

How could my child become radicalised?

Young people may be vulnerable to a range of risks as they pass through adolescence. They may be exposed to new influences and potentially risky behaviours, influence from peers, influence from older people or the internet as they may begin to explore ideas and issues around their identity.

There is no single driver of radicalisation, nor is there a single journey to becoming radicalised. The internet creates more opportunities to become radicalised, since it's a worldwide 24/7 medium that allows you to find and meet people who share and will reinforce your opinions. Research tells us that the internet and face-to-face communications work in tandem, with online activity allowing a continuous dialogue to take place.

Why could social networking be a concern?

Your child may actively search for content that is considered radical, or they could be persuaded to do so by others. Social media sites, like Facebook, Ask FM and Twitter, can be used by extremists looking to identify, target and contact young people. It's easy to pretend to be someone else on the internet, so children can sometimes end up having conversations with people whose real identities they may not know, and who may encourage them to embrace extreme views and beliefs.

Often children will be asked to continue discussions, not via the mainstream social media, but via platforms, such as Kik Messenger, Whisper, Yik Yak or Omegle. Moving the conversation to less mainstream platforms can give users a greater degree of anonymity and can be less easy to monitor.

People who encourage young people to do this are not always strangers. In many situations they may already have met them, through their family or social activities, and then use the internet to build rapport with them. Sometimes children don't realise that their beliefs have been shaped by others, and think that the person is their friend, mentor, boyfriend or girlfriend and has their best interests at heart.

What are the signs I should look out for

There are a number of signs to be aware of (although a lot of them are quite common among teens). Generally parents should look out for increased instances of:

- A conviction that their religion, culture or beliefs are under threat and treated unjustly
- A tendency to look for conspiracy theories and distrust of mainstream media
- The need for identity and belonging
- Being secretive about who they've been talking to online and what sites they visit
- Switching screens when you come near the phone, tablet or computer
- Possessing items – electronic devices or phones – you haven't given them
- Becoming emotionally volatile.

What can lead young children to become radicalised?

Political and religious groups can provide a sense of family or support that children may feel is lacking in their lives. This desire for security could also be due to poverty, unemployment, social isolation or feelings of rejection by their own faith, family or social circle.

In some cases the trigger may be an event, either global or personal, such as being a victim or witness to a race or religious hate crime. Young people may also join these groups as a result of peer pressure and the desire to 'fit in' with their social circle.

However, it should also be remembered that not all young people that experience these factors adopt radical views.