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**EDUCATOR'S GUIDE** 



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# THEY ARE AMONG US: THE COMIC STRIP PREVENTION TOOL

Comic strips are a playful form of media that we have chosen to use as a teaching tool. They deliver simplified messages that facilitate learning by presenting scenarios in which readers can see themselves and other people in the characters.

This is how CPRLV's *Radicalishow* show got started. It is now in its third episode.

### **BASED ON A TRUE STORY**

The process of radicalization leading to violence: true stories

### A FAMILY AFFAIR:

Radicalization: repercussions on families

### THEY ARE AMONG US

Right-wing extremism: recruitment and violence, but also disengagement



Episodes 1 and 2 of Radicalishow are available for free download.

- Radicalishow 1. Based on a True Story: [indd.adobe.com/view/3c5ff48b-5478-4b64-a5d8-0516e54b0e96].
- **Radicalishow 2.** A Family Affair: [indd.adobe.com/view/3f594f9b-4e87-43d5-82fd-f858a0450c54].

### RADICALISHOW 3 - THEY ARE AMONG US:

### **GENERAL PRESENTATION**

In the third episode of Radicalishow, we learn about various aspects of right-wing extremism.

### Genesis of the project

The *Radicalishow* comic strip series was developed by CPRLV as a new way to raise awareness about radicalization leading to violence. In 2016, the Centre teamed up with talented cartoonist Eldiablo, who is best known for the television series and film *Les Lascars*, among other projects.

To develop the story for *They Are Among Us*, the artist collected the stories of people who, at one point or another in their lives, have bought into extremist ideologies. He also gained deeper insight into the topic of violent extremism by speaking with CPRLV specialists. He then began creating the comic strip *They Are Among Us*, a fictional piece on violent right-wing extremism that is largely based on real events.

### They are among us:

The comic strip starts by explaining the recruitment methods often used by agents of radicalization.

It also addresses the many ways in which right-wing extremist groups violate human rights in expressing their xenophobia, citing conspiracy theories. Highly popular among right-wing extremist groups is the theory that certain elites are conspiring to dominate the people.

Beyond violence, the comic strip places particular emphasis on the possibility of disengagement based on known cases. We must emphasize here that managing cases of radicalization is necessary and proven to be successful, even in detention facilities. This is the foundation of CPRLV's mission to provide support- and social reintegration.



### **WHAT WE LEARN**

### FROM THE CHARACTERS

### M. SKINOFF: the archetype of an agent of radicalization

Meeting with an agent of radicalization is a critical point in the radicalization process for many people. This is what determines Jessica's trajectory when she meets Mr. Skinoff. The comic strip clearly illustrates key elements of the recruiter's strategy. Being a good manipulator, he projects confidence, both in his appearance and his attitude. He is calm and pretends to care about Jessica's concerns. He behaves charismatically, which helps him develop his influence over her, a key factor in the recruitment strategies described below.

### RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES



### Feigning sympathy

Agents of radicalization will do anything it takes to appear sympathetic, even if they are not. They appear to be gentle, kind-hearted and open to listening. This is one of the most effective and disturbing approaches, because they use it to veil their manipulation strategy.

To show that they are sympathetic, agents will, for example, find things they have in common with the individual before trying to indoctrinate them.

That's what Mr. Skinoff is doing when he says, "I know how you feel." (p. 3)

Agents of radicalization will even shower the indoctrinated individuals with compliments and flattery to encourage them to stay committed, to get involved in proselytizing (recruitment) and to take greater risks by committing acts of violence.

When Jessica joins the cause, Mr. Skinoff compliments her, either directly or through another person, for example:

- "Mr. Skinoff wants you to know that he is very proud of your work." (p. 10)
- "Well done, young lady!" (p. 12)

In this positive atmosphere, the agent of radicalization paints the indoctrinated person's actions as being part of a project, a greater ideal, for example, by making them believe that the extremist movement is patriotic.

The compliments increase over time, such as "I'm very proud of you," and "Your county is proud of you!" (p. 12)

Praising and validating a radicalized person is a powerful way of convincing them to take their commitment to the next level.

After all of the praise she's received, Jessica is pushed to take more illicit action, to "go undercover." (p. 12)

### RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES (CONT.)



### **Familiarity**

Agents of radicalization can also exploit a person's fragility by meeting some of their needs (e.g., affection, safety, or validating their identity).

During their first meeting, Mr. Skinoff tries to reassure Jessica by offering his support, saying "We'll protect you," and "We're here for you." (p. 5)

He also refers to the extremist organization as her "family." (p. 5)

This expression of familiarity can be verbal or physical.

The characters demonstrate familiarity by gently placing their hand on a Jessica's shoulder (p. 3, 7 and 13), getting close to her (p. 4 and 13) or patting her back (p. 12).

### **Manipulation**

Agents of radicalization will appear (or pretend) to be knowledgeable as a tool for establishing legitimacy, even authority.

But behind this intellectual justification often hides manipulated information, a conspiracy-based worldview, and an ultimate goal of creating subversion—when a person reverses their values and cuts themself off from society, potentially leading them to take action.

When Mr. Skinoff first meets with Jessica, his main goal is to feed her a polarized view of society.

Mr. Skinoff's rhetoric also reaffirms this vision of a homogeneous community of individuals who share a common culture and destiny. This vision is widely held among right-wing extremist groups, and Mr. Skinoff manages to convince Jessica of it, as she agrees with him each time, saying, "It's no longer the place I knew when I was a child!" (p. 2), and "They really aren't like us!" (p. 4).

When Mr. Skinoff invites Jessica to look out the window (p. 3), she is also given a very limited view of society. But this view is only further restricted when she looks through the glasses. In other words, she now sees society through the lens of her ideology. From that moment on, she is indoctrinated. For her, society can be broken down into two opposing realities: black and white, us vs. them, etc.—a view that is unnuanced, polarizing and divisive.

At this stage of the process, the goal of the agent of radicalization is to indoctrinate Jessica to make her a subversive person.

### **Dictatorship**

While an agent of radicalization can be appear to be seductive, altruistic and cultivated, it doesn't take long before they are revealed for the dictator that they are.

The scene in which Mr. Skinoff's big-muscled interrogator subjects Jessica to humiliation is a perfect illustration of this. (p. 21 and 22).

### JESSICA: an illustration of the process of radicalization/deradicalization

Though the expression "brainwashing" is often used in relation to violent radicalization, we must move beyond this notion and see radicalization for the methodical and complex process that it is.

### PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION/DERADICALIZATION: ENTHUSIASM TO DISILLUSIONMENT



### **Radicalization**

Violent extremism is based on a form of reasoning combined with a simplified and unnuanced interpretation of society as a whole.

To bring more people into the fold, agents of radicalization will target people within a society who have certain vulnerabilities<sup>2</sup>. By acting on these vulnerabilities, they surround themselves with people who are easily manipulated to serve their own interests.

Take the example of the ABCs of recruitment, illustrated by Mr. Skinoff in a (non-exhaustive) description of how agents of radicalization operate. (p. 8)

Similarly to those who are indoctrinated into a cult, people who have been radicalized have something to offer: their time, strength, enthusiasm, knowledge, money, goods<sup>3</sup>, and even their charm or powers of persuasion.

Jessica is a determined person, and Mr. Skinoff wants to make use of her attractiveness: "You could be very useful to us... as someone who is attractive." (p. 6). As a recruiter, Jessica is the "glamorous" face of the right-wing extremist group, and that makes her feel useful. (p. 9)

### **Deradicalization**

A radicalized individual may eventually realize that there are two faces of violent extremism—a palatable discourse in the public eye, but in private, the use of violence as a legitimate means of advancing the cause.

Jessica soon discovers what this violence entails (p. 11). This is an interesting moment in the sense that, when she is exposed to the violence, she sees through the façade.

If they begin to think critically (or if a specialized worker in the disengagement process helps them to start thinking critically<sup>4</sup>), they will begin to question their beliefs, a crucial step toward disengaging from violence<sup>5</sup>. At that point, instead of questioning society, they will begin questioning the group to which they belong. An individual will become increasingly self-reflective until they become disillusioned and disengage from violent extremism.

Jessica begins to question the organization's rationale. Her critical thinking is revealed when she asks "Did you have to be so rough?" (p. 12)

Jessica again realizes how dangerous these thugs are when she says that their violence is directed toward defenceless people: "They were just kids! One was a girl!" (p. 12)

She feels uncomfortable spying on journalist Candy Malone, who really has done nothing wrong. (p. 13) Later, when she is interrogated (p. 21 22) and humiliated, she understands what she has gotten herself into and how bitter it is when the illusion fades

### **HENCHMEN**: instruments of violence

Agents of radicalization do not always have henchmen. They can act as recruiters or gatekeepers. Mr. Skinoff's character plays both an agent of radicalization and a charismatic leader. More often than not, agents of radicalization are not the ones committing acts of violence. Like a catapult, they launch devoted henchmen at very specific targets. They can then deny any involvement, guaranteeing their own impunity.

### **DELEGATING VIOLENCE**



### **Radicalization**

Agents of radicalization do not act alone. They work with thugs who will carry out the violence for them.

"The struggle against the invasion takes both brains-people—like Mr. Skinoff—and brawn!" (p. 7)

Through what we could call right-wing extremist henchmen, the comic strip is not just depicting violence. In fact, the main purpose is to show that, in reality, right-wing extremism is sometimes raw and intense.

To illustrate this, the comic strip presents different violent situations involving right-wing extremist henchmen. We see this in a range of situations where people spew xenophobic or homophobic comments and commit physical assault. (p. 7, 11, 29, 30, 31)



# RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS: THE COLLATERAL CHARACTERS OF RADICALIZATION

Some people gravitate toward radicalized groups because they admire their actions and identify with their cause.





Some of the characters in the comic strip were not given a name. This reminds the reader that violent extremism, in any form, cannot be linked to a particular identity or profile.

### THE ORBIT OF RADICALIZATION: THE OTHER FACES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM



Radicalization leading to violence extends beyond the groups created by agents of radicalization and charismatic leaders. Some people come to it on their own, making them one of the multiple facets of radicalization. These people are not part of a group and do not form one themselves. But, if they frequently communicate with others, they help create a community of thought.

The characters in C1 and C2 are two friends. They help the comic strip show different faces of violent extremism.

C1 appears on page 14, where he sympathizes with far-right extremist ideas, which he shares with his friend C2 on page 19.

The person often has admiration for a cause or the activities of an extremist group.

C1 idealizes extremist activities, e.g. "That guy is a hero!" (p. 15,), and expresses his desire to finally act and, as he puts it, serve his country (p. 15).

The person displays similar behaviour that is typical of the radicalization process<sup>6</sup>, such as withdrawal, isolation or cutting oneself off from society or one's family values.

C1 feeds his radicalization on the Internet. (p. 18)

He cuts himself off and isolates himself from society, saying that his neighbourhood is now nothing but a bunch of "weirdos." (p. 18)

C1 shares his ideas, concerns and view of society with his friend, C2.

In their conversation, it is interesting to analyze C1's rhetoric, which is much like that of Mr. Skinoff's. C1 groups society into two categories, the "Aliens", and people like himself.

He also uses disparaging, dehumanizing words to refer to the Other, calling them a "bunch of savages," "sheep," and "imbeciles." (p. 19)

In his rhetoric, he refers to the end of the world, or a lost paradise: "Civilization is coming to an end!" (p. 18). This pseudo-theory of a chaotic world leads to a saviour-like discourse, with the hypothetical arrival of «someone[who] decides to clean up this filth." (p. 19) For C1, this "cleaning up" is carried out through violence.

A person can also be more discrete in their radicalization process.

**C2** is someone who displays certain vulnerabilities. He is gullible and lacks judgement, blindly accepting everything he is told.

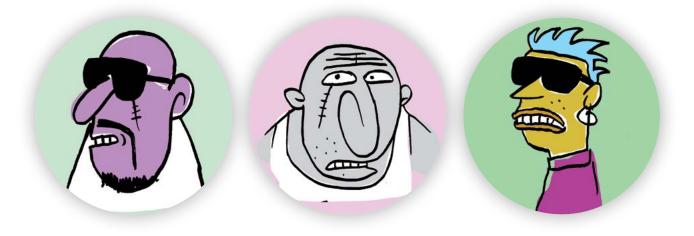
With regular contact with C1, C2 progressively becomes radicalized. He feeds off the hateful rhetoric of his friend and is curious about how to get a gun on the "darknet." (p. 20, 26).

By legitimizing this violence ("You may be right," p. 20), C2 is convinced to take action and commit a massacre (p. 26). His actions show that he is willing to be the one who "cleans up." This is suggested behind the completely rhetorical question, But who's got the guts to do it?" (p. 20)

## DISENGAGING FROM VIOLENCE

A person can disengage from violence spontaneously, without any outside help, as we see with some of the characters in the comic strip.

This may be the result of community efforts, specialized workers, and organizations working against radicalization leading to violence.



Jessica, whom we saw earlier, slowly disengages from extremism when, seeing the violence carried out by the group, she begins to question the rationale behind their actions.

Two other comic strip characters also disengage from violence.

### Meeting the other

We see the progression of the agent of radicalization's henchmen. One of them, whom we'll call **HM1**, has an experience with the "Other," whom he initially hates (p. 16). He then begins to question his overall judgment of these "Aliens" and begins to see them as individuals.

This is the perspective that must be developed—seeing people as individuals rather than just part of a group to be labeled. When **HM1** is moved by the kindness and professionalism of one of these "Aliens," the ones he originally calls "bastards" (p. 14), he changes his perception, the way he sees things. He removes his glasses (p. 17), symbolizing his questioning of what he sees through them.

He is no longer exhilarated by the cause and now sees its failings. "With Skinoff gone, the fighters will quickly disband... Things don't look good for the organization." (p. 23)

In his immediate environment, the occasion of a happy family event (p. 23)—a protective factor against radicalization—puts the brakes on his spiralling extremism.

### **Detention and social reintegration**

The third character has some concrete lessons to share, because in addition to having been involved in violent extremism, he has also spent time in prison.

As a devoted skinhead, this character, whom we'll call **D1**, committed a number of violent acts against immigrants, leftists, and gay people (p. 29, 30 and 31). Quite separately from this extremist ideology, **D1** committed other crimes, including bank robbery, for which he was given a long prison sentence.

**D1** recounts his experience of being an extremist in prison. His story is full of lessons, especially since he now sees things very clearly.

- During his time in prison, **D1** experiences being in the skin of the "Alien," the "foreigner." This time, it was his turn to be stigmatized and assaulted. This is when he has to learn how to negotiate and find middle ground. (p. 33)
- **D1** comes to the unpleasant realization that the extremist group he belonged to was never a "family" like he thought they were, when they completely cut off contact with him after he is detained (p. 34). We see similar behaviour from Mr. Skinoff, who flees when things take a turn for the worse (p. 23). **D1** was also abandoned by his "people." This sheds light on the lies behind extremist rhetoric, which exploits people's need for belonging. He has no other choice but to open himself up to others: "So you had to develop new relationships..." (p. 34).

Little by little, his views change, as illustrated when he removes his glasses, symbolizing him abandoning his ideology.

One of the key elements of the disengagement phase is when a person no longer sees violence as a legitimate means of expressing their convictions. **D1** says that violence has become unjustifiable: "In the end, I realized that it was all a load of crap," (p. 29). Not only can he no longer justify the violence, he condemns it: "The guy that did that is the worst son of a bitch!» (p. 27)

Having turned away from violence, **D1** now has empathy for others, a protective factor against radicalization and, therefore, disengagement. This is illustrated when **D1** recounts the emotional shock he felt when he saw images from the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. "I had never been so upset before... I knew that I had truly changed." (p. 34)

**D1** rejects his former beliefs, and the best way for him to demonstrate this is to get rid of his tattoos promoting those beliefs (p. 35).

In conclusion, **D1** wants to translate his disengagement into helping improve co-existence through awareness-raising and prevention initiatives on violent extremism. (p. 36)

# THOUGHT-PROVOKING ACTIVITIES

CPRLV has developed several thought-provoking activities to help readers delve deeper into the comic strip content, ensuring that the messages are fully understood and have the intended impact.

Each person who has read the comic strip may have their own interpretation of the events, may have been affected by one situation or another, and may have their own emotional reaction to it (e.g. anger, hatred, concern for family safety, empathy). The previous pages helped in analyzing the messages behind the story. You can draw on this knowledge to conduct the activities and guide discussions based on the what your group has experienced and felt. This will require some experience and a deeper understanding of the issues of radicalization leading to violence. We therefore recommend asking a skilled resource person to assist you. If needed, the CPRLV can send a staff member to provide support during the activity.

Before beginning these activities, make sure that all participants have read the comic strip.

It is important to create an environment of respectful dialogue, where there is room for differing opinions.



### Rose- or black-coloured glasses?

Thoughts on our perception of society

1 TIME: 30-45 MIN. Audience: Sec. III to V, cégep

### **OBJECTIVES:**

The purpose of this activity is to have participants reflect on their relationship with society. Referring to the various situations in the comic strip, you will encourage participants to reflect on how they judge stereotyped groups, changes to societal space and their place in society.

### TIP:

The questions below are open-ended and addressed to all activity participants. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply allow each person to talk about their experience and perceptions. The community worker can then add their own point of view to the discussion, based on the information in the guide and on their own experience. Try to get as many people as possible to participate in discussions, and remind them that it is important to remain respectful and listen to others.

- "This country is changing." (p. 2): What changes is Jessica referring to?
- What societal changes stand out to you or worry you?
- What do you currently perceive as being a positive change in society?
- What do the glasses worn by the violent radicals in the comic strip signify?
- Do you ever wear glasses to view the people around you?
- What glasses do you wear, and how do they affect the way you see things?
- "The glasses were always just a metaphor." (p. 24) What do you think this means?
- What did you think about the statement, "Maybe that's the problem! Nobody prepared me for this world!" (p. 18)?
- Have you ever had the feeling that you don't have enough tools to analyze and understand this changing, increasingly complex society?
- Mr. Skinoff says: "And of course, when you speak about it, they make fun of you, they think you're weird, don't they?" (p. 3) Do you think that there are topics today that are too hard to discuss because you're afraid of being ridiculed or stigmatized?
- Does every opinion deserve to be heard?
- Jessica says: "I no longer feel at ease in my own home!" (p. 2) Have you ever felt uncomfortable like that? How did you deal with it?
- What do you think is your place in society? Does that involve equal space for everyone?
- After spending time in the hospital, one of the militant extremists changes his negative
  preconceptions of immigrants (p. 16). Have you ever had a similar experience that changed
  your preconceived ideas, positive or negative, about another person?
- Do you feel that society puts enough emphasis on projects that bring people together?

### Is it possible to socially reintegrate people who have been radicalized?



2 TIME: 55 MIN.
AUDIENCE: SEC. III TO V

### **OBJECTIVES:**

This activity is intended to get participants thinking about social reintegration for radicalized individuals. There are two main objectives: to raise awareness about the challenges of disengaging from violent extremism, and to leverage the experiences of deradicalized people and turn them into ambassadors of prevention.

### TIP:

The comic strip depicts **D1**'s disengagement from violent extremism, and then his social reintegration. To get participants thinking about this character's story, present the following scenario to them:

Like many people before him, **D1** quit his right-wing extremist group and wants to right his wrongs. He would like to get involved in youth violence prevention but doesn't quite know where to start. That's where you come in! Discuss with your group about how you can help **D1** transform his experience into a prevention tool. All ideas are welcome!

### **LEADING THE ACTIVITY:**

- To make sure you have enough time to hear each group's ideas, form a maximum of four groups.
- Give each group the project sheet in Appendix 1.
- Designate one representative per group to present the group's ideas.
- Also designate a time-keeper who will make sure that debates do not drag on and that people have equal time
  to talk.
- Give the groups about 20 minutes to form their project ideas.
- After the groups have had time to reflect, gather their ideas.

### **FEEDBACK ON THE ACTIVITY:**

This discussion period with all of the groups should last about 30 minutes. Start by asking each group to share about their creation experience:

- Was it difficult to think about project ideas for violence prevention?
- What challenges did you encounter when designing your project?
- How did your discussions go?
- Did you take inspiration from existing projects to make things easier?
- Did you define each aspect of the project together as a group, or did you divvy up the project tasks?

Next, ask each group to present their project and allow the other groups to react. Also, ask participants to think about the challenges and rewards of a radicalization awareness and prevention project:

- What obstacles might you encounter in carrying out your project?
- What strategies could you use to handle them?
- What are the strengths of your project?
- What makes it different from existing projects?
- What are the benefits of involving previously radicalized people in prevention projects?
- What is the downside of involving previously radicalized people in prevention projects?
- Do you know about any prevention projects that focus on the testimonials of people who are affected by a social issue?

### Is support necessary int the disengagement process?





### **OBJECTIVES:**

This activity consists of showing an individual's descent into violent radicalization and their engagement and their disengagement, for a full perspective of their path. The workshop also illustrates the different manifestations of violent radicalization (motives, speech and actions).

### TIP:

Referring to the story told by **D1** in the comic strip (p. 27 36), ask participants to reproduce his path of radicalization, from violent extremism to social reintegration. As a guide, you will then reproduce the tree in Appendix 2, placing the following elements in the right places:

- On the roots: what motivates him to become involved in violent extremism.

  The roots symbolize the sources of unease.
- On the trunk: the ways that he expresses his engagement in violence (actions, speech and thoughts).
   The trunk symbolizes the brute force of violent extremism.
- On the branches: his reasons for disengaging from violent extremism.
   The branches symbolize the freedom brought by disengagement, and the ability to reach for the limitless sky.
- On the side of the tree: the psychosocial support available and project ideas (see activity 2) that promote social reintegration.

The space around the tree symbolizes the community environment.

### **LEADING THE ACTIVITY:**

- Place participants into 3 or 4 groups.
- Give each group a copy of the project sheet in Appendix 2.
- Designate a time-keeper who will make sure that debates do not drag on and that people have equal time to talk.
- Give groups about 20 minutes to complete the tree.

### When time is up, ask for the participants' reactions to certain aspects of the exercise:

- Was it easy or difficult to identify each part of the tree?
- How did your group discussions go?
- What did you learn in the class that helped you complete this exercise?

### Then start a discussion around the following questions:

- The character **D1** committed hateful, violent acts and yet demonstrates altruistic behaviour when he gives the money he stole to people in need. What do you think about this?
- **D1** continues his violent behaviour even in prison. Should **D1** have taken advantage of any particular support while he was incarcerated? Why?
- What sort of case management or prevention initiatives could be put into place in the prison?



### **APPENDIX 2 – PROJECT SHEET A SUGGESTION BOX FOR D2**

Project name
Objectives
Target Audience
Project summary
- 1-0,001 outlimitary
People or organizations to involve
Possible actions
Slogan

### **APPENDIX 2 – THE TREE OF SOCIAL REINTEGRATION**

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND AN ENGAGEMENT PROJECT TO FACILITATE SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

REASONS FOR DISENGAGING FROM VIOLENT EXTREMISM

WAYS ONE EXPRESSES THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE



### NOTES

- The guide Strengthening Our Resilience to Agents of Radicalization and Their Rhetoric is available for free download: [https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/what-is-an-agent-of-radicalization-cprlv.pdf].
- 2 Vulnerability or protection factors are explained in the guide An Information Kit for Social Workers and Counsellors, which is available for free download at: [info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/INFORMATION\_KIT\_SOCIAL-WORKER\_CPRLV.pdf].
- 3 Marie Joly, Comment les sectes vous manipulent : les stratégies dévoilées, Montréal, Stanké, 2002, 184 p.
- 4 In such a case, we recommend the "What If I was Wrong?" Educator's Guide, developed by the CPRLV in cooperation with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. The guide provides activities aimed at building critical thinking skills and civic awareness. It is available for free download at: [etsijavaistort.org/en/educators-guide/].
- 5 Critical thinking is a protective factor against radicalization. Read the Information Kit for Social Workers and Counsellors [info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/INFORMATION\_KIT\_SOCIAL-WORKER\_CPRLV.pdf].
- 6 See the Behaviour Barometer, available for free download at: [info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/BAROMETRE\_EN\_CPRLV\_2016-1.pdf].





24/7 HELPLINE Montreal area: 514 687-7141 Elsewhere in Quebec: 1 877 687-7141 It's confidential!

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