means or medium to express views, which:**

- **Encourage, justify or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs;**
- **Seek to provoke others to terrorist acts;**
- **Foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK.”**



Channel

A non-criminal, voluntary, confidential multi-agency panel that provides support and advice to vulnerable individuals who may be a risk of being drawn into extremist activity that involves supporting, glorifying or committing acts of harm.

Ideology

A set of beliefs. In this case it often encompasses views which are extreme in their ideas and may be linked to harmful behaviour and extremist organisations.

Online radicalisation

Being exposed to or introduced to an extreme set of beliefs through the internet (such as through speaking to a recruiter on a game or app, or through extreme or violent content posted online).

Social media

Websites or apps which enable users to create and share text, images and videos or participate in social networking. Some of the most popular include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok, WhatsApp etc.

Multiplayer function

This is a mode of play for online games where two or more gamers can play in the same game at the same time and communicate via the platform from devices which could be anywhere – even in a different country.

Fake news

Information that is false, fabricated or deliberately misleading.

Real friend

A genuine friend that young people can rely on.

False friend

May seem trustworthy, but it could be that they have another motive. This can be particularly difficult to ascertain online.

Fact

Statements which can be proven true or false.

Opinions

Someone’s feeling or belief that cannot be proven. Can sometimes be used to mislead others.

Motive

Why someone may be acting a certain way.

Identity

What makes up a person. A set of characteristics that distinguishes an individual from others.

Group identity

A person’s sense of belonging to a particular group – such as a family, religion or political party.



Fundamental British values

According to Ofsted, “**Fundamental British values comprise democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and for those without faith.”**

Propaganda

Dissemination of information in a biased or misleading way in order to promote a particular cause or point of view.

Stereotypes

An “**oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a certain group, person, situation etc.”** (Oxford English Dictionary)

Self esteem

Having a good opinion of oneself and confidence in one’s own abilities.

Vulnerabilities

Qualities which may leave an individual more exposed to being harmed – either physically or emotionally.

Memes

An image, video or piece of text that is copied and spread rapidly, often by internet users. Can be used for humorous purposes but can also be used by extreme groups to encourage action or a sense of belonging to a particular ideology.

Theory of mind

The ability to understand the intentions, motives, beliefs and feelings of others.

Counterfeit deviance

Inappropriate behaviours that are not the result of deliberate deviant thinking but are instead due to a lack of social skills, naivety and a lack of understanding.

Hyperfocusing

Intense interest or fixation on one particular interest or activity for a protracted period of time.

Hypersensitivity

Sensory overload.





What is radicalisation and extremism?

Radicalisation means the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues. As a person is radicalised, they may try to change the nature of society and government, which is no bad thing! Without radical thinkers, society would not have made many of the advancements we currently have.

However, if someone decides that using **fear, terror or violence** is justified to achieve ideological, political or social change – **this is extremism**.

Violent Extremism is defined by the Crown Prosecution Service as:

“The demonstration of unacceptable behaviour by using any means or medium to express views, which:

- Encourage, justify or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs;
- Seek to provoke others to terrorist acts;
- Foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK.”

Individuals aged 20 years and under have consistently accounted for most referrals, discussions at panel and Channel cases (54 %).

Published 26 November 2020

Source: www.gov.uk/government/publications/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2019-to-march-2020



Prevent and Channel protect the most vulnerable in our society and prevent them from being drawn into terrorism – over 780 individuals have left the Channel process since April 2015 with no further terrorism-related concerns...individuals receive the support they need in a timely manner to guide them away from such activity.

RT Hon Ben Wallace MP, Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime, Prevent and Channel



Source: www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-and-border-security-bill-2018-factsheets/prevent-and-channel-panel-factsheet-accessible-version

Why might my child be more vulnerable to being radicalised into an extreme ideology?

Research clearly shows that someone with an ASC is no more disposed to commit a violent act than anyone else. However, some children and young people's needs mean that they are potentially more vulnerable to being manipulated and groomed into a violent or extreme ideology. Some of these vulnerabilities and qualities which terrorist groups may want to exploit could include:

- **Theory of mind** – difficulty empathising or understanding other people's perspectives may stop someone from questioning a radical point of view or the consequences of an action
- **Obsessionality/hyperfocusing** – fixation or obsessions with particular themes of concern. This could be linked to counterfeit deviance (inappropriate behaviour born out of social naivety) causing them to be attracted to dark interests
- **'Black and white' thinking** – radicalisers could exploit this by making their often simplistic ideologies appealing



- **Social isolation** – a consistent risk factor in the case of violent extremism. Someone with an ASC may be more likely to experience social isolation due to a lack of understanding of the conventions and unwritten rules of social behaviour, a preference for their own company or unwelcoming or negative past experiences
- **Social naivety** – someone with an ASC may find it harder to make sense of the social situation they find themselves in and respond appropriately – as a result they may be unable to figure out others motives and the consequences of their actions
- **Critical thinking** – someone with an ASC may be more inclined to think literally and be unable to question the nuances of an extreme ideology.
Someone who is particularly high functioning may have particular skills or abilities that a radicaliser may look to exploit
- **Hypersensitivity** – this can make the techniques (such as games and social media propaganda), signs and symbols that radical groups use appealing
- **Learning difficulties** – may mean they are unable to challenge what they are being told
- **Low self-esteem** – extremists may target them and draw them in so that they feel they belong within their group, before exploiting them.

This guidance booklet and toolkit will aid you in mitigating some of these concerns.



Adapted pathway to intended violence


The pathway to intended violence has been adapted many times to explore the steps that someone takes which could indicate that an individual is progressing towards an act of targeted violence.

As we have expressed before, someone with an ASC is no more likely to commit a violent action than anyone else, however they may have predisposed traits linked to ASCs that causes them to be vulnerable. These predisposed vulnerabilities could make them more likely to be a target of a group or individual wishing to groom them into an extremist ideology. The purpose could be to commit an act of violence or they may wish to benefit from information or expertise they may hold (as discussed in **Section 4**), particularly if your child is high functioning.

It is really important to be able to identify the vulnerabilities (or risk factors) of individuals who could be on the path to intended violence (or could be being drawn into parts of this by someone else). Once identified, timely and appropriate strategies can be implemented to stop the individual from contributing to or committing an illegal and/or violent act.


Here then, we have adapted the 'Pathway to intended violence' so that you can see how it might occur. **(In the Parental Toolkit there is also an ASC specific one you may be able to explore with your young person)**. Of course, this is only a model and is not a perfect representation of reality – however it may be helpful in alerting you to any concerning behaviour and reporting as necessary so that any potential harm can be mitigated.





It could be like getting into gangs on the street, [you] might not know what you are getting yourself into.

Quote from a young person with an ASC





Adapted pathway to intended violence



Someone with an ASC may display a range of vulnerabilities and be particularly interested in, or fixated on concerning topics.

A real or perceived wrong, or a particular fixation on something.

Interest or grievance



A groomer may exploit this vulnerability or fixation to draw them onto this path to violence, or to exploit a talent for their own illegal ends.

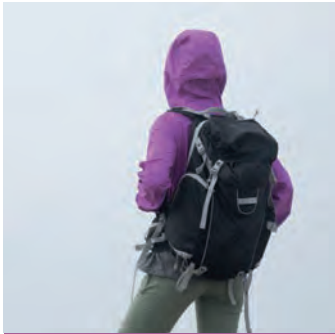
A groomer could pick up on this grievance or fixation/interest and manipulate it to their own advantage.

Potential grooming



The grievance, influences and fixation which lead to violence as the resolution.

Violent ideation



Someone with an ASC may have intrinsic knowledge or skills useful for the groomer's attack.

Planning the incident – **Who? What? When? Where?**

Research/ planning



What capability do they have?

Acquiring the means to fulfil the plan – e.g. resources.

Pre-attack preparation/ information gathering



Testing out things to see where the vulnerabilities of the plan lie.

Probing and breaches



Attack or illegal activity

De-escalation

- Noticing vulnerabilities/concerning behaviours
- Reporting concerns and getting help
- Supporting them away from violent interest
- Ensuring they are less vulnerable and feel fulfilled.

Escalation

Escalation

Escalation



Online safety

The online and digital world is an intrinsic part of everyday life – and is increasingly used amongst young people so that they can communicate with friends, gain information quickly, and be entertained. It is believed that “people with ASDs [ASC] like computer-based instruction and find it motivating” (Moore and Calvert, 2001). Digital Technology comes with many benefits, but there are also risks which are essential to be aware of.

The internet provides the perfect platform for radicalisers to exploit the vulnerabilities that young people with an ASC may possess, and indeed some research has identified that this group is more likely to be radicalised in an online space. The following sections will inform you as to some of these risks, and also help to support you in mitigating these to ensure the safety of your young people online.

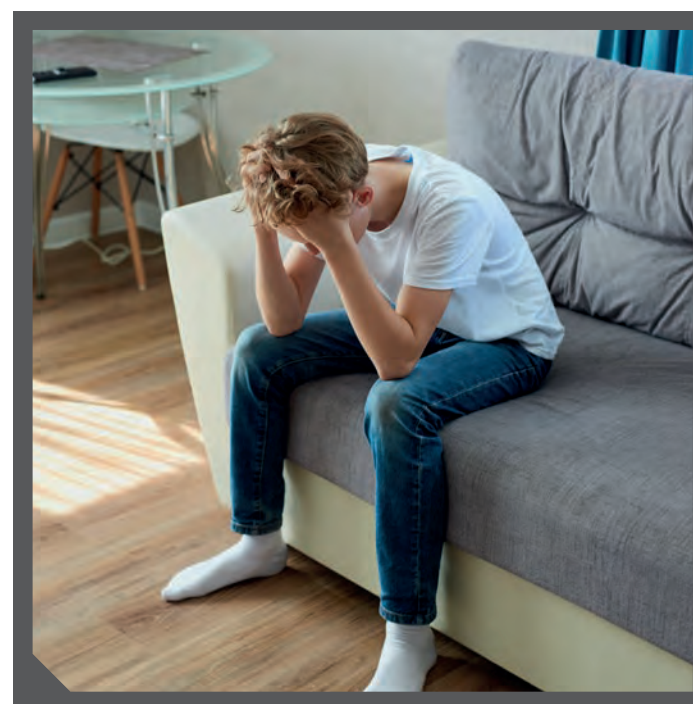


How the use of technology facilitates radicalisation:

Internet enabled devices provide a platform to speak to other people. Whilst this is good in that “computers reduce the discomfort and anxiety that people with ASCs feel in face-to-face interaction because they can interact in a familiar place” (Bagatell, 2010), unfortunately it is much harder to distinguish between true friends and false friends online. Those with an ASC may be even more vulnerable to this as they could have difficulty understanding other people’s perspectives, meaning that they may not question another’s motives or radical ideologies. They may also have difficulty reading emotions and understanding the consequence of their actions on victims and their families.

Someone with an ASC may not understand the consequences of their actions online, or indeed of a violent or extreme act. However, would be radicalisers may not always wish to mobilise individuals to violence. Just as evidence shows that young people with an ASC are groomed into non-violent acts such as computer hacking, someone with an ASC could be vulnerable to exploitation by terrorists due to their specialised knowledge or talents.

Hypersensitivity – the internet is appealing as it can quickly give you detailed, factual information. This may appeal to someone with an ASC as they are able to focus on particular interests and gain a sense of order out of a seemingly chaotic world. Yet in an online space they feel that they can simply shut this off when they experience sensory overload, again making this environment more appealing to them. However, **groomers recognise this and use the internet to promote their black and white ideologies that promise to create order out of chaos.**



Extreme content – Individuals with an ASC are ‘more likely to develop compulsive Internet usage than individuals without ASC’ (Finkenauer et al., 2012). The internet allows individuals to gain a huge amount of knowledge very quickly. Combine this with the amount of ‘fake news’ online and individuals becoming fascinated by dark interests (perhaps due to counterfeit deviance), and this may become very dangerous. Individuals may end up hyperfocusing on themes of concerns and being susceptible to grooming from online extremists.

Practical tips to help minimise the risks for your child online:

Parental controls

Parental controls are important to set up – they can be used to block upsetting or harmful content, control in-app purchases or manage how long your child spends online. Parental controls can be set up on devices and Wi-Fi as well as search engines.

If you become aware that your young person is searching for inappropriate content online, then have a conversation with them about why this may be (you can refer to the ‘**Having difficult conversations**’ section of this booklet to help you with this). If you are still concerned following your conversations, then refer to the ‘**What do I do if I think my child is being radicalised?**’ to find out where you can voice your concerns.

Think about if your child uses your phone or device and what they can potentially access if you have more lax settings on them:



Internet Matters:
www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls



NSPCC:
www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/

Screen time

It can be good to consider agreeing limits for time they spend online. Many devices also now have settings where you can manage and monitor the amount of time spent on certain apps or the device itself:



Internet Matters (Screen time):
www.internetmatters.org/issues/screen-time

Family agreement

You may want to consider using a family agreement tool which can help you to agree and manage how as a family you spend time online:



NSPCC Family agreement:
www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/online-safety/o2-nspcc-family-agreement-template.pdf



Childnet Family agreement:
www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement

Privacy settings

Privacy settings should be managed on each app/game/account and device – this may seem daunting but there are lots of helpful guides to assist you!



Thinkuknow:
www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/a-parents-guide-to-privacy-settings

Age restrictions

All console games, like movies, have age restrictions and these can be found on the front cover of the games. These have been developed by the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) and give a recommended age based on the content and its suitability. Be careful however, as this rating does not take into account its functionality – such as the ability to chat to other gamers.

With tablets and smartphones becoming ever more powerful it is no surprise that video gamers are as at home on these multifaceted gadgets as they are on dedicated handheld consoles. Because of this, it is important to understand age-rating systems for iOS, Android and Windows devices. This is now simpler with PEGI ratings being applied to all products in the Google Play (Android) and Windows stores.

Age recommendations/ratings also apply to many social media platforms. However, be aware that there is currently no age verification system in place, so any young person can join a social media site if they change their birth date to that of at least the minimum required age:



PEGI:
pegi.info/page/pegi-age-ratings

Remember, that age restrictions are a guide. You know your child best and are best placed to use your judgement on what you deem suitable.

How to report

It is important both you and your child know how to report any harmful content or abuse:



Internet Matters:
www.internetmatters.org/report-issue

Have a conversation

Most importantly, having regular conversations about online activity is key. Make sure to talk about the positives, fun and exciting things they are doing online, as well as consistently reinforcing safety advice and support. To help you with these conversations, there are some great toolkits and resources you can use:



O2:
www.o2.co.uk/help/nspcc/parents-vs-kids



NSPCC:
nspcc.o2.co.uk



Safer Internet (advice):
www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/have-conversation



Childnet:
www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation

Keep up to date

With technology ever-changing and developing at such a fast pace, it is important to be aware of what's new about what your young person may be doing or using online. Understandably it's hard to find the time to stay up to date about the latest online safety issues or know where to go for the right information. These resources can help you to do this:



Net Aware:
www.net-aware.org.uk



Free monthly Staying Safe Online:
e-newsletter: www.westsussex.gov.uk/staying-safe-online

Further helpful resources for you to have a look at

Inclusive Digital Safety Advice Hub by Internet Matters: 'Empowering parents, carers, and professionals with tailored advice and insight to make meaningful interventions in the lives of children and young people most likely to experience online risks':



www.internetmatters.org/inclusive-digital-safety

STAR SEND Toolkit: Aimed at educators, however could be a useful tool for initiating discussion.



www.childnet.com/resources/star-send-toolkit



Measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 mean most children will be at home and spending increasing amounts of time online. There is a risk that extremists may exploit this situation by sharing harmful misinformation and conspiracy theories and targeting vulnerable children and young people directly.

Educate Against Hate Blog,
January 2021



Source: educateagainsthate.com/blog/posts/january-2021-update-school-college-closures-ongoing-prevent-management-support



Having difficult conversations

Many of the topics in this booklet are confusing or difficult to talk about. However, in order to build their resilience – both offline and online – to some of these issues, it is important that you are able to talk to your young person about their concerns and answer any questions they could have. It may be that they find it difficult to ‘put themselves in someone else’s shoes’ and understand another person’s intentions or personal beliefs; all young people need safe spaces to explore their own thoughts, ideas and concerns. As parents and carers of these young people, you play a crucial role in creating spaces to hold open and honest dialogue to prevent your young person from becoming involved in risky behaviour.

Sometimes a young person may say something that you disagree with, or that others may find shocking or provocative. The following advice comes from the Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace (reproduced with their kind permission), and aims to provide you with a constructive manner of dealing with the statement, rather than reacting emotively and shutting down debate.



Parents naturally have a big influence on their children’s views so it’s important to encourage children to see and respect different points of view.

Educate Against Hate



Source: Educate Against Hate: Top tips to help parents discuss radicalisation and extremism with young people https://educateagainsthate.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAH_Parents_Top-Tips_English_AW_Interactive.pdf



1. Affirm the individual

Statements that acknowledge and affirm so that the young person is listened to and understood.

2. Analyse viewpoints

What lies beneath this opinion? What are their needs?

3. Broaden Perspectives

Examples of stats, facts and what you can say to open up different perspectives. What questions can you ask?

Tips for having these conversations:

- Really listen to their point of view and show that you value their arguments. Wait for their response.
- Give them time to process thoughts.
- Establish clear ground rules that demonstrate respect – such as taking it in turns and not interrupting one another.
- Try to stay neutral rather than displaying emotions – even if you are shocked or disagree with something they say.
- Remind your young person to challenge the point of view – not the person making it.
- If you think your young person may be making offensive or unkind comments (remember this may not be deliberate but instead may be down to social naivety) then it is important to **calmly challenge it and explain why it is unacceptable**. Explain how it may make the other person feel and talk about times things have been said to them and how it made them feel, so they understand the consequences of their comments. You can also use social narratives to explain why comments or actions are inappropriate (have a look in the **Toolkit** resource to help you with this).
- **Do not use euphemisms or idioms** – speak literally and use facts. If you are unaware of these, can you look it up together? (From a reputable source of course!)
- **Follow up after** – make sure they know they can come talk to you again. Consider using some of the resources in the **Toolkit** section to help facilitate this.



What can I do if my young person is concerned about the ongoing threat or a recent terrorist attack?

The following online resources may be helpful in having these often sensitive and difficult discussions about violent attacks:



London Grid for Learning: Talking to Children about terrorism (For parents/carers)



NSPCC: How should you talk to children about terrorism? (For parents/carers)



Childline: Worries about the world page (For children)

Other useful resources to aid you in holding these discussions:

Guidance and activities for teaching and practising dialogue with young people:



www.institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files

NSPCC – How to have difficult conversations with children:



learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-children

Educate against Hate – Blog post on challenging concerning beliefs:



educateagainsthate.com/blog/posts/challenge-beliefs-holding-discussions-around-extremism

Internet Matters – Article on supporting families to safeguard loved ones from radicalisation:



www.internetmatters.org/hub/expert-opinion/supporting-families-safeguard-loved-ones-radicalisation

Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation:



www.foundation4peace.org





What do I do if I think my child is being radicalised?

This list has been taken from the WSCC website and is by no means exhaustive. You know your child best and if you are concerned, then please feel free to have an informal chat with a professional, as detailed below.

Potential signs:

- isolation/withdrawal from family/friends
- obsession with and secrecy around the internet/social networking sites
- becoming uncooperative/disengaged
- using abusive/aggressive/extremist views/comments/threats/language
- fascination/fixation with weapons/chemicals/explosives/extremist activity/events
- significant changes in relationships
- the use of seemingly scripted speech
- change in behaviour or appearance due to new influences
- seeking to recruit/'groom' others to an extremist ideology
- possession of violent extremist literature.

Who can I talk to if I am worried?

If you are worried that your young person may be becoming radicalised, then the below can provide support and advice:

- Your child's school, college or university. Ring and ask to speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) about your concerns.
- Sussex Police Prevent Team – Email: prevent@sussex.pnn.police.uk or call **101** and ask for the Prevent Team.
- WSCC – Beverly Knight, Countering Extremism Team Manager, Community Safety and Wellbeing: Beverly.Knight@westsussex.gov.uk
- CBC – You can email the Communitysafety@ Crawley.gov.uk inbox for low level support or advice.

A new dedicated website www.actearly.uk and advice line has been set up to provide advice, guidance and support for anyone who is concerned that someone they know may be at risk from being radicalised by extremists or extremist content online. You can also call the national Police Prevent Advice Line on **0800 011 3764** to share your concerns in confidence. The sooner you reach out, the sooner the person you care about can be protected from being groomed and potentially being led into harm by extremists.

If you are concerned about **online material** that a young person may have encountered, which promotes or encourages terrorism, extremism or violence, then you can **anonymously** report it on the gov.uk website.

If you are concerned that something urgent and potentially dangerous is happening. You should:

- report suspicious activity to the police by calling confidentially on **0800 789 321** or by completing the form on the ACT campaign website which allows you to report any concerns you have about a family member.
- If you feel it is an emergency, call **999** and explain your concerns.

What could happen?

The first thing that could happen is that you and your young person would be given support or advice from school, college or Prevent colleagues. This can be informal and might help allay your fears or consider what you may need to be alert to in the future. If there are minor concerns, then they may be able to put in interventions or help for you as a family. If they are concerned that your young person is potentially being groomed into an extremist ideology, then they may make a Prevent referral.

This referral is assessed by police and may get immediately rejected as holding no risk for your young person, in which case other agencies may find ways to support. However, it may get accepted on to something called Channel Panel.



Case study

"Callum was a teenager whose teacher became aware of his involvement in promoting a far-right Facebook page which had upset another student. He had been invited to "secret" group meetings connected to football games. Without family influence around he was getting attention and social support through his involvement in this group. He said he didn't have a problem with most people - just Muslims: Muslims were not like "us". He said he'd watch them all "doing their Sharia law."

Through the Channel process, the school worked with the police, social care and a local youth group to support him through challenging the ideology he had developed, providing him with careers advice, and connecting him to an ethnically diverse local youth group. His confidence grew, as did the bond with his family. He dismissed the ideology that he had connected himself to and realises he had been heading down the wrong path."

Source: Gov.uk Channel Programme, updated Dec 2018 (www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/the-channel-programme)

What is Channel?

Channel provides a safeguarding function and is made up of a group of different professional partners that work together to support your young person and you as a family. The important thing to note is that Channel does not criminalise in any way.

It is a voluntary (you or your young person would have to give permission to allow panel members to discuss your situation), confidential programme which aims to support your young person and ensure they or others are protected from harm.

This **Let's Talk about It** clip explains more about what Channel is.

Where else can I get help or support?

Educate against Hate

Gives parents and school staff practical advice on protecting children from extremism and radicalisation.



www.educateagainsthate.com

NSPCC

Radicalisation – support, training and resources to help fight radicalisation.



www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/

Your Space

Information for younger people about radicalisation and extremism.



www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/life/radicalisation-and-extremism

Internet Matters

Radicalisation – advice on helping to prevent children becoming radicalised online.



www.internetmatters.org/issues/radicalisation

Sussex Police

Advice and contact details regarding the Prevent agenda and terrorism.



www.sussex.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/t/terrorism-in-the-uk



Myth-busting

These may be things you have heard, or opinions other parents may present to you. You can use some of these to dispel incorrect myths if necessary.

Myth: It stops my young person being able to share his own opinions

Any support offered should not stop young people from having the freedom to discuss and debate controversial issues. In fact, it encourages that this is done in a safe space in a proactive and respectful way. By having these discussions, young people may understand the risks associated with extremist arguments and learn the skills required to respectfully recognise, question and challenge views incompatible with shared values. You can use some of the **Toolkit** resources to help build these skills.

Myth: Neither I nor my young person will be listened to

The most important thing is that your young person, and you, feel listened to and supported. All the people that could provide support (whether school, college, work, county council employee, police, or Channel member) do so in order that your concerns and those of your young person are taken into account. Their main aim is to keep your young person safe and prevent them from committing any harm to themselves or others.

Myth: There is only support available for some extreme ideologies – no one will care if I ask for help

Prevent looks at all forms of extremism (in fact – last year, almost half of the cases referred were due to concerns about right wing radicalisation), examples of which could include right wing extremism, Islamist extremism, animal rights extremism, or even mixed, unclear or unstable ideology. This means that there is no specific belief system identified, but that the individual is vulnerable enough to still pose a risk to themselves or others in this space. Every concern is carefully considered and, if necessary, support tailored to the individual concerns.

Myth: My child will get in trouble if I report my worries

A “clear distinction should be made between individuals who present with a ‘terrorism vulnerability’ requiring Channel support and those who pose a ‘terrorism risk’ requiring management by the police.” (Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, 2020)

Unless your young person has clearly done something which constitutes a crime, Channel works in a confidential and non-criminal space. Yes, police may work as part of the Channel team, but they do so in a safeguarding capacity along with other professionals to ensure that individuals are supported away from harm. The sooner you voice your concerns, the sooner the support for your young person, and the whole family, can be put in place.

Myth: Someone with an ASC is more likely to commit a violent act

There is absolutely no research to suggest that someone with an ASC is more likely to commit a violent act than someone who is considered neurotypical. However, what is clear is that someone with an ASC may have a range of **vulnerabilities** and **specialist talents** that a recruiter may wish to exploit in the name of their extremist ideology. Furthermore, someone with an ASC might find it particularly difficult to understand others’ perspectives. It is important that then we help safeguard our young people from this and develop their critical thinking skills so that they are able to question and counter extreme and dangerous points of view.

Myth: My child wouldn’t engage in activity like this – they know what is right and wrong

It can be difficult for young people in particular to understand what behaviour crosses a line. Depending on what they are using or engaging with - particularly online - they may come into contact with people who want to influence them in a negative way. They could also unwittingly come across content that could be harmful, and they may not have the skills or knowledge to be able to conduct themselves in a way that doesn’t cross any lines.

Furthermore, someone with an ASC may have a more limited understanding of some of the negative aspects of society and the risks they pose. The online space wasn’t created with young people in mind and there are still very limited restrictions in place to keep young people safe (e.g. accurate age verifications). Things change quickly and it is the role of parents or carers to navigate this.

It is really important therefore to have regular, repeated and informed conversations about online safety with your young people. Please have a look at the **Online Safety** section of this booklet in order to remind yourselves of how you can start having these conversations.



Myth: People with autism cannot form relationships – they are unlikely to get groomed by a recruiter

Whilst unfortunately some people with an ASC may feel more socially isolated, this does not mean that they do not have a strong desire to make friends that they can talk to and experience a sense of belonging to certain groups. In particular, an individual may feel more comfortable online where they can engage with others in a more predictable and structured environment, and it could be here that they are befriended by someone who is untrustworthy and has ulterior motives.

Having a sense of kinship, security and belonging applies just as much to someone with autism as it does to anyone else, and unfortunately groomers will exploit this to draw someone into being radicalised and potentially exploit their talents and skills for their own ends.

Myth: Someone with an ASC does not feel or show emotion, so they are unlikely to feel strongly about a particular ideology

Whilst someone with autism may not show emotions in a neurotypical way that people without the condition may recognise, it does not mean that they do not have their own thoughts, beliefs and feelings about key issues, people or society. Groomers can of course use this and manipulate individuals into acting on their behalf.

Myth: You can’t change someone’s behaviour

Unfortunately, as we have seen, groomers can exploit individuals with an ASC so that they become drawn into a group’s ideology. As a result, autistic individuals could change their appearance or behaviour just as easily as those who do not have an ASC.

If someone is supported through Channel, you may feel that we are unable to change their concerning beliefs or interests. However, rather than trying to do this, it is likely experts will explore their other passions and encourage them away from the direction of harm, rather than just trying to counter their arguments.

Myth-busting resources

Some useful websites for helping you with fact checking and 'myth-busting' generally:

The Full Fact Toolkit – this was originally developed to be aimed at 14-16-year olds. It is an excellent resource for fact checking and spotting misinformation and 'fake news', particularly on the internet, and could be an opportunity for challenging views and 'myth-busting' fake news:



www.fullfact.org/toolkit

Snopes – this is an excellent fact checking website for misinformation, fake news, urban legends, conspiracy theories etc. Really useful and comprehensive:



www.snopes.com

BBC reality check – a 'news service dedicated to clearing up fake news stories and finding the truth':



www.bbc.co.uk/news/reality_check

Channel 4 Fact Check – 'Goes behind the spin to dig out the truth and separate political fact from fiction':



www.channel4.com/news/factcheck

Factcheck.org – factcheck posts and debunk false news stories:



www.factcheck.org

LGfL – films and resources to 'help children spot fake news and build digital literacy skills'. Aimed at primary aged children but may provide useful advice nonetheless:



www.lgfl.net/news/dyn/33194617-dba0-41ec-a68d-05ce152dbf05

Politifact.com – uses a 'Truth-O-Meter' rating which makes it quick and visual to see whether something is true or false:



www.politifact.com

The News Literacy Project – 'provides programs and resources for educators and the public to teach, learn and share the abilities needed to be smart, active consumers of news and information and equal and engaged participants in a democracy':



www.newslit.org



A Commission on Fake News report published in June 2018 found that only 2% of children in the UK have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake.

LGfL; Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools, run by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust, June 2018.





Frequently Asked Questions

These might be questions you yourself are wondering about, or you may like to use these to answer any questions or concerns other parents could have.

Question: If I report my child, will they get in trouble?

No – as long as they have not done anything that would constitute breaking the law, by reporting your concerns you will actually be safeguarding them from future harm and ensuring that they go down a more productive and fulfilling path. For instance, a referral was made by Tom’s school into Channel because they were concerned about his fixation with Nazi symbolism and other far right material, along with a range of vulnerabilities such as anxiety and low attendance at school. He and his family were supported through the Channel process and a specialist mentored him to ensure his vulnerabilities lessened and his other hobbies and interests were encouraged – such as an interest in Chess in which he has now gone on to win many tournaments.

Question: Only I understand how to deal with the needs of my child – how can others help?

Of course, as their parents or carers, you understand your child and their specific needs best, and will play an important role in engagement and support. The very fact that autism is a spectrum condition means that everyone is affected by their autism differently, and you are likely to know what the greatest risk factors are for your child. However, there are also a range of other experts we can call on to provide tailored and specific advice for your young person in particular. For instance, we may call on an expert in ASC to mentor your young person and encourage other productive passions and interests. A range of experts will work with you to ensure that you, as a family, are given all the support you need and can encourage work around understanding other points of view and questioning opinions.



Case study

K has an Autism Spectrum Condition. He had said to several people at work that he had viewed some Daesh (ISIS) videos online, and although he knew the beheadings were horrific, he said he couldn’t stop watching them. He also said he was beginning to think that ‘Daesh might have a point’ and that he might contact them. K loves using the internet and is extremely proficient with IT. He spends a large amount of his time online at home without interacting much with other people.

K received one to one support from an experienced expert who worked with him to understand Daesh and other extremist groups’ recruiting and radicalising methods and the risks they present, reflecting on possible consequences.

As K was quite isolated without many interests, he received support to find activities to get involved in, especially where he could mix with others. He was also given support regarding job searching, applications and interviews.

K no longer wants to watch the videos or contact anyone associated with them. K understands the dangers of online radicalisation and even warns others about it. K has developed an interest in astronomy through a relative and is learning to drive in order to extend his job searching.

Question: My child knows so much more about the digital space than me – I can’t keep up – so how can I ensure they stay safe?

Digital technology is ever evolving at such a fast pace; it can be a real challenge to keep up with the latest games and social media platforms and any associated dangers. This can feel really overwhelming. However, what is really key is understanding the key principles and actions you can take to keep your child safe online. You can find these in the **Online Safety** section of the booklet, as well as further resources in the **Toolkit**. To keep you informed about new emerging issues and resources, use **Net Aware**, and sign up to our free monthly **Staying Safe online newsletter**, where you will also be able to find out about training sessions specifically designed for you as parents and carers.

Question: My young person gets fixated on certain topics – won’t it be impossible to change their mind?

Someone with an ASC may become particularly interested in a certain topic and learn a huge amount about this interest (this could partly be fuelled by the readily available information on the internet). This is wonderful as it allows young people to explore their passions and specific talents. However, the issue is if that interest is particularly linked to dark or violent topics, extreme beliefs, or useful for radicalisers to exploit. If this is the case, then support would be put in place, but not to particularly counter or change that young person’s mind, but instead to open their eyes as to their other interests and topics which may be far more positive and productive for them and their futures.

Question: It is their school’s job to safeguard against this – what can I do?

You are right in that schools and colleges have always had an important role to play in protecting young people from a range of safeguarding risks – and the threats posed by extremism are no different. It therefore forms part of a school’s statutory safeguarding responsibilities and they will be doing all they can to ensure your young person is kept safe.

However, as their parents or carers, you are likely to know your child and their needs best and be able to recognise when something may be of concern. It is all of our responsibilities to ensure vulnerable people are kept safe. Therefore being alert to any changes in appearance or behaviour; excessive time spent online; or strange or concerning comments or opinions, and reporting any concerns, will be key in ensuring your young person is kept safe.

Question: Sometimes my young person has difficulty in transferring learning from one context to another. How do I help reinforce this to keep them safe?

This can be really difficult, but repetition is key! Try to revisit the topic at different times – for instance, remind them of the importance of passwords every time they go on their computer, and bring up key terms such as ‘extremism’ throughout different discussions.

Having continuous open and honest communication with your young person is vitally important. Use the ‘**Parent Toolkit**’ resources to help you have some of these discussions.



Further contacts for advice


Useful websites for information about Prevent and Channel:

Educate Against Hate – Contains DfE approved practical advice and resources about protecting children and young people from extremism and radicalisation




www.educateagainsthate.com

West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership – Radicalisation:




www.westsussexscp.org.uk/professionals/child-exploitation-ce-including-child-sexual-exploitation-cse/radicalisation

West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership – Channel:



www.westsussexscp.org.uk/professionals/child-exploitation-ce-including-child-sexual-exploitation-cse/radicalisation/channel

West Sussex – Preventing extremism and radicalisation:



www.westsussex.gov.uk/fire-emergencies-and-crime/preventing-extremism-and-radicalisation

Let’s Talk About It – website designed to provide help and advice as to the signs of radicalisation:



www.ltai.info

Parents: Protecting your children from extremism – booklet with key information about extremism and radicalisation, produced by Educate Against Hate:



www.educateagainsthate.com/resources/parents-protecting-children-extremism-2

CTP ACT, Action Counters Terrorism – Ways to report if you are concerned:



www.act.campaign.gov.uk

ACT Early – Explains what to do if you’re worried someone close to you is expressing extreme views or hatred towards others:



www.actearly.uk

ASC specific information:

NAS – Safeguarding young people on the Autistic spectrum. Information on the risk of radicalisation is available on page 16:



www.autism.org.uk/shop/products/books-and-resources/safeguarding-young-people

Helping Learners with Autism understand how to keep safe from radicalisation and extremism – Aimed primarily at teachers, however this resource may be beneficial in giving you additional insight as parents or carers:



www.preventforfeandtraining.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/JG1125-Natspec-ETF-documents-Keeping-safe-from-extremism.pdf

Other useful ASC resources linked to Radicalisation:

Some of these are designed for use in schools, but could be beneficial for you to explore with your young person, nonetheless:

SEND Natspec resources around FBVs:



www.preventforfeandtraining.org.uk/home/practitioners/curriculum-guidance-and-materials

Babcock LDP:



www.babcockldp.co.uk/disadvantaged-vulnerable-learners/send



Think Protect Connect – Aimed at KS3 upwards but could be useful. Challenges myths, misconceptions and stereotypes and deals with topics such as race and racism:



www.educateagainsthate.com/resources/think-protect-connect

Talking to your teenager about radicalisation – An interactive website to support your young person in understanding extremism and radicalisation:



www.concept-training.co.uk

Kidscape – Explores friendships and what makes a good friend:



www.kidscape.org.uk/advice/advice-for-young-people/friendships-and-frenemies

Safe spaces for young people to socialise and find new friends



www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/community



wiki.rixwiki.org/west-sussex-mmm/home/short-breaks-6



www.sussexcyp.org.uk



www.aspergersvoice.org.uk

Online safety and safeguarding:

Cerebra – A guide for parents around online safety:



cerebra.org.uk/download/learning-disabilities-autism-and-internet-safety

STAR SEND Childnet – resource around online safety in KS2 and 3:



www.childnet.com/resources/star-sen-toolkit

Inclusive Digital Safety Advice Hub by Internet Matters – ‘tailored advice and insight to make meaningful interventions in the lives of children and young people most likely to experience online risks’:



www.internetmatters.org/inclusive-digital-safety

Mencap – SafeSurfing – Aimed at supporting individuals in surfing the web safely:



www.mencap.org.uk/about-us/our-projects/safesurfing



More general Autism and SEND support:

National Autistic Society website – Positive ‘stories from the spectrum’:



www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/stories

Ambitious about Autism – Expert information and resources:



www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

The National Autistic Society:



www.autism.org.uk

Aspens – Operates in the SE of England to provide care and support to those with autism:



www.aspens.org.uk

West Sussex Local Offer – Provides local SEND information for parents/carers.



www.westsussex.local-offer.org

Reaching Families – A parent-carer led charity to support parents and families:



www.reachingfamilies.org.uk

NAS Parent to Parent Emotional Support Helpline:



www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/help-and-support/parent-to-parent

Wiki, pages on Radicalisation – There is a page on ‘radicalisation’ on the short breaks Wiki website which contains useful links. You will need to click through until you get to the right page:



Wiki.rixwiki.org/west-sussex-mmm/home/short-breaks-6/our-info

Ambitious about Autism – Video around impact of Covid-19:



www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/information-about-autism/coronavirus-and-autism/health-and-wellbeing/the-world-has-turned-upside-down



