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What is the Prevent Duty

'Prevent' is part of the government's overall counter-terrorism strategy which is called CONTEST. The aim of Prevent is to reduce the threat from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

The Prevent strategy has three specific objectives:

1. respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it
2. prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support
3. work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.

There is Prevent duty statutory guidance for England and Wales, and separately for Scotland, issued under section 29 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. It places a duty on specific bodies to have 'due regard to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

What is expected of schools and educational settings?

The government expects that those in leadership positions in specific bodies, which includes all types of schools, colleges and registered childcare providers to:

- establish or use existing mechanisms for understanding the risk of radicalisation
- ensure staff understand the risk and build the capabilities to deal with it
- communicate and promote the importance of the duty
- ensure staff implement the duty effectively.

What are extremism and radicalisation?

Let's go back a step and look at some of the definitions included in Prevent - extremism and radicalisation

Extremism is 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. The definition of extremism also includes calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas'.

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

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Who may be at risk from radicalisation?

All terrorist groups need to radicalise and recruit people to their cause. Some want a few select, key people with what they see as the right capabilities; others seek to be mass movements and to transition from being terrorists to insurgents capable of overthrowing legitimate governments.

Group bonding, peer pressure and indoctrination are necessary to encourage individuals to think that violence is a legitimate response to perceived injustice.

There is no one way of identifying an individual who is likely to be susceptible to terrorist ideology. If extremist views are held within a family unit, even very young children may be vulnerable to radicalisation and display concerning behaviour.

However, many studies show that radicalisation often occurs as people search for identity, meaning and community and this is why young people may be particularly vulnerable.

Other factors that may have a bearing on someone becoming vulnerable may include:

- peer pressure
- influence from other people
- the internet/social media
- bullying
- crime against them or their involvement in crime
- anti-social behaviour
- family tension
- race/hate crime
- lack of self-esteem
- personal or political grievances.

Vulnerability Assessment Framework

Professionals use a Vulnerability Assessment Framework to guide their decisions about whether an individual needs support to address their vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism. It sets out three dimensions:

1. engagement
2. intent
3. capability

However, it should not be assumed that the characteristics described below necessarily indicate that a person is either committed to terrorism or may become a terrorist.

1. Engagement

The engagement factors are sometimes referred to as 'psychological hooks'. They include the needs, susceptibilities, motivations and contextual influences that together can map an individual's pathway into terrorism.

They can include:

- feelings of grievance and injustice
- feeling under threat
- a need for identity, meaning and belonging
- a desire for status
- a desire for excitement and adventure
- a need to dominate and control others
- susceptibility to indoctrination
- a desire for political or moral change
- opportunistic involvement
- family or friends involvement in extremism
- being at a transitional time of life
- being influenced or controlled by a group
- relevant mental health issues.

2. Intent to cause harm

Not all those who become engaged by a group, cause or ideology go on to develop an intention to cause harm, so this dimension is considered separately.

Intent factors describe the mind-set that is associated with a readiness to use violence and address what the individual would do and to what end.

They can include:

- over-identification with a group or ideology
- 'them and us' thinking
- an ability to dehumanise people they see as the enemy
- attitudes that justify offending
- preparedness to use harmful means to achieve an end
- harmful objectives.

3. Capability to cause harm

In the same way that not everyone who is engaged with terrorist ideals intends to cause harm, not all those who intend to cause harm are capable of doing so. Plots to cause widespread damage take a high level of personal capability, resources and networking to be successful. What an individual is capable of is therefore a key consideration for those who are tasked with assessing the risk of harm to the public.

Factors can include:

- individual knowledge, skills and competencies
- access to networks, funding or equipment
- criminal capability.

How messages are spread

There are many different kinds of groups, but ISIL, also referred to as ISIS, is a violent terrorist group that uses propaganda to portray the group as an exciting alternative to life in the West. They present themselves as powerful creators of a new state, to which all Muslims, both male and female, have a duty to travel.

When they release media online, the group encourages supporters on social media to share the material, and this is what gives ISIS its large reach, particularly to young people. The messages are in English and other languages, such as French and Spanish rather than Arabic. This makes them easier for young 'modern' Muslims to relate to and they feature short 'Hollywood-style' productions, more suited to younger audiences. The people featured are 'normal' westerners who have travelled to Syria and found their 'true calling'.

ISIS propaganda has four main themes to encourage young people to travel to Syria and Iraq.

1. They celebrate and promote an image of success by telling people they are on the winning side and can offer them an exciting life.
2. They claim to have established an 'Islamic State' or 'caliphate' where Muslims will find status and belonging. They regularly state that it is a duty of all Muslim men and women in the West to travel there and that foreigners are welcome as long as they are Sunni Muslims.
3. They insist it is the personal duty of Muslims to support them and travel to the 'Caliphate'. Islamic scholars dismiss this and have made it clear that there is no such obligation.
4. They portray themselves as the only group able to defend Sunnis from the Assad regime, the Iraqi army or the threat from the West. ISIS communications also show the group providing food and services to people in Syria and Iraq. In reality most Sunnis fear and oppose ISIS and recognise that they are a threat to their lives and security.

When you consider the children and young people with whom you come into contact, think about how the various themes we've considered may or may not fulfil a need or impress them.

As mentioned, there are many more terrorist groups than ISIS; for example, Boko Haram, Haqqani, Network, Hezbollah, Al Qa'ida and Al Shabaab. There are also groups and key figures in Britain who are terrorist sympathisers; for example, Al-Muhajiroun, Anjem Choudary and Michael Adebolajo.

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The role of social media

Millions of young people use social media platforms every day to share content, but there are a small minority of users who exploit it to radicalise and recruit vulnerable people. ISIS exploits social media to full effect.

Facebook

Supporters of terrorism can use Facebook to share content, such as news stories, and YouTube videos.

Twitter

This is another popular platform on which to share propaganda. It is easy to open an account, stay relatively anonymous and share material with large groups of people. Nearly 50,000 pro-ISIS accounts have been set up and identified on Twitter.

YouTube

This is a video sharing website. Multiple 'dummy' accounts are set up so that when videos are taken down, they can be reposted quickly.

ASK.FM

This is often used by those considering travel to Syria or Iraq to ask British jihadis and female ISIS supporters about travel, living standards, recruitment, fighting and the broader ideology. The answers given by ISIS supporters are encouraging, saying all their difficulties will be solved if they travel to the region.

Instagram

Instagram is used by fighters and supporters to share photos, including pictures of their life in the region showing landscapes and images suggesting they are living a full and happy life.

Tumblr. (Logo)

This is a blogging site exploited by fighters to promote longer, theological arguments for travel.

Private Messaging

Supporters encourage others to message them on private peer-to-peer networks when asked for sensitive information, such as how to travel, what to pack and who to contact when they arrive. Popular private messaging apps include WhatsApp, Kik, SuperSpot and Viber.

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The Prevent duty and you

The Prevent duty does not require early years providers, teachers or other staff to carry out unnecessary intrusion into family life, but as with any other safeguarding risk, you must take action if you observe behaviour that concerns you. This means that you must be able to demonstrate both a general understanding of the risks affecting children and young people in the area and a specific understanding of how to identify individual children who may be at risk of radicalisation and what to do to support them.

Those who work directly with children and young people are in an ideal position to build their resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and challenging extremist views; for example, in PSHE, SMSC and citizenship lessons. They can be taught to recognise and manage risk, make safer choices and recognise when pressure from others threatens their personal safety and wellbeing, including knowing when, where and how to get help.

Parents and families are also vital to Prevent work as they are in a key position to notice changes in behaviour that may be a sign of radicalisation. It is important that early years providers and schools are able to advise and assist families who raise concerns and be able to point them in the right direction for support.

The Prevent duty is not intended to stop young people debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments.

DfE Prevent duty departmental advice

The DfE Prevent duty departmental advice says:

'Citizenship helps to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. It should equip pupils to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, to debate, and to make reasoned arguments. In Citizenship, pupils learn about democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Pupils are also taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.'

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Risk assessment

Schools and childcare providers are expected to assess the risk of children being drawn into radicalisation, including support for extremist ideals that are part of terrorist ideology. The general risks affecting children and young people may vary from area to area and the local authority and the police will be able to provide contextual information to help you understand the risks in your area.

Support for individuals at risk

'Channel' is the name of a programme which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It uses a multi-agency approach to:

a. identify individuals at risk
b. assess the nature and extent of the risk
c. develop the most appropriate support plan for the individual concerned.

It provides a mechanism for childcare providers and schools to make referrals if they are concerned about an individual, although the individual's engagement with the programme is entirely voluntary at all stages.

What to do if you have a concern

All safeguarding policies should have clear procedures in place for protecting children at risk of radicalisation. If you have a concern about a particular child or young person, in the first instance, you should follow your normal safeguarding procedures and speak to your designated safeguarding lead.

Where deemed necessary, the lead may discuss the matter with children's social care. In Prevent priority areas, the local authority will have a Prevent lead who can also provide support.

The safeguarding lead may also contact your local police force or dial 101, the non-emergency number to talk in confidence and get support and advice.

The Department for Education has a dedicated telephone helpline (020 7340 7264) to enable staff and governors to raise concerns relating to extremism directly, or in non-emergency situations, they can be emailed at: counter.extremism@education.gsi.gov.uk