

Keeping Children and Young People Safe against Radicalisation and Extremism

Parents may wonder why schools and colleges are so concerned about the radicalisation of young people but there is a very real and present danger if we are complacent and we think 'not us'. Any young person who has access to social media is as much at risk from being exposed to extremist views (whether that is extremist Islamic views or views of organisations such as the English Defence League) and therefore has the potential to be 'groomed' by very sophisticated means which are particularly attractive to young people.

The Prevent Duty is part of our statutory Safeguarding responsibility and we strongly advise parents and carers to be aware of the vulnerability many of our young people have when they are so beholden to their mobile phones and tablets; the very means by which they could be drawn into radicalization or at the very least, become exposed to some of the more dangerous ways of thinking these sites promote.

Why might a young person be drawn towards extremist ideologies?

- They may be searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging
- They may be driven by the desire for 'adventure' and excitement
- They may be driven by a need to raise their self-esteem and promote their 'street cred'
- They may be drawn to a group or individual who can offer identity, a social network or support
- They may be influenced by world events and a sense of grievance resulting in a need to make a difference

How might this happen?

On-line:

The internet provides entertainment, connectivity and interaction. Students may need to spend a lot of time on the internet while studying and they may use other social media and messaging sites such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Vine or Whatsapp. These can be useful tools, but we need to be aware there are powerful programmes and networks that use these media to reach out to young people and can communicate extremist messages.

Peer Interaction:

Young people at risk may display extrovert behaviour, start getting into trouble at college or on the streets and may mix with other individuals who behave badly, but this is not always the case.

There are no typical characteristics of young people who may be more at risk than others. However a sudden change in behaviour could be a potential indicator. Sometimes those at risk may be encouraged, by the people they are in contact with, not to draw attention to themselves. If you feel there is a change in your child's behaviour, parents are encouraged to inquire about their children's wellbeing at college.

TV and media:

The media provide a view on world affairs. However, this is often a very simple version of events which, in reality, are very complex.

Young people may not understand the situation fully or appreciate the dangers involved in the views of some groups. They may see things in simple terms and not have the whole picture.

Recognising Extremism – signs may include:

- Out of character changes in behaviour and peer relationships
- Secretive behaviour
- Losing interest in friends and activities
- Showing sympathy for extremist causes, including radical Islamic causes or far right wing political views.
- Glorifying violence
- Possessing illegal or extremist literature
- Advocating messages similar to illegal organisations such as “Muslims Against Crusades” or other non-proscribed extremist groups such as the English Defence League

How can parents support children and young people to stay safe?

- Know where your child is, who they are with and check this for yourself
- Know your child’s friends and their families
- Keep lines of communication open, listen to your child and talk to them about their interests
- Encourage them to take up positive activities with local groups that you can trust
- Talk to your child about what they see on the TV or the internet and explain that what they see or read may not be the whole picture
- Allow and encourage debate and questioning on local and world events and help them see different points of view
- Encourage your child to show an interest in the local community and show respect for people from all faiths and backgrounds
- Help your child to understand the dangers of becoming involved in situations about which they may not have the full information
- Teach them that expressing strong views and trying to change things for the better is fine but they should not take violent action against others or support those that do
- Be aware of your child’s on-line activity and update your own knowledge
- Know what social media and messaging sites your child uses
- Remind your child that people they contact over the internet may be pretending to be someone else or telling them things that are not true
- Explain that anyone who tells them to keep secrets from their family or teachers is likely to be trying to do them harm or put them in danger

Our Catholic mission is committed to the Gospel values of Freedom, Justice and Love and both students and teachers have the right to speak freely and voice their opinions. However, with that freedom comes responsibility and free speech that is designed to manipulate the vulnerable or that leads to violence and harm of others goes against the moral principles which value freedom of speech. Free speech is not an unqualified privilege; it is subject to laws and policies governing equality, human rights, community safety and community cohesion.

The current threat from terrorism in the United Kingdom includes the exploitation of vulnerable people, to involve them in terrorism or in activity in support of terrorism. The normalisation of extreme views may also make young people vulnerable to future manipulation and exploitation. There is recognition that non-violent extremism can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists then exploit. Aquinas College is clear that this exploitation and radicalisation should be viewed as a safeguarding concern.

Risk Reduction:

The Governors, the Principal, the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Senior Tutors and other members of the Senior Management Group will assess the level of risk within College and put actions in place to reduce any identified risks.

Procedure:

Keeping students safe from these risks is a safeguarding matter and should be approached in the same way as safeguarding young people from other risks - see the College's Safeguarding Policy and procedures. When any member of staff has concerns that a student may be at risk of radicalisation or involvement in terrorism, they should speak with Andrew Bailey (Pastoral Director) Diane Spencer (Safeguarding Lead) or Will Dawson (Senior Tutor Prevent Contact). These three will liaise over all Prevent concerns with SMBC Prevent team and if appropriate the Channel Panel.

Numerous factors can contribute to and influence the range of behaviours that are defined as violent extremism, but most young people do not become involved in extremist action. For this reason the appropriate interventions in any particular case may not have any specific connection to the threat of radicalisation, for example they may address mental health, relationship or drug/alcohol issues. The College will ensure that there is appropriate support available to students who are at risk.