

Are you  
**CONCERNED?**

Extremism Group  
**Radicalization** Online  
Nationalism Terrorism ISIS  
Hate **Alt-Right** White

# Who is Vulnerable?

The time from adolescence to early adulthood is filled with many social, academic, career, and personal transitions. Young adults are trying to figure out who they are, where they belong, and what they should believe about the world. Excitement, energy, and optimism are often mixed with confusion, disappointment, and stress. Sometimes, young people adopt harmful ways of coping with these common challenges. While "radicalization" is not usually thought of as a way to cope with an identity crisis or typical life struggles, research and the experiences of many families shows that this can be the case.

## Understanding the Issue

### What is Extremism?

There are many extremist groups with very different beliefs, but most share a key similarity: They view the world in terms of "us vs. them." Extremist groups believe that they are under attack and must take action against the out-group in order to survive.

### What is Radicalization?

Most people have seen a friend or family member change in ways that were harmful to themselves or others. Radicalization, in the simplest sense, is a process of change in an individual's beliefs and behaviors, influenced by extremist individuals, groups, or networks. The greatest concern about radicalization is that an individual may come to believe they are justified in taking violent action.

Radicalizing influences may be direct and targeted, such as when extremist group members focus recruiting efforts on a specific vulnerable person through in-person or online interactions. Other times, influences are more broad and general, like the extremist propaganda circulating in online forums or within offline social environments.

# What is the Appeal of Extremism?

When someone you care about adopts strange or hateful beliefs and isolates themselves from friends and family, it's natural to ask "Why?" What is the individual getting out of it?

As strange as it sounds, joining an extremist movement can provide a shortcut to feelings of personal significance and sense of belonging. Although extremist ideologies seem complex, most issues boil down to the "us vs. them" dynamic. This makes understanding the world and all of its problems easier. By belonging to the in-group, they know who they are, what they should believe, and who they should associate with. Personal traumas, grievances, and feelings of marginalization can now be blamed on the "them."

## How Do I Know It's Really Radicalization?

Every person and radicalization process is unique. Determining whether the "radicalization" label fits is not the end-goal; the goal is to better understand the situation so you can look for ways to help the person you're worried about. The list below includes some changes in mindset and behavior that you and other family and friends may be noticing.

- Justifying the use of violence to advance a cause
- Adopting a rigid worldview with no room for dialogue
- Feeling persecuted or marginalized due to their identity
- Suddenly losing interest in goals, activities, or hobbies
- Using hateful or discriminatory language
- Distancing from friends and family
- Spending large amounts of time interacting with strangers in online forums
- Centering social life around a secretive or unknown new group of friends
- Hiding their beliefs, or aggressively pushing beliefs on others
- Major changes in emotional expression

**Remember...** these are just a few examples. Always consider your concerns within the larger context of the individual's life. There may be a different serious issue they need help addressing.

# You Can Make a Difference

It's normal to feel confused, angry, and unsure of what to do in a situation like this. The good news is that friends and family members can play an important role in a very natural intervention process. You don't have to be an expert on extremism and radicalization - you are an expert on the person you're concerned about.

## Ask Yourself

Why are you concerned? What is your loved one doing they doing that's different or unusual?

Do you think these changes have been influenced by specific people?

What are their goals and dreams? Are they still excited and working towards them?

## Getting Started

- Try to be open and accepting when starting a conversation with your child.
- Try to get your child to share their views with you and have a constructive conversation, rather than immediately scolding him or her.
- You might not get all of your answers immediately. That's okay - patience is key!
- You may find out about a different problem in your child's life. This conversation is an opportunity to support him or her with any struggle they're experiencing.

## We Are Here to Help

You know your loved one best.

If you have any concerns, call Parents 4 Peace to:

- Ask questions about extremism and the radicalization process
- Ask questions about concerning behavior
- Get help figuring out the next steps

**Helpline: 844-49-PEACE**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential unless someone is in imminent danger.