



CREX Scenario: Philadelphia, PA

Note: This is a hypothetical scenario derived from a series of actual cases involving the actions of known American violent extremists and foreign travelers prior to arrest. By combining facts from a variety of cases the scenario permits more dynamic interactions between workshop participants while still ensuring that scenario is representative of real world events.

Setting: middle Pennsylvania

Scene 1: "Someone Should do Something"

Ahmed just turned 16 and began his junior year in a high school in Philadelphia County. He lives at home with his parents, his older brother, Sami, and his younger sister, Fatima. Ahmed is a good student and has always been a pretty well-behaved kid, with lots of friends at school. Ahmed is also an active member of the youth group at the local mosque. Ahmed respects and trusts Mr. Edwards, his soccer coach. Coach Edwards was a mentor to Ahmed's older brother Sami, and he tells Ahmed that with hard work and focus, he can go far. Since the return from summer break, Coach Edwards has seen much less of Ahmed. When the Coach asked Ahmed how he was enjoying his junior year, Ahmed told him he was thinking of quitting soccer. When Coach Edwards asked him why, Ahmed would not give a clear reason.

Ahmed's favorite teacher is Mrs. Jenson, who teaches math and is encouraging Ahmed to work towards an engineering scholarship. When he has questions in class, Ahmed always asks Mrs. Jenson to spend additional time tutoring him. Mrs. Jenson has also noticed a change in Ahmed. Lately, his grades have been slipping a bit and he has missed some of his homework assignments. When she reminded him that he needed strong grades to be an engineer, Ahmed told her "there are more important things in the world than school."

Ahmed looks up to his older brother Sami, who goes to Villanova University. Ahmed often wears a Villanova "V" T-shirt that Sami gave him. Sami often encourages Ahmed to follow his example and attend university.

Ahmed's best friend, Troy, is on his soccer team, and has a number of classes with Ahmed. Last school year Troy and Ahmed were inseparable, and they attended a couple of Villanova athletic events together. However, since the return from summer break, they did not hang out as much as before. The other day in history class, Ahmed burst into a long speech about the situation in Syria. Ahmed said that the West had created nothing but suffering for the region, which you can clearly see in what's going on in Syria today - yet no one is doing anything to help the suffering of the Syrian people. Ahmed does not think anyone cares enough about the injustices in Syria. Troy had never heard Ahmed so upset. After class, Troy asked Ahmed what was going on, but all that Ahmed would say is that he had been feeling depressed lately. Troy also notices that Ahmed's Facebook profile has changed recently. Gone are the pictures of Ahmed and his friends on the soccer team. In their place, Ahmed has posted pictures of people in Syria.

At home, Ahmed's sister Fatima notices that Ahmed has become very moody lately and complains a lot. She notices that Ahmed is not studying as much, is on his computer in his room all day, and is not hanging out with any of his friends. She overhears Ahmed talking to someone online, saying that the situation in Syria is terrible, yet no one is doing anything to help the Syrian people, and that someone should do something. Ahmed says that it is their duty to do something to help. Fatima also notices that Ahmed's Facebook profile has changed recently. Fatima mentions this to her mother and tells her that Ahmed is acting weird.

Scene 2: “A Normal Teenager?”

Ahmed’s parents are worried about their son. Over the summer, they noticed that he was spending more time in his room and on his computer. He stayed involved with his friends in the youth group at the mosque, but Troy had not come to the house for weeks, which is unusual. When they asked Ahmed about Troy, Ahmed said that he “would rather spend time with people who understand the truth about the world.” They are concerned about Ahmed’s fascination with world politics, his increasing anger, and his failing grades in school.

Ahmed’s father remembered that the school had a school resource officer. Ahmed’s father thought that they should reach out to the school resource officer before Ahmed “did something stupid.”

Ahmed’s mother would have none of it. She said that teenage boys go through phases and that Ahmed’s frustration was normal. She doesn’t trust the police to judge who is a normal teenager and who is a trouble-maker. Ahmed’s mother doesn’t know much about Syria, except for what she has seen on the news, but she knows her son. She says Ahmed is a good boy and a hard worker, and would never get caught up in anything like that. Ahmed’s mother considers calling the mosque to speak to the Imam, but doesn’t, as she doesn’t want Ahmed to get kicked out of his youth group. She had considered contacting the Imam or school counselor before when Ahmed seemed depressed, but didn’t want to embarrass him.

A few days later Ahmed hears that a threat was made against a local mosque. He is very upset and in a confrontation with his mother states, “They don’t even want us here”. Ahmed’s mother is concerned because she has always felt like a part of the community but is worried that after the attacks in Paris she and her family may be unsafe. She is also worried about Ahmed.

Scene 3: “Run in with Law Enforcement”

Ahmed and Troy drive to the Eastern Pennsylvania State Cup soccer match of the year. While driving on the interstate, a police officer flashes his lights and stops the two friends. “Typical,” Ahmed says to Troy. The police officer walks over to the car. He explains that Ahmed was over the speed limit by 10 mph. The cop asks for his license and registration, goes back to his car, and then returns with a ticket. Ahmed says nothing to the officer and just takes the ticket and his license back. Before he walks away, the cop asks: “hey, your bumper sticker?” “Yea,” responds Ahmed. “What is that a flag of?” the officer inquires. “Palestine,” replies Ahmed.

“Oh, interesting,” the police officer responds and then walks back to his car. Ahmed turns to his friend, “you see, Troy? He stopped me because he thinks I am Palestinian. I am so sick of not being welcomed in this country. My sister is harassed now that she started to wear hijab, I’m tired of it.” Troy is confused because Ahmed was born in the U.S., and has always said he was American, and now he was saying he was Palestinian. However, he brushes off the conversation and the young men continue to Murfreesboro for their soccer game.

Scene 4: “Should I Stay or Should I Go?”

Sami is home from college for the week and gets on Ahmed’s computer to plan his courses for the next semester. While on the computer, Sami notices Ahmed’s search history, which includes tons of YouTube videos, and weird websites with very violent images. His tweets are now much more Syria focused, railing against the fact that no one is doing anything to help, while praising those who have traveled to help. Ahmed has tweeted, “It seems like there is only one group doing anything.” He also sees an extensive search on air travel sites for flights to Europe, as well as searches on Google Maps for maps of Turkey. He notices an open tab of a website with questions regarding what travel documents are needed to travel to Turkey.

Sami questions Ahmed about what he sees on the computer. Ahmed tells Sami that the situation in Syria is terrible, people are suffering, yet no one is doing anything to help the Syrian people. Ahmed said he does not think anyone cares enough about people in Syria. Sami encourages Ahmed to become active in school and in his community on these issues, like Sami. Sami is doing his share to help the Syrian people, by working through the Villanova Muslim Student Association to raise money for refugees. Ahmed tells Sami that it is not enough. He tells Sami he is rethinking the value of school. How can he be in college, while people in Syria are struggling just to survive?

Ahmed tells Sami he is late for school, grabs his bag, and leaves the house. Later that night, Troy texts Sami, asking him if he’s seen Ahmed, since he didn’t show up at soccer practice.

Scene 5: “Where is Ahmed?”

That morning, both Mrs. Jenson and Coach Edwards try to find Ahmed, but he’s absent from school. They talk to the school resource officer, but he hasn’t seen Ahmed either. They find Troy, who said that Ahmed texted that he was sick and staying home.

They contact the family to check on Ahmed, but Ahmed’s mother tells them that she hasn’t seen Ahmed since the morning, and that he wasn’t sick at home. Fatima checks Ahmed’s Facebook page and finds that he has posted “Going to do something that matters.”

Ahmed’s mother is terrified that something may have happened to her son. She calls the Imam, who also hasn’t seen Ahmed. The Imam reassures Ahmed’s mother that Ahmed is a good boy of strong faith and that she should not worry. Ahmed’s father has had enough and calls Philadelphia FBI office. The FBI calls the school and the Imam of Ahmed’s mosque to determine whether Ahmed may have given some indication of where he was going. The school resource officer calls his supervisor at the Philadelphia Police Department to alert them of the FBI’s interest in Ahmed. The Imam is nervous about the FBI’s call, surprised that Ahmed is in trouble, and he calls Ahmed’s mother who is frantic because the police have just shown up at the house.