



OFFICE OF PARTNER ENGAGEMENT
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SCHOOLS

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High school students are ideal targets for recruitment by violent extremists seeking support for their radical ideologies, foreign fighter networks, or conducting acts of targeted violence within our borders. High schools must remain vigilant in educating their students about catalysts that drive violent extremism and the potential consequences of embracing extremist beliefs.



THE ISSUE

Framing the Threat

Despite efforts to counter violent extremism, the threat continues to evolve within our borders. Extremism and acts of targeted violence continue to impact our local communities and online violent propaganda has permeated social media. Countering these prevailing dynamics requires a fresh approach that focuses on education and enhancing public safety—protecting our citizens from becoming radicalized by identifying the catalysts driving extremism.

Emerging Trends

Youth are embracing many forms of violent extremism; those perpetrated by terrorist organizations or other domestic violent extremist movements, to those maintaining biases towards others due to their race, religion, or sexual orientation. Youth aged 13 – 18 are actively engaged in extremist activities including online communication with known extremists, traveling to conflict zones, conducting recruitment activities, or supporting plotting against U.S. targets. These factors signify the potential for increased risk within our schools and local communities.

The Reality:

ISIL messaging likely influenced a 17-year old student to create, produce, and disseminate violent extremist messaging via social media to radicalize other youth to violence. The youth connected with violent extremists and like-minded aspirants to distribute ISIL messaging to a network of friends and followers on multiple social media accounts.

Although violent extremists are predominantly male, there are noted increases in the number of females embracing violent radical ideologies due in part to their roles becoming more defined. Extremist organizations actively seek females to fill operational roles, including carrying out attacks in the Homeland or traveling to fight—in addition to historic supportive activities such as fundraising or traveling to marry foreign fighters.

Impact on Schools

As this threat evolves and more youth embrace extremist ideologies, it places a growing burden on our educational system to provide appropriate services to students who view hatred or targeted violence as acceptable outlets for their grievances. To complicate matters, youth possess inherent risk factors making them susceptible to violent extremist ideologies or possible recruitment. A current body of research on developmental behaviors, which is discussed later in this guide, suggests that a youth's risk factors and stressors, if not properly addressed through personal actions or third-party intervention, can lead to negative outcomes in the form of suicide or violence against others.

Our educators are in a unique position to affect change, impart affirmative messaging, or facilitate intervention activities due to their daily interactions with students. These interactions allow for observing and assessing concerning behaviors and communications—students embracing extremist ideologies and progressing on a trajectory toward violence.