Preventing violent extremism/radicalisation – what parents can do

There are more and more reports of young British people travelling to join extremist organisations in Syria and Iraq. We are in the middle of a national debate about how to identify young people who have been radicalised and stop them leaving home. But it would be much better to prevent radicalisation in the first place – and this is where parents come in.

A question of identity

Young people from all backgrounds can struggle to define themselves as they enter their teenage years. We all have multiple identities, and it can be challenging to come to grips with being (for example) British, gay, Muslim, a maths genius and a hip hop fan, all at the same time. Extremists exploit this confusion with a negative, distorted focus on one aspect of young people's identity at the expense of all others.

Online radicalisation then becomes a kind of grooming, in which vulnerable young people are exposed to extremist views and made to believe they're normal.

So what can parents do? When children are young, parents are the main influence on their identity, so this is the time to emphasise positive messages about being comfortable with who you are. As they enter their teenage years, young people naturally start to look for a separate identity. New friends, music, clothes and interests are a normal part of being a teen – but this doesn't mean parents stop having an influence. There are lots of ways for parents to send positive messages to children of all ages. You might try:

- **Value people's rights and equality**. All kinds of extremism are incompatible with human rights such as freedom of expression and equality for all. Bringing up children to respect difference and value people's rights can make them less receptive to extremist views.
- **Don't confuse Islamist extremism with Islam**. Then when you challenge extremism you won't damage freedom of religion.
- **Acknowledge complexity and teach critical thinking.** Extremist ideologies are black and white. Teach your children to think critically about what they hear. Extremists present half-truths. Talking to your child about how complicated political and religious issues can be will help them understand that the important answers are not necessarily simple.

- **Be tech savvy.** Radicalisation isn't just an online problem, but the internet is one-way young people connect with extremists who want to exploit them. Talk to your children about what they do online and stay alert for potential warning signs like increased secrecy.
- **Don't ignore it.** Not all extremist views are violent, but they are all cause for concern. If your child says something worrying, don't brush it off – even if you're not sure how serious it really is.
- **Get support.** Parents are often the first to notice worrying changes in a child's behaviour, but it's hard to deal with these issues by yourself. There are mentoring programmes and support networks that can help if you have concerns – <u>Quilliam</u>(link is external) is a good place to look for more information.
- **Talk about identity.** Reassure young people who may be struggling with their identity that it's normal to have lots of different aspects. Letting them know you're supporting them as they explore the possibilities is one of the most important things you can do. Make sure they know it's all right to be confused and that they can always come to you for guidance.