

Supporting A Multidisciplinary Approach to Addressing Violent Extremism: What Role Can Education Professionals Play?

TAKEAWAY. Education professionals are uniquely poised to contribute to effective prevention and intervention activities for addressing violent extremism.

THE NEED. Terrorism and mass casualty attacks are increasingly of concern in the U.S., and recruitment of vulnerable youth into extremist groups is emerging as a critical threat. Violent and non-violent extremist organizations like ISIS and the Council of Conservative Citizens can reach vulnerable youth digitally, rendering their reach far greater than a previous time when influence was largely a result of face-to-face contact.

WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM? Violent extremism refers to violence in the name of extreme or radical social, political, or economic ideologies. These threats can come from a range of groups (e.g., radical right, Islamic jihadist) and may be carried out by individuals acting alone or in coordination with an extremist group. To date, there are no known pathways, definitive set of risk factors, or reliable predictors that would indicate who is likely to commit violent acts driven by extremism.

WHAT ROLES CAN EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS PLAY? Addressing violent extremism requires both prevention and intervention activities; educational professionals can contribute to each of these areas. There are different ways for educational professionals to be involved.

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Prevention activities are programs, policies and interventions that promote inclusion and engage youth and communities to diminish exposure to broad risk factors that threaten healthy development and increase access to resources that promote well-being. Some examples of prevention activities include: response teams who collaborate to work on key issues facing the community, support for existing programs and resources that strengthen the community, youth leadership, arts, and athletics programs that seek to engage and empower marginalized youth and training for community members about risks associated with threats of violence and violent extremism.

Intervention activities are programs, policies and interventions that serve youth and young adults who are believed to be at risk of committing a violent act, such as a response team that takes referrals from various stakeholders and initiates appropriate services and follow up for at-risk youth.

WHAT CAN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS DO? Sadly, preparing for and responding to violence is not new for many school districts. Many school systems have already prepared threat assessment protocols and set up student response teams for violence-related crises. These teams can be trained to understand and identify risk behaviors that may be associated with violent extremism, and to engage appropriate supports and services for at risk youth.

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR ADMINISTRATORS TO BE INVOLVED IN PREVENTION

- **BUILD PARTNERSHIPS** with faith-based/multi-faith/ecumenical organizations that work with students in your school.
- **LEARN ABOUT** existing programs that are available to youth in your school.
- **DEVELOP** partnerships with those programs to ensure communication and access.
- **INITIATE AND SUSTAIN** relationships with mental health and law enforcement professionals in your community.
- **ENSURE** that there is a strong anti-bullying curriculum that helps students view themselves as more than bystanders.

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR ADMINISTRATORS TO BE INVOLVED IN INTERVENTION

- **ESTABLISH** student response teams, inclusive of education, mental health, religious, and law enforcement professionals
- **FOCUS** on the design (or adaptation) of existing protocols for response to concerns about individual students being at risk for violence.
- **CREATE (OR REFINE)** threat assessment protocols that outline steps teachers and other school staff should take when they have concerns about students.
- **CREATE (OR REFINE)** communication protocols for youth to ensure they have a process for raising concerns about violent threats, either to their own safety or about peers.
- **PARTNER** with mental health professionals to shape interventions

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

Much of the work teachers already do in their classrooms supports students' integration into the school community. Of the many adults in youths' lives, teachers are often the first to identify changing behaviors that reveal vulnerability to violent extremism, with regular contact and access to their written work.

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR TEACHERS TO BE INVOLVED IN PREVENTION

- **CONTINUE** to work to support and include all students in classes
- **MAINTAIN** lines of communication with other adults working with your students.
- **LEARN** protocols for how to share information with the student response team.
- **IDENTIFY** and discuss with colleagues threats of violence in your community.
- **BUILD** relationships with youth and their families to understand the challenges they face.

PRACTICAL WAYS FOR TEACHERS TO BE INVOLVED IN INTERVENTION

- **CONSULT** with a colleague who is familiar with the student when you are concerned about a student.
- **FOLLOW** protocols set up in your school to enact the student response team and supports for students whom you think are at risk.

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