EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

HELPING LEARNERS WITH AUTISM UNDERSTAND HOW TO KEEP SAFE FROM RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM

TEACHERS' GUIDE 2019

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Helping learners with autism understand how to keep safe from radicalisation and extremism

This guidance has been developed to help teachers support learners with autism, or other types of SEND, to understand the risks of radicalisation and ways to keep safe from it. Our thanks to Derwen College, Henshaws Specialist College, Homefield College, Orchard Hill College and Trinity Specialist College for their support in putting this guidance together.

SPECIFIC RISK FACTORS FOR LEARNERS WITH AUTISM

Learners with autism are all individuals, so the risk factors will differ from one learner to the next. However, certain characteristics commonly associated with autism can make those with this condition particularly vulnerable to being radicalised. It is important to consider these risk factors when deciding

• how best to teach learners with autism about protecting themselves from the threat of radicalisation

• which aspects to prioritise.

Learners with autism MAY:

• be more **credulous** than their neurotypical peers; they may believe 'fake news' more easily; they may not question or be suspicious of other people's motives; they may be more likely to take at face value what other people tell them.

• be **socially isolated** and yet have a strong desire to make friends and belong to a group

• have a **limited awareness of risk** or ability to assess the extent of a potential risk

• be **impulsive**, with a less well-developed understanding of consequences than their neurotypical peers

• feel marginalised, misunderstood, or **under-valued** by society

• take enormous **enjoyment in following rules or instructions** – without questioning the trustworthiness or motives of those whose authority they are submitting to

• spend a **great deal of time online**, finding it easier to make online rather than face-to-face friends, in particular through online gaming

• have a level of **confidence/competence in using technology** which far outstrips their social awareness

• have been more **sheltered** from 'the unpleasant side of life' during adolescence than their neurotypical peers, leading to an under-developed understanding of some of the more negative aspects of society.

> **"Learners with autism are all individuals, so the risk factors will differ from one learner to the next."**

Autism is a spectrum condition, meaning that learners are affected by their autism differently. It is important, therefore, that you get to know each learner and identify which are the greatest risk factors for them as individuals. While most of the learning in relation to keeping safe from radicalisation will happen in group sessions, it is possible that for some learners, you may identify specific risk factors unique to the individual; these might be best addressed through a one-to-one approach.

Understanding of risks associated with a learner's autism should always be married up with an understanding of risks associated with their environment, including, for example, their home, their peer group, the locality in which they are living/where the place of learning is situated. Risks of exposure to different types of extremism will vary from one locality to another.

LEARNING ABOUT KEEPING SAFE FROM RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM

Many learning providers cover the threat of radicalisation and extremism within more general teaching and learning about safeguarding. This is particularly true of teachers working with learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) where the focus of the teaching is often about reducing the risk of being exploited whether that is sexually, financially or through radicalisation.

Key aspects of learning where radicalisation and extremism fit naturally into general teaching about safeguarding include:

- **e-safety and understanding of the online world** (e.g. being careful with personal data; responsible online behaviours; awareness that not everyone on the internet is who they say they are; recognising that not everything published on the internet is true; awareness of common scams; ways to respond to/report things that are concerning them)

- **exploitation and coercion** (e.g. grooming in its different forms; recognising when this is happening to you, including common warning signs; understanding the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships with others – individuals or groups; high-risk situations; strategies to avoid getting involved or ways to extricate yourself; sources of help and advice)

- **recognising when the personal safety of others may be at risk** (e.g. common behaviours and warning signs; how to respond; where to get help).

Learners with SEND, including those with autism, often benefit from having multiple opportunities to consolidate learning. They may also have difficulties in transferring learning from one context to another, or not be automatically aware of the relevance of learning undertaken in one context to other situations. Opportunities to revisit key topics in different sessions across their timetable are, therefore, particularly helpful. This can be done, for example, through

- **simple repetition across sessions** (e.g. ensuring they are reminded of the importance of keeping their passwords secure each time they access a computer)

- **revisiting and reinforcing aspects of the keeping safe curriculum in other classes** (e.g. learning how to use a search function in an ICT session through exploring some key words such as 'extremism')

- **using Prevent-related topics as a context for developing skills pertinent to other subjects** (e.g. developing reading and comprehension skills by looking at a newspaper article about a local 'Rally against Racism' demonstration).

USING TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be a great teaching tool for learners with autism who prefer working on their phones or tablets to engaging with paper-based material or taking part in oral discussion. Learning experiences can be designed to replicate some of the features familiar from online gaming or popular apps, which can be a useful motivator. If the resource is online, whether freely available on the internet or via an organisation's own virtual learning environment, learners can return to it in their own time to explore it further or consolidate their learning.

Online safety also needs to be a key part of the content of learning about radicalisation. Learners with autism will benefit from learning about e-safety in the practical context of the actual digital devices and social media platforms they use on a regular basis. In particular, it is a good idea to start by finding out what social media they are using. The pace of change in this arena, especially amongst young people, is so fast that it's quite possible that your students are using platforms you have not heard of, let alone used! This means that teaching about Facebook, despite it being the largest social media site, for example, may be irrelevant.

Rooting your teaching in the lived online experience of the learners will allow you to help learners with specific features, such as privacy settings, and use the site-specific terminology with which your learners are familiar. As transferring learning between contexts can be difficult for learners with autism and other types of SEND, your teaching is likely to be more impactful this way.

TEACHING RESOURCES

There is a resource folder, accompanying this guidance, which includes materials that can be used to explore the topic of 'keeping safe from radicalisation and extremism' with learners with autism, while at the same time giving them an opportunity to practise their English skills.

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Developed in association with Natspec and member colleges