



RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM:

HOW DO I TALK ABOUT IT

WITH MY CHILD?

**INFORMATION
GUIDE FOR
PARENTS**

Produced by:



CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION
OF RADICALIZATION
LEADING TO VIOLENCE

Prevention first.

With the participation of:



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Canadian
Commission
for UNESCO



ORDRE DES
PSYCHOLOGUES
DU QUÉBEC



WHAT WE DO BEST
is help you!

This guide offers practical advice to help you talk with your children about acts of violence and the issues of violent radicalization and extremism.



HOW DO I EXPLAIN SUCH VIOLENCE TO MY KIDS?



WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO THEM?



WHEN'S THE RIGHT TIME TO TALK ABOUT IT?



SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT IMAGES?



HOW DO I REASSURE THEM?



WHAT HAPPENS IF NO ONE TALKS TO THEM ABOUT IT?

1 | HOW DO I TALK ABOUT VIOLENT RADICALIZATION AND EXTREMISM WITH MY CHILD?

Let's be frank: acts of violence due to violent radicalization and extremism are scary, whether they occur thousands of kilometres away or right in our own communities. Each time a tragic event occurs, parents want to know how to explain such extreme acts to their children. This creates a dilemma – how can we reassure our children and reinforce their sense of security whilst frankly answering their questions about this type of violence within our society.



WHAT IS RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE?

Radicalization leading to violence is a process in which individuals adopt a system of extreme beliefs – including the desire to encourage, facilitate or use violence – in order to achieve social transformation by imposing an ideology, political project or cause.

TO PUT IT SIMPLY

Violent radicalization is when a person believes that to get across an idea that's important to them, they are entitled to encourage or to use violence to impose that idea.



WHAT IS

2 | VIOLENT EXTREMISM?



Extremism is when someone takes a position – on identity, culture, society, religion or politics – which is extreme compared to the usual spectrum of beliefs in a society. Such extremism becomes violent when violent means are used to defend or promote this position. Violent extremism includes terrorism, but also every other act of divisive or violent hatred driven by ideological motivations.

WHAT IS

3 | TERRORISM?



Terrorism describes a strategy of violent acts designed to sow terror, intimidate people or pressure a government in order to draw attention to political, ideological, cultural, religious or social demands. Terrorism is an indicator and ultimate outcome of violent extremism; it is often organized and promoted by extremist groups in order to force a society or government to make decisions or adopt orientations that they would not otherwise choose to implement.



TO PUT IT SIMPLY



Violent extremism is when a person supports and defends extreme opinions that are counter to the best interests of the community as a whole. In many cases, such persons also encourage or use violence to impose their ideas.

Terrorism is an act of intimidation, of creating fear by using violence to impose ideas and beliefs by attacking the way of life and freedoms of innocent people.

4 HOW DO I EXPLAIN

TO MY CHILD WHAT A TERRORIST OR VIOLENT EXTREMIST IS?

What you say will vary depending on the age, temperament and personality of the child. There's no "one size fits all." Tailor what you say to each individual child.

- For little children, for example, you could say: "It's someone who does something bad and thinks they have a good reason to do it. But there are more peaceful ways to get their message across."
- For older children, you could draw upon a more complex vocabulary but still tailor it to the child's ability to understand.

If your child has not heard about violent extremism, or terrorism or related events, keep the discussion for a later date. In many cases using simple words to talk about the issue will help the child overcome their personal fears. There's no need to add a lot of detail. It's important to stay calm so you don't scare the child.



WHAT'S A TERRORIST?

Terrorists, or violent extremists, are people who want to convince others that their ideas are right and who use violence to do so.

- Reassure your child by explaining that most people do not act that way and that such situations are rare.



"People do not usually try to convince others by using violence. It's rare that it happens."

- Explain to your child that only a very small number of people are actually violent extremists and terrorists. It's true that we talk about them a lot in the news and on TV, and that gives the impression that there are more of them than there really are.



"There are only a few terrorists."
"And they are not everywhere."

Also, remind your child of the importance of defending one's own ideas and respecting others who don't agree with us. Ask your child to identify peaceful ways of settling conflicts or differences.

5 | WHAT'S A GOOD AGE

TO TALK ABOUT EXTREMIST OR TERRORIST
ACTS OF VIOLENCE WITH A CHILD?

DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM

You can discuss the problem of violent extremism and terrorism at a fairly early age. But it's important to not raise these issues with a very young child, so as not to create fear or anxiety. If the child is not exposed to such situations (in the home or in other settings) and is not aware of it, it is not a good idea to initiate a discussion with the child about such matters.



Take into consideration your child's age, the nature of their questions, as well as their need to understand or express something about the problem.

6 | HOW DO I TALK ABOUT

VIOLENT ACTS RELATED TO RADICALIZATION AND
VIOLENT EXTREMISM WITH MY CHILD?

First, create a **safe atmosphere** so that your child can express his or her emotions and fears about the situation. Don't just raise the issue quickly while talking with other adults. Also, although anger is justified (because of the violence and our value system), don't let it take over while you are talking to your child.

TAKE TIME TO GIVE YOUR CHILD YOUR FULL ATTENTION AND
UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE EVENTS.



"How do you feel?"

"What do you think about what's happening?"

"Are you worried?"

It is important to figure out what your child knows, and especially what your child understands, from the information he or she had access to. Let your child know that when we're faced with events caused by radicalization and violent extremism, it's normal to have thoughts and feelings about it.

There is no need to talk about it with children who need to be protected from things that would get them upset or overexcited (act as a protective shield). If it's not an issue, don't discuss it with them.

It's also possible that your child will ask **you questions** about the events. Be patient and take the time to provide simple and frank explanations that will help your child understand what is going on and also provide reassurance.

Validate your child's thoughts and feelings and **correct** any mistaken or exaggerated perceptions in terms of the seriousness of the event. Don't share your own fears with your child: children are very sensitive to the feelings of those around them and your anxiety will only increase their own.

ANSWER YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS



If you cannot adequately control your feelings, ask someone close to you to talk to your child. Children are sensitive to feelings and it would be a wasted effort to try to hide your anxiety. It may even be that children will ask more questions because they are aware of your anxiety.

Your approach should be to clarify the facts, reinforce your child's sense of safety and encourage emotional resilience (ability to cope).

The idea is to help your child understand violent acts related to radicalization and extremism without making your child feel threatened. By keeping this goal in mind, parents fulfill their role as protectors.

7 | CAN I LET MY CHILD WATCH PICTURES OR VIDEOS ABOUT TERRORIST ACTS?

Pictures or videos of terrorist acts, whether violent or not, can result in anxiety and nightmares in children, especially young children.

It is recommended that you avoid exposing your child to these types of images or repetitive news stories. They may give your child the impression that the whole world has become terrifying and disturbing.

However, if a child has already seen the images, try to understand what they're going through; let the child talk about what he or she saw and is feeling, without being intrusive. If your child

doesn't want to talk about it, don't push, but do keep an eye on their behaviour.

The aim is not to explain what cannot be explained, but rather to provide a space where the child can express his or her feelings and you can address the issues raised.

Furthermore, if you and your child are watching TV or coverage that describes terrorist acts, make sure your child is okay with continuing to watch. If the child seems all right, you can help interpret the information by adding details, if necessary, and always in a calm way. You can also suggest your child change

the channel by saying: "we've heard enough about violence, that's not the only thing happening in the world and it's taking up too much space."

Remember that when there is an act of violence, you are the person to whom your child will turn to find out what's happening and be reassured. It's an opportunity for a quiet talk about the situation and a chance to correct any mistaken information your child may have heard or read.



8 | HOW DO I TALK ABOUT VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM WITHOUT CREATING HARMFUL STEREOTYPES?

Violent extremism (or terrorism) is a societal problem that has nothing to do with one particular community, group or religion.

In fact, only a few extremist individuals are behind the violence, no matter what form it takes. The violence can be associated with different causes or ideological motivations. Someone can adhere to an ideology without being violent, just as a member of a group can use violence to promote an ideology without other members of the group approving or participating in the violence.

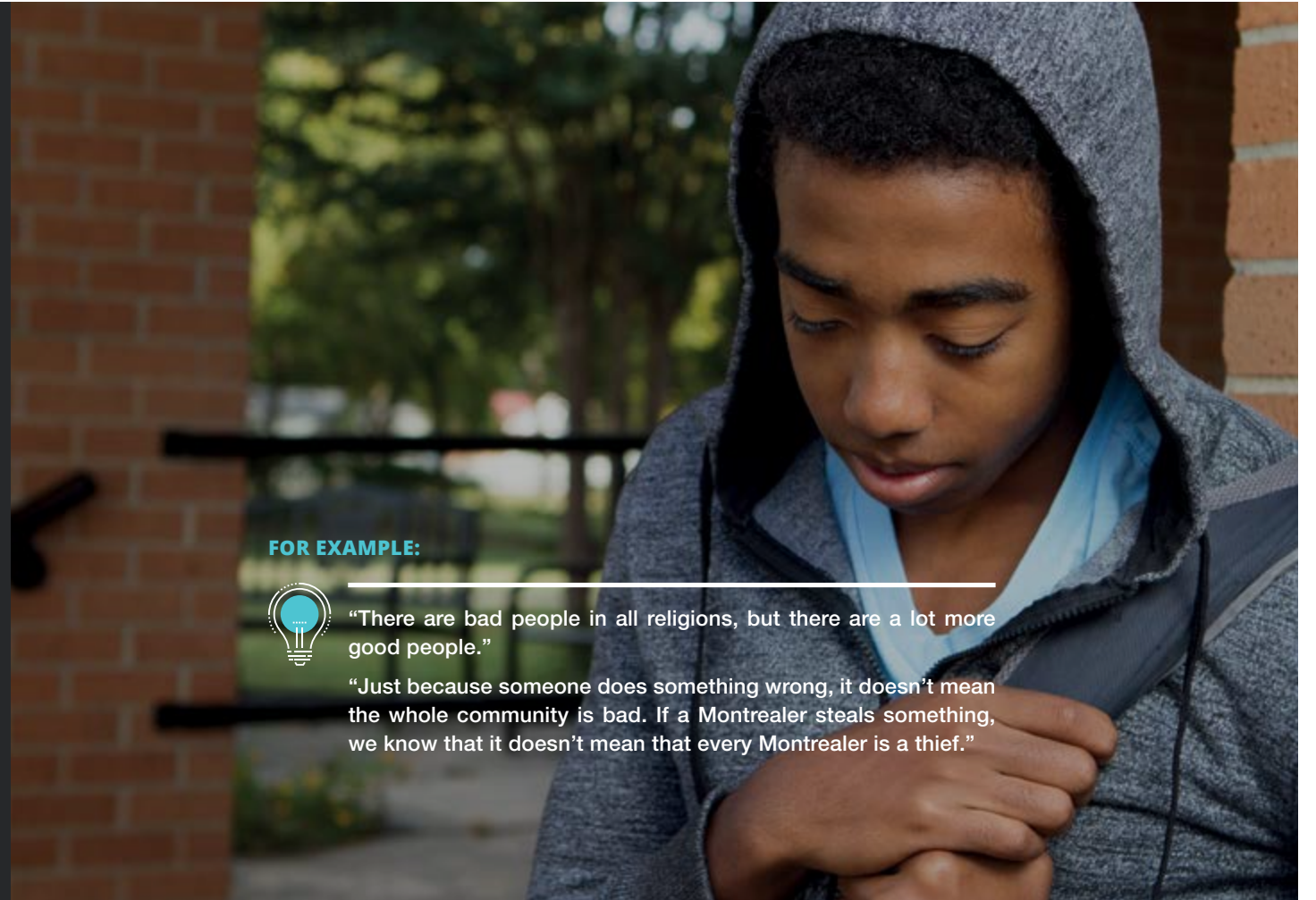
It's important to make this clear to your child, to prevent the development of prejudices that could lead your child to fear certain groups or communities.

FOR EXAMPLE:



“There are bad people in all religions, but there are a lot more good people.”

“Just because someone does something wrong, it doesn't mean the whole community is bad. If a Montrealer steals something, we know that it doesn't mean that every Montrealer is a thief.”



9 | HOW DO I REASSURE AND COMFORT MY CHILD?

I YOUR CHILD'S FEARS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENTS

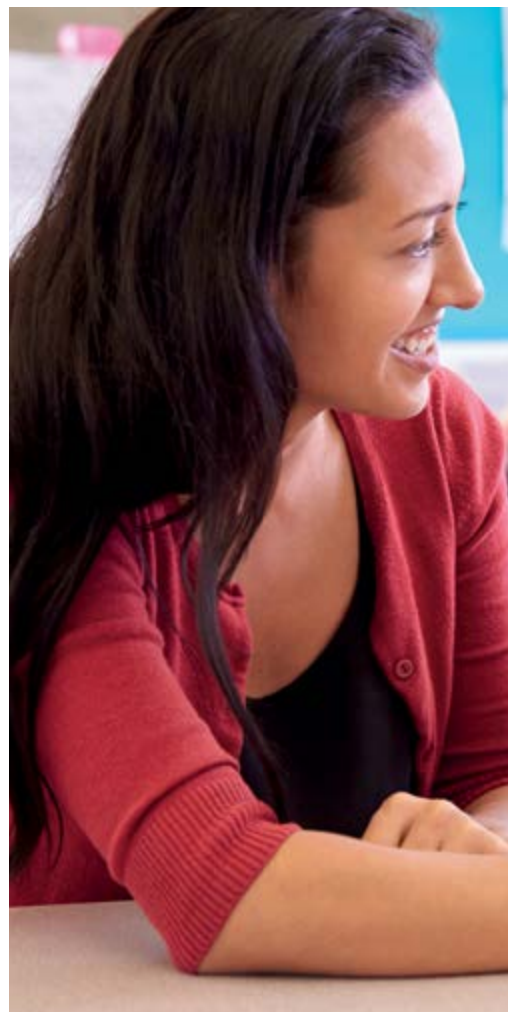
As a parent, you must listen to your child without trying to brush off or trivialize your child's fears. It is also important to pay attention to what your child says and to their non-verbal behaviour, because your child feels fear and worry differently than you.

Be clear in your responses, use simple words and check to see what your child understands.

YOU CAN ASK YOUR CHILD WHAT HE OR SHE UNDERSTANDS OF THE EVENT.



"What do you think is happening?"
"Does it make you afraid?"



MAKE YOUR CHILD AWARE THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE AND AUTHORITIES WORKING TO KEEP US SAFE.



"The police are here to protect you."
"There are organizations that are working hard to prevent radicalization and terrorism in our country."

STRESS THE FACT THAT YOUR CHILD'S PERSONAL SAFETY IS NOT AT RISK.



"You're safe here."
"We're here too, to protect you."

I WHAT YOUR CHILD UNDERSTANDS ABOUT RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Be careful to not introduce, encourage or reinforce any wrong ideas your child may have about violent extremism and terrorism.

Remind your child that violent radicalization and extremism are fairly rare.

Children often have difficulty contextualizing events and tend to generalize or personalize the things they hear or encounter in the media, in the family, or at school.

So it's vital to reassure them about the exceptional nature of such acts of violence.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT
IS THAT YOU
NEVER FEEL ALONE.

A POSSIBLE QUESTION



“Could it happen to me? To my mum and dad? To my family?”

A POSSIBLE QUESTION



“Such things are very rare.” “It’s terrible what happened, but luckily it doesn’t happen often.”

YOUR CHILD'S WELL-BEING

It is essential that by the end of the conversation, your child **personally feels safe**, and does not feel anxiety or on edge. If your child needs to be closer and more dependent on you for a while, let this happen.

YOUR CHILD'S TRUST

Lastly, it's important to give your child **hope** so that he or she perceives the world and society as a safe place, where most people are not a threat.

Talk with your child about all the great things and the good people who are making the world a better place, every day, in your community and in other countries.

Above all, encourage your child to continue with his or her usual daily activities, just like you, to re-establish the family routine that provides comfort and calm.

**IF MY CHILD SHOWS SIGNS OF
ONGOING ANXIETY OR EMOTIONAL DISTRESS,**

10 | WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Children react differently to acts related to violent radicalization and extremism, and some are more affected than others.

It's important to pay attention to your child's behaviour and physical symptoms, so you can identify any signs of anxiety or emotional distress. Be aware that such signs are not exclusive to exposure to media coverage of violent radicalization and extremism.

Don't forget that children do not express their emotions in the same way that adults do!

If you think your child is experiencing anxiety, reassure them, remind them that he or she is safe and protected, and remain close: the priority is to help your child cope with the feelings caused by the situation.



If the symptoms continue, consider seeking professional help for your child.



BEHAVIOUR

Unusual agitation
Visible anxiety
Aggressive reactions
Isolation
Regression

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Headaches
Stomach aches
or upset stomach
Loss of appetite

TROUBLE SLEEPING

Recurring nightmares
Problems sleeping
Refusing to go
to bed
Wanting to sleep
with a parent

11 | WHAT SHOULD I REMEMBER

AS A PARENT, WHEN I TALK TO MY
CHILD ABOUT TERRORIST ACTS?



MAKE A DISTINCTION

Distinguish radicalization and violent extremism from other problems such as mental health, bullying, honour crimes, street gangs, militancy, etc. Radicalization and violent extremism involves the following:

- Adhering to an ideology that is meaningful to an individual and dominates their life and actions.
- Belief in the use of violence to convey a message.
- Blending of ideology and violence.



BE HONEST

Be honest in what you say. Don't make promises you cannot keep, such as saying there will be no other acts of violence in the future.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Remember to also look after yourself, because **you are the most important role model for your child**, who will rely on you for reassurance.



KEEP YOUR CHILD AWAY FROM VIOLENT IMAGES

Keep your child away from violent pictures or videos that will just be upsetting and won't make it any easier to understand the situation.



LET YOUR CHILD SPEAK

Be attentive and let your child express his or her emotions and understanding of the events.



REASSURE AND TEACH

Reassure your child and **teach** your child to trust society (parents, teachers, etc.) and the response of the authorities.



ADAPT YOUR APPROACH

Use simple words and adapt what you say to the child's age and personality.



SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS

Share what you are feeling about the event with your child to reassure your child that it is normal to be upset and have a reaction. **But remain calm and even-tempered, so you don't make your child anxious.**



YOUR CHILD ASKS YOU QUESTIONS

Discuss violent extremism and terrorism with your child when your child asks you questions, or if you think your child wants to talk about them. **Don't introduce the topic or push your child to talk before he or she is ready.**



PAY ATTENTION

Don't change your routine and pay attention to any sign of anxiety or emotional distress. If necessary, seek professional help.

12 | WHY SHOULD I

CONTACT THE CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE (CPRLV)?

The CPRLV has a team of professionals whose main task is to provide the coaching, support and psychosocial assistance you may need to address radicalization. If necessary, we can also direct you to other services and resources within the community.



A resource:
INFO-RADICAL.ORG

To get all
our guides
and tools



Several
PROFESSIONALS

The main purpose of
our team is to provide
you with support



Specialized
TOOLS

To gain a better
understanding
of all aspects of
radicalization



Help is
AVAILABLE 24/7

Montreal Area:
514 687-7141
Elsewhere in Quebec:
1 877 687-7141



SOURCES

BROTHERSON, Sean (2013). *Talking to Children about Terrorism, Fargo* (USA): North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Service.

GURWITCH, Robin H., et AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION [collaboration] (2011). *What Happened? The Story of September 11, 2001: A Discussion Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Educators*, Massachusetts (USA): Viacom International Inc., 19 p.

New York University Child Study Center (2006). *Caring for Kids After Trauma, Disaster and Death: A guide for parents and professionals*, 2nd ed., New York (USA): New York University Child Study Center, 64 p.

ZELINGER, Laurie (2011). "Talking to Children about Terrorism and War", *Facts for Families*, no 87, Washington (USA): American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Prevention first!

HELPLINE

Monday to Friday - 9 A.M to 8 P.M

Montreal area: 514-687-7141 #116

Elsewhere in Quebec: 1 877-687-7141 #116

| info-radical.org

IT'S CONFIDENTIAL!



CENTRE FOR THE **PREVENTION**
OF RADICALIZATION
LEADING TO VIOLENCE