

Terrorism Prevention: Addressing Early Risk Factors To Build Resilience Against Violent Extremism

Terrorism Prevention—policy and practice that focuses on empowering individuals and communities to be resilient against radicalization and mobilization to violence—can be a valuable addition to traditional counterterrorism (CT) efforts that focus on law enforcement investigations and arrests.^a Terrorism prevention activities work to proactively address risk factors, build or strengthen protective factors, and intervene with individuals who may be radicalizing or mobilizing to violence. Local stakeholders are best positioned to identify early risk factors that may make an individual more susceptible and to intervene before violence occurs. Prevention requires a whole-of-society approach and collaboration among federal, state, local, and nongovernmental stakeholders (civil society,^b community, and private sector).

SCOPE: This product provides public safety personnel awareness of terrorism prevention tools and resources to aid in mitigating radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization to violent extremism.

- Nongovernmental stakeholders are critical partners in preventing violence because they may have visibility into early behaviors that are indicative of radicalization or mobilization to violence and can, therefore, intervene promptly.
- In some cases, terrorism prevention may be integrated into existing violence prevention efforts. Standalone programs may be particularly valuable in other cases, such as education programs that help parents understand violent extremist recruitment, radicalization, and ways to protect their children.

NOTE: Protecting civil rights and civil liberties is paramount in itself and helps to counter violence by safeguarding equal and fair treatment, ensuring nonviolent means to address grievances and making it more difficult for terrorists to divide communities. Additional advice and consultation can be provided regarding potential privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties concerns through the DHS, DOJ, FBI, and NCTC privacy and civil liberties offices. Some activities may be constitutionally protected and insignificant on their own but, when observed in combination with other suspicious behaviors, may constitute a basis for reporting. Law enforcement action should not be based solely on the exercise of constitutionally protected activities or on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any combination of these factors.

^aTraditional CT practices rely on mobilization indicators to identify and disrupt extremism threats. You can find a list of mobilization indicators in the US Violent Extremists Mobilization Indicators Handbook (2021 Edition). You can also email mib@nctc.gov for a copy.

^bCivil society comprises organizations that are not associated with government—including schools and universities, advocacy groups, professional associations, faith-based institutions, and cultural institutions.

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RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS: A multiagency and multidisciplinary approach uses a range of educational, engagement, intervention, and disengagement efforts to address radicalization^c to violence conditions—including personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors.^d Core components of terrorism prevention are recognizing risk factors and building protective factors against radicalization to violence.

- **Risk factors** may change or remain constant; some can be observable by first responders and community or family members. Risk factors may include a history of violence or other problematic behavior (e.g., stalking, menacing, threatening, harassment, noncompliance with lawful limits and boundaries); current or prior suicidality; unhealthy family dynamics or social support system; loss of identity; search for belonging; need for a sense of power; real or perceived grievances; mental health stressors;^e trauma; unmet emotional needs; and isolation, self-imposed or otherwise.^f These factors are not predictive or all-encompassing and should be evaluated in context with other individual and environmental factors.
- **Protective factors** mitigate the risk of engaging in violent extremism,^g and can include: pursuit of nonviolent, legally- and socially-sanctioned methods of conflict resolution; a supportive family or healthy social support system; a secure job; involvement in extracurricular activities; positive coping mechanisms; and a sense of humor.

RADICALIZATION FACTORS: Five interlinked contextual factors play a role in the unique process of an individual radicalizing to violence.

- **Personal factors** include psychology, such as personal needs and history, demographic background, and situational context.
- **Group factors** include the influence of family and peers who provide a sense of belonging.
- **Community factors** include marginalization, a lack of trust in societal institutions, and religious discrimination leading to identification with an insular community.
- **Sociopolitical factors** include collective grievances, opposition to foreign and domestic policies, and world events leading an individual to perceive threats to his or her identity or values.
- **Ideological factors** provide a set of values, beliefs, and goals that help justify violence.

MOBILIZATION INDICATORS: Once an individual has decided to take violent extremist action to achieve social and political change, they are past the radicalization phase and have moved onto mobilization. Mobilization is distinct from radicalization in that an individual often displays observable indicators—behaviors that suggest an individual has likely already radicalized to violent extremism and may require a more timely intervention. Risk factors should be evaluated in context with specific indicators of violence.

^c**Radicalization** occurs when an individual evolves from adherence to a nonviolent belief system to a belief system that includes willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to effect societal or political change.

^dFor more on radicalization factors, see *Radicalization and Mobilization Dynamics of Violent Extremists*, May 2019.

^eFor more information about mental health factors, see *Mental Health Considerations in Threat Management of Terrorism Investigative Subjects*, December 2000.

^fA **risk factor** is a characteristic that may make an individual more susceptible to recruitment by violent extremists and/or violent extremist organizations and may be addressed through prevention. Risk factors can make an individual vulnerable toward negative or destructive behavior; however, having one or more risk factors does not guarantee an individual will radicalize to violence but may signal an opportunity to intervene to provide support.

^g**Violent extremism** refers to advocating, engaging in, or preparing to engage in potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence in furtherance of ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including support to terrorism) to advance political or social objectives. It is a complex and global phenomenon, not limited to a particular ideology. Mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics does not constitute violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected.



CONSIDERATIONS: The following are methodologies, tools, and resources that may be used in deterring individuals from radicalizing or mobilizing to violence.

- Establish partnerships with a wide variety of disciplines—including public safety, mental health, social service, faith, law enforcement, technology and others—that can identify concerning behaviors and provide resources to intervene.
- Establish new or enhance existing local threat assessment and threat management (TATM) teams with partners from mental health services, social service providers, and school administrations to improve relationships with those who may be best positioned to observe concerning behaviors. TATM teams can be a resource and tool for partners who may best positioned to use a whole-of-person evaluation approach in addressing an individual's needs and/or grievances.
 - Develop redundant communication channels among threat management partners and customers that may be used to inform the public of prevention efforts, participation, and reporting mechanisms.
- Apply and enhance broader violence prevention programming, promoting societal resilience and cohesion, and raising bystander awareness toward preventing radicalization and mobilization to violence.
- Enhance community partnerships by establishing new and building upon existing relationships with faith-based leaders, educators, employers, and others to serve as force multipliers.
- Establish and enhance trust around the community, implementing transparent policies that protect sensitive information reported by family, friends, acquaintances, and other bystanders.
- Build awareness and foster dialogue with the community on violent extremism, related behaviors and trends.
- Promote local, state, regional, and national counseling and referral helplines, networks, and services, as well as suspicious activity reporting mechanisms.
- Provide practical intervention opportunities and build trust among the community and stakeholders with a precise legal framework to minimize potential liability.

RESOURCES

- **DHS**
 - **“New Approaches to Countering Terror: Countering Violent Extremism”** is a free multi-week, 3.5 hour interactive online course offered by the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)—a DHS-sponsored program through the University of Maryland. It explores challenges that shape the evolution of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), to include differentiating between CT and CVE and explaining the CVE spectrum of nonviolent approaches: prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation/reintegration programs. <http://www.start.umd.edu/new-approaches-to-countering-terror-countering-violent-extremism>
 - **The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program’s Behavioral Threat Assessment Integration (BTAI) team** assists DHS federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners in adapting processes for identifying and mitigating homeland security threats of targeted violence. BTAI seeks to incorporate a behavioral approach to violence prevention and provides homeland security partners with program support, resources, and training to assist in the identification and prevention of targeted violence. <https://www.dhs.gov/national-threat-evaluation-and-reporting-program>



- **Active Shooter Web Portal**, a joint effort with DHS and FBI (within DHS's HSIN), provides a user-friendly environment to promote information sharing and collaboration between federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, private, civilian, and international entities working to help prevent active shooter incidents. <http://www.dhs.gov/cveas-portal>
- **US SECRET SERVICE'S NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER** provides social science research and guidance in direct support of law enforcement, schools, government, and other public and private sector organizations to combat the threat of targeted violence impacting communities across the United States. The center's work includes studies on school shooters, mass attackers, and other public safety concerns. <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac>
- **DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**
 - **Identifying and Mitigating Extremist Activities in Corrections (2020)** is a booklet that is available on LEEP. <https://www.cjis.gov>
 - **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)** aims to reduce youth crime and violence by supporting prevention and early intervention programs and through research and programming efforts to strengthen the nation's juvenile justice system. <https://ojp.gov/programs/juvjustice.htm>
 - **Bureau of Justice Assistance Police-Mental Health Collaboration (PMHC) Toolkit** provides resources for law enforcement agencies to partner with service providers, advocates, and individuals with mental illness and/or intellectual and developmental disabilities. <https://bj.a.ojp.gov/program/pmhc>
- **FBI**
 - **Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC)** is a national-level, multiagency, multidisciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence through the application of behavior-based operational support, training, and research. Encouraging bystander reporting is one of its top missions. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made through the Behavioral Analysis Unit Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office. <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>
 - **Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks** is a practical guide on assessing and managing the threat of targeted violence and contains concrete strategies to help communities prevent these types of incidents. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view>
 - **Office of Partner Engagement's Preventing Violent Extremism in Schools** is a guide to educate school personnel about at-risk behaviors and activities that assist students with reducing social and psychological commitment to violence as a method of resolving a grievance. https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/FBI_PreventingExtremismSchools.pdf
- **NCTC**
 - **The US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators Booklet (2021 Edition)** is an NCTC, DHS, and FBI tri-seal product that provides a list of observable behaviors that could help determine whether individuals are preparing to engage in violent extremist activities. For inquiries or more information, contact mib@nctc.gov or visit <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-resources/item/2272-u-s-violent-extremist-mobilization-indicators-2021>.
 - **NCTC's Radicalization and Mobilization Dynamics Primer** is a briefing on how and why individuals in the United States radicalize and potentially mobilize to violence. This offering can be accessed and requested by emailing NCTC-Domestic-Reps@nctc.gov.



- **SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (SAMSHA)**, an agency within the US Department of Health and Human Services, leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. Law enforcement can use SAMSHA to refer a person (or parent) to local counseling or mental health assets. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>
- **US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) VETERANS CRISIS LINE** is a free, confidential resource available to any veteran, even if they are not enrolled in VA health care or registered with the VA. It offers an online chat function, phone and text, and is operated 24/7 by qualified responders, many of whom are also veterans. The Veterans Crisis Line can connect Veterans to their local suicide prevention coordinators who follow up to coordinate care. <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)**
 - **VetoViolence** is a free service from the CDC that provides prevention information, trainings, and tools designed to empower communities to prevent violence and implement evidence-based prevention strategies. <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/main/home>
 - **A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors** highlights strategies based on the best available evidence to help states and communities prevent or reduce youth violence. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-technicalpackage.pdf>
 - **Risk and Protective Factors** <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>
- **UNITED NATIONS**
 - **A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism** provides practical advice to educators on how and when to discuss violent extremism and radicalization with students. It was produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676>
 - **Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme** within the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) aims to empower and enable youth to actively prevent and counter violent extremism on all levels. <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/cct/youth-engagement-and-empowerment>

STATE-OPERATED REPORTING PROGRAMS: Several states have implemented state-operated reporting programs for community members, including students, to report concerning behaviors and threats of violence—ideologically motivated or not—through mobile app, phone, text, or website. Examples include:

- **Courage2Report Missouri:** <https://www.mshp.dps.missouri.gov/MSHPWeb/Courage2ReportMO/index.html>
- **FortifyFL:** <https://getfortifyfl.com/>
- **Kansas School Safety Hotline:** <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Fiscal-and-Administrative-Services/School-Finance/School-Bus-Safety/School-Safety-Hotline>
- **OK2SAY Michigan:** <https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say//>
- **Safe2Help Nebraska:** <https://www.safe2helpne.org>
- **Safe2Say Something Pennsylvania:** <https://www.safe2saypa.org/>
- **Safe2Tell Colorado:** <https://safe2tell.org/>
- **Safer Ohio School Tip Line:** <https://ohioschoolsafetycenter.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/osscc/pre-k-12-schools/school-safety-resources/safer-ohio-school-tip-line>





PRODUCT FEEDBACK FORM

(U) JCAT MISSION: To improve information sharing and enhance public safety. In coordination with the FBI and DHS, collaborate with other members of the IC to research, produce, and disseminate counterterrorism (CT) intelligence products for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies and the private sector. Advocate for the CT intelligence requirements and needs of these partners throughout the IC.

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