OFFICE OF PARTNER ENGAGEMENT
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SCHOOLS

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High school students are ideal targets for recruitment by violent extremists seeking support for their radical ideologies, foreign fighter networks, or conducting acts of targeted violence within our borders. High schools must remain vigilant in educating their students about catalysts that drive violent extremism and the potential consequences of embracing extremist beliefs.
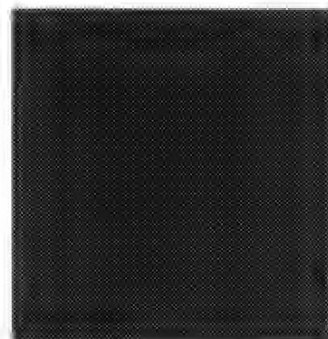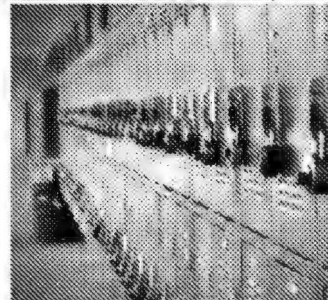
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THE ISSUE

Framing the Threat

Despite efforts to counter violent extremism, the threat continues to evolve within our borders. Extremism and acts of targeted violence continue to impact our local communities and online violent propaganda has permeated social media. Countering these prevailing dynamics requires a fresh approach that focuses on education and enhancing public safety—protecting our citizens from becoming radicalized by identifying the catalysts driving extremism.

Emerging Trends

Youth are embracing many forms of violent extremism; those perpetrated by terrorist organizations or other domestic violent extremist movements, to those maintaining biases towards others due to their race, religion, or sexual orientation. Youth aged 13 – 18 are actively engaged in extremist activities including online communication with known extremists, traveling to conflict zones, conducting recruitment activities, or supporting plotting against U.S. targets. These factors signify the potential for increased risk within our schools and local communities.

> *The Reality:*
>
> *ISIL messaging likely influenced a 17-year old student to create, produce, and disseminate violent extremist messaging via social media to radicalize other youth to violence. The youth connected with violent extremists and like-minded aspirants to distribute ISIL messaging to a network of friends and followers on multiple social media accounts.*

Although violent extremists are predominantly male, there are noted increases in the number of females embracing violent radical ideologies due in part to their roles becoming more defined. Extremist organizations actively seek females to fill operational roles, including carrying out attacks in the Homeland or traveling to fight—in addition to historic supportive activities such as fundraising or traveling to marry foreign fighters.

Impact on Schools

As this threat evolves and more youth embrace extremist ideologies, it places a growing burden on our educational system to provide appropriate services to students who view hatred or targeted violence as acceptable outlets for their grievances. To complicate matters, youth possess inherent risk factors making them susceptible to violent extremist ideologies or possible recruitment. A current body of research on developmental behaviors, which is discussed later in this guide, suggests that a youth's risk factors and stressors, if not properly addressed through personal actions or third-party intervention, can lead to negative outcomes in the form of suicide or violence against others.

Our educators are in a unique position to affect change, impart affirmative messaging, or facilitate intervention activities due to their daily interactions with students. These interactions allow for observing and assessing concerning behaviors and communications—students embracing extremist ideologies and progressing on a trajectory toward violence.

Educating, building skills, and assisting students with developing strong social and emotional well-being are essential components to preventing violent extremism and other types of violent acts. These preventative measures diminish the likelihood of schools becoming potential nodes of radicalization or recruitment hubs for violent extremists.

OUR SOLUTION

This document serves as a guide to inform school personnel about at-risk behaviors and activities that assist students with reducing social and psychological commitment to violence as a method of resolving grievances. This guide can be a powerful tool to help empower schools and local communities who play prominent roles in building resilience and providing influence for youth.

The FBI is committed to assisting schools with understanding the drivers of violent extremism, which are more fully described herein. Drivers of violent extremism can be addressed by:

✓ [illegible]

- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]

These goals encourage sustainability and long-term success by:

- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- ✓ [illegible]

Law enforcement cannot arrest its way out of violent extremism. Countering violent extremism is a shared responsibility between law enforcement, its partners, and their communities. Schools share in this responsibility within their local communities, which builds resiliency against the catalysts driving violent extremist activities. Schools should remain a healthy environment for learning, personal growth, physical and cognitive development, and not be infused with extremist or radical rhetoric. Communities can grow stronger against outside influences targeting our youth by informing about the perils of violent extremism. These collaborative efforts will help youth make informed decisions on the impact violent extremism poses to their lives, families, and communities.

FORMS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The FBI is a leader in preventing Homeland attacks and educating local communities and families about the impact of violent extremism. In recent years, local communities were targeted by myriad types of violent offenders including active shooters, terrorists, gangs, criminal enterprises, human traffickers, and online predators. The motivations behind these acts suggest financial gain, a perceived ideological grievance, or feeding on vulnerable youth. As these threats evolve within our communities, a corresponding impact within our schools also evolves.

The FBI's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program addresses these emerging issues. The CVE mission identifies the catalysts and grievances motivating individuals to advocate violence as a solution to a perceived grievance and facilitates alternative behavior to guide individuals down a less destructive path.

This program focuses on one aspect of violence prevention—that which is advocated for or perpetrated to address ideologically motivated grievances. The guide discusses three major categories of ideologically motivated violence: international terrorism, domestic violent extremism movements, and hate crimes.

International Terrorism

Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs): The U.S. Department of State defines FTOs as organizations that advocate violence or conduct violent activities against U.S. interests domestically and abroad. The FBI protects the Homeland and U.S. interests through investigation and disruption of terrorist operations perpetrated by these FTOs. Many terrorist organizations continue planning or plotting external operations against U.S. interests and our allies.

Since 9/11, the U.S. government's efforts to disrupt and dismantle Al-Qa'ida's terrorist activities made successful gains but the terrorist organization is still a viable and persistent threat. An international terrorist landscape that was once controlled by al-Qa'ida is now dominated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

ISIL's emergence and growth is threatening our borders and youth, who are targets of ISIL's recruitment efforts.

Domestic Violent Extremism

Domestic Violent Extremism Movements: Domestic violent extremism is defined as individuals or groups attempting to advance social or political beliefs through force or violence and in violation of federal law. The FBI recognizes several domestic violent extremism movements, including but not limited to white supremacists, animal rights and eco-terrorists, and anti-government or radical separatist groups. There is no specific crime of domestic terrorism, but

rather the individuals or groups are investigated based on a specific criminal violation. Violations include hate-based activities, weapons violations, or possessing a destructive device.

As some adults embrace domestic violent extremist ideologies, their beliefs can permeate family norms, oftentimes influencing their children. This dynamic fosters biases leading to hatred and intolerance, and drives the need for action.

Hate Crimes

Hate crimes: A hate crime is violence or the threat of violence based on a victim's actual or perceived race, national origin, religion, or other protected classification. For example, the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009* makes it a crime to willfully cause or attempt to cause bodily injury of another based on the target's actual or perceived race, religion, color, national origin, gender, disability or sexual orientation. Other federal hate crime statutes prohibit using force or the threat of force to interfere with employment, housing, access to public accommodations, and other federally protected rights, based on certain protected classifications, or to interfere with religious exercise.

BEHAVIORAL DYNAMICS

B

Numerous behavioral models outline the dynamics and factors leading to violent extremism. Most notably, violent extremism is not a linear progression, but an evolving dynamic situation involving numerous factors, catalysts, mitigators, and motivation variables. Behavioral experts hypothesize that the efforts of those seeking to combat radicalization can be informed by consideration of other models of social behavior and development, including

> *Developmental Model* – promoting a child's moral development through early intervention and the prevention of moral-emotional delay or the occurrence of challenging behaviors. At-at-risk child may exhibit developmental delay or disorders, resulting from low quality supportive environments.

> *Social Identity Theory* – an individual's self-image and status is directly connected to the group to which they belong, resulting in social categorization. A sense of belonging becomes an important factor in pride and self-esteem. The central theme is that group members seek to find negative aspects among other groups, which enhances their self-image, but also might result in prejudice, hatred, and violence toward other groups.

> *Gang Model of Criminal Behavior* – a gang member feels de-individualized and willing to commit violent acts consistent with the gang's behavior and feels less personal responsibility. This separation from one's self results in less accountability and reduced self-awareness, and therefore, manifests in instances of deviant behavior.

➢ *Causation Model of Juvenile Delinquency* – a child is vulnerable to detrimental influences from familial, socioeconomic, educational experiences, or ideological factors, often resulting in criminal deviant behavior. Once exposed to dysfunctional norms, the child begins to exhibit behavior that is contrary to social expectations.

➢ *Risk Analysis of Terrorist Attacks* – an individual is thought to become "at-risk", when three elements are present: threat to core values or beliefs, vulnerability, and consequence of one's actions. These three elements are not independent of each other, but rather all must be present to result in an "at-risk" individual. The sum of these three elements equate to an individual's risk to act on their intentions, subscribing to their motivation, intent, capability, opportunity, and psychological gain.

A main challenge for our schools is understanding the underlying catalyst associated with a student's behavior and determining the form of ideologically motivated extremism the student has embraced.

CATALYSTS THAT DRIVE VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A body of research conducted by mental health practitioners, academics, and social service providers, documented three risk categories—adolescent, environmental, and intrinsic risk factors—that affect youth and their proper cognitive and physical development.

A

According to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services adolescence is marked by the transition from childhood to young adulthood and viewed as one of the most dynamic stages of human development. The characteristics of adolescence include physical, emotional, and intellectual changes, as well as changes in social roles, relationships, and expectations. Adolescence is characterized by redefining and developing relationships with others, family and peers, and consists of not one developmental stage, but three interrelated periods.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERIOD	AGE RANGE
Early Adolescence	10 – 14 years of age
Middle Adolescence	15 – 17 years of age
Late Adolescence	18 – 24 years of age

Each period of adolescence contains inherent expectations that cause an individual's needs to fluctuate dramatically. As needs fluctuate so do the associated risk factors. There are associative risks within schools from guns, gangs, drugs, bullying, sexual harassment, and developmental issues that can result in violence, including suicide or targeting others.

High schools are comprised of students in each adolescent developmental period creating a unique dynamic. High schools might be at greater risk and students may be more susceptible to embracing violent extremist ideologies, joining extremist organizations, or self radicalizing, if

they are unable to withstand the many influential factors and daily stressors in their lives. This dynamic also presents unique challenges for our educators—recognizing and understanding the underlying catalysts to violent extremist behaviors and designing grass roots initiatives to help students resist the temptations and lure of extremist organizations.

The *Virginia Youth Violence Project,* administered by the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, developed a threat assessment model for addressing the underlying catalysts to concerning behaviors. The model emphasizes early attention to problems such as bullying, teasing, or other student conflicts before they escalate into violent behavior. Educators adopt a problem-solving approach vice a punitive zero-tolerance behavior modification approach. This new approach promotes student-staff interactions resulting in a more positive school climate in which students feel treated with fairness and respect.

Violent extremists primarily target adolescents due to developmental vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities make them susceptible to recruitment efforts by groups offering personal support and providing a sense of meaning and belonging. Adolescents, like most individuals, tend to choose group affiliations—social and antisocial—based on the "fit" of the group with their developmental needs. The type of group the individual gravitates towards is largely determined by accessibility, opportunity, and relationships formed over time. According to a Psychiatric Times article entitled, *Why are Young Westerners Drawn to Terrorist Organizations like ISIS,* dated September 2015, researchers believe many adherents drawn to violent extremist organizations are not psychopaths or brainwashed, but rather everyday young people in social transitional stages in their lives. The desire to ascribe meaning to one's life and being part of something much larger than oneself is an overriding wish in human nature. Researchers concluded that embracing violent extremism is due to vulnerabilities in human nature that are exacerbated by aspects of Western societies.

A student may use a relevant group as a standard of reference against which oneself is compared creating aspirational or associative dynamics.

Youth embracing domestic extremist movements (across any extremist ideology) are sometimes raised in an environment where racial, religious, or cultural bias is viewed as acceptable. This results in behaviors influenced by family involvement. Youth growing up in these environments are exposed to extremism at a very young age, which permeates their values, and aids the formulation of radical beliefs. Youth view these forms of extremism as family norms, although they are not acceptable in mainstream society. This dynamic perpetuates the cycle of hatred and intolerance.

A student's personal crisis or underachievement may trigger impulsive or violent acts.

Environmental Risk Factors

According to the *World Health Organization* and other social services providers, adolescents exposure to environmental risk factors affect health and well being, coping skills to withstand life stressors, physical and cognitive development, and their ability to make prudent decisions. These environmental risk factors include nutrition; parents and families; neighborhoods and communities; cultural backgrounds; school districts; access to civic organizations or social services; employment opportunities; availability of proper health care; societal norms and socio-economic status.

One or several of these factors might affect a student's coping ability and drive acceptance of violent extremist ideologies. Oftentimes, students become disillusioned by factors outside of their control thus giving way to resentment, emptiness, loneliness, or feeling lost and abandoned. Cultural differences can intensify these feelings leading to isolation or alienation. A nurturing environment might help a student withstand the threat from violent extremists, while a dysfunctional environment might lead to greater acceptance or adherence to extremist philosophies.

Students act on feelings of isolation, alienation, disenfranchisement, sense of belonging, adventure, glory, or thrill seeking.

Entrance Risk Factors

An article in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, *Building Resilience to Violent Extremism – One Community's Perspective*, dated April 2014, cited a recent cultural assessment conducted on youth, parents, and community service providers in a select American community. This article outlined entrance risk factors that create opportunities for entering into violent extremism and how protective resources could stop, delay, or diminish such opportunities.

An entrance risk factor is defined as an opportunity provided to an individual to allow for access to an activity or initiate a negative behavior outside the purview of friends, family, peers, or associates.

These findings suggest prevention activities should be directed at three factors contributing to potential involvement in violent extremism:

- Unaccountable time and unobserved space;
- Perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and
- The potential for contact with violent extremists.

Each of these entrance risks contribute to a student's initial involvement in or facilitating acceptance for violent ideologies occurring out of their family's view; therefore, without their direct knowledge or consent.

Unaccountable or unobserved space provides a window of opportunity for students engaging in activities contrary to their family norms or desires, thus creating additional vulnerabilities and

opportunities for exposure to violent extremists or violent rhetoric. Students in unobserved space may contact or be contacted by a known violent extremist, who assesses the youth for possible future recruitment. Students' consumption of violent propaganda while in unobserved space may ignite the radicalization and mobilization process. Limiting idle times and unobserved space provides less time to engage in negative activities. Replacing idle times with positive social interactions may reduce activities in unobserved space.

Violent extremists attempt to legitimize their actions as appropriate and necessary to help the cause, or wage war to protect culture, heritage, or beliefs. Students can readily view stories on nightly news broadcasts, internet websites or social media forums, which highlight foreign or national policy. These stories serve as catalysts or promote grievances for extremist organizations. Students assign meaning to these conflicts building resolve and support for the call to action.

To offset its impact, communities and governmental entities should promote open dialogue about underlying issues or craft affirmative messaging to counter this violent rhetoric. Communities and families are credible voices to overcome this daunting challenge and turn youth away from violent trajectories—endorsing positive family ideals and nurturing environments. Parents, older siblings, and educators may be effective in facilitating discussions with adolescents and fostering critical thinking resulting in alternative behaviors. Also, some immigrant families may not be sufficiently present in a youth's life due to work constraints to foster critical thinking. In this scenario, educators and trusted community partners can aid that process to ensure a youth is afforded the appropriate resources.

This cultural assessment concluded that risk and resiliency are properties of the community and its families that can be modified based on community-based or family-focused prevention activities. These efforts empower schools, families, and civic leaders, raising the level of involvement in local resiliency efforts.

Social Media

The inundation of violent extremism in mainstream culture can be aligned in part with technological advances. As new technologies have emerged, so too has the virtual spread of violent extremism.

Violent extremist organizations' ability to transcend geographical boundaries is made possible by the internet and the use of social media. Violent extremists troll for youth in social media or online forums, to spot, assess and recruit those who are vulnerable. This targeting of youth is increasingly putting them "at-risk" as many are tech-savvy and often spend large quantities of time on social media networks. Today's youth strongly depend on social
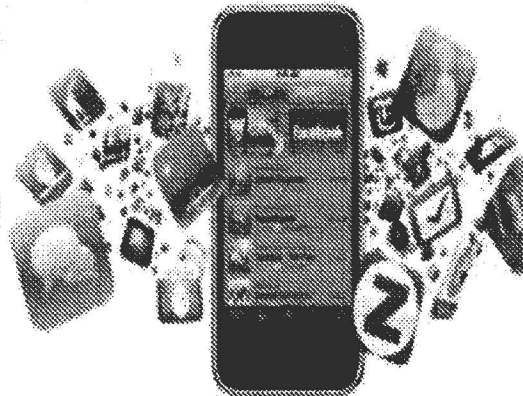
media and seek immediate connections or gratification. This change in inter-personal communications often replaces normal face-to-face interactions. The need for connectivity, acceptance, or sense of belonging can drive their overall needs, online activities, and their social sphere of influence. According to a Psychiatric Times article entitled, *Why are Young Westerners Drawn to Terrorist Organizations like ISIS*, dated September 2015, researchers opine that youth can be easily tempted by the false allure of quick and easy social connections amidst an individualistic society from which they feel alienated.

Physical contact with extremist organizations has diminished over time.

The internet now affords violent extremists a veritable playground for spotting and assessing individuals who are receptive to a specific grievance or ideology and for sharing radical thoughts and beliefs. A growing body of research suggests the internet acts as a catalyst to sustain radicalized beliefs more so than acting as a primary catalyst towards radicalization. Regardless of the mechanism, once a violent extremist makes contact with youth, they begin assessing his or her responsiveness for supporting a violent extremist belief or acting on behalf of its underlying grievance.

> *A 2009 essay by former Al-Qa'ida recruiter and militant cleric, Anwar Aulaqi, labeled the internet as a great medium for spreading the call of Jihad and following the news of the mujahedeen. Aulaqi referred to the internet as WWW Jihad and urged supporters to establish online discussion forums, websites, and email lists to initiate conversations and expand the jihadist communities.*

The internet serves as a primary catalyst to sustain radicalized beliefs.

While online recruitment is one potential vulnerability, social media also provides youth a platform for identifying violent extremists or becoming curious about the subject matter to conduct research—gaining an appreciation or understanding of its principles. Youth may find the content appealing or attractive, especially when they meet others (peers or young adults) online, who are violent extremists and viewed as rational people. These online contacts offer meaning and understanding to the ideological underpinnings that drive acceptance of radical beliefs or support for future actions. These interactions result in bringing new supporters into the fold.

No single element is responsible for making a student vulnerable to violent extremists seeking to impart radical views on them.

Violent extremist recruiters often encourage their followers to transition their means of communication from open social media platforms to encrypted chat rooms—transitioning from overt lines of communication to covert, encrypted chats, facilitating extremism discussions and hindering law enforcement's ability to obtain electronic communications or evidence pursuant to a court order or warrant. Law enforcement defines this phenomena as "Going Dark," limiting an understanding of extremist communications or future intentions. Extremists might possess a working knowledge of hacking or anonymizer capabilities, further complicating the ability to lawfully trace communications.

📌 *Pre-operational planning, communications, or target selection facilitated via social media.*

A threat landscape, once dominated by terrorist organizations and their hierarchical command and control structures, is now characterized by decentralized and distributed nodes of influence. While the volume of violent extremist propaganda may vary depending on the type of network structure, the ease of access to violent extremist propaganda on social media platforms frequented by youths remains a concern. Even limited exposure to violent extremist propaganda may result on a path towards violent extremism.

FIG. 1 — Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks
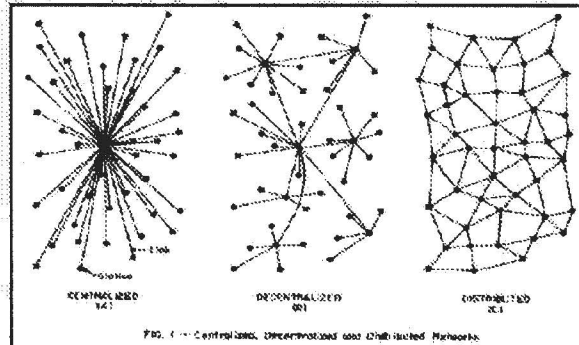
These nodes alter the violent extremist landscape by potentially exposing youth to a heightened number of extremists and quantity of violent propaganda. These horizontal relationships—often with peers or those of the same generation—make them more vulnerable to possible radicalization and recruitment.

📌 *Vast social networks promote agility in recruitment, radicalization, planning, and mobilizing to violence.*

Violent Propaganda

Internet-based Propaganda

The internet provides access to endless streams of violent propaganda inspiring others to
action, glorifying extremist lifestyles, or perpetuating
the spread of hatred and intolerance. The difference
between protected speech and illegal incitement can
be a very fine line. Espousing anti-U.S. sentiment or
extremist rhetoric is not a crime and is protected First
Amendment activity. The issue is not if the individual
voiced his/her support, but rather has advocated
imminent violence in support of an extremist
organization and that violence is likely to occur as a
result. As individuals consume violent propaganda, it
might resonate with them or reinforce their perceived
grievance. This results in a strengthening of beliefs
and aids development of radical views or a willingness to use violence in support of an ideology
or grievance.
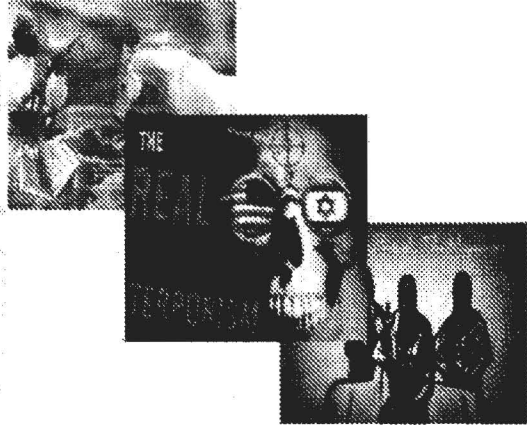
Consumption of violent propaganda is a primary catalyst in self radicalization.

Online Magazines

Several extremist organizations disseminate online magazines intended for their supporters.
According to analysis on Al-Qa'ida's *"Inspire"* magazine
conducted at Georgia State University, the goals of these
online magazines are three-fold: providing a platform to
disseminate information or propaganda to supporters;
motivating supporters to act; and providing the tools to
mobilize.

Online magazines focus on inspiring believers while
simultaneously attacking their enemies through
voluminous and often erroneous violent propaganda.
These magazines emphasize power and geographical
dominance, while decrying western policies and European
cultures. They also serve to perpetuate their grievances while glorifying the actions of martyrs.

These online magazines serve as reference documents outlining possible targets, summarizing protocols for weapons acquisition, and serving as a how-to guide for bomb-making capabilities. The magazines are professionally designed and of high quality. They are disseminated on a massive scale ensuring penetration of their radical messages, and disseminated in multiple languages, allowing them to target a particular population for manipulation or radicalization. This may affect some of the U.S. Diaspora populations, which either don't speak English or prefer their native language, thus impacting multiple generations. Posting these magazines in online forums in English specifically targets western and European audiences. Further, these organizations either have access to individuals from the regions they are targeting with their messaging or are very adept at synthesizing the region's local concerns and manipulating those issues to advocate their position.

They also contain flashy graphics, mimicking those in present day video games. The primary motivators behind these online magazines are drawing attention to their cause and enticing more supporters into the fold—notably youths who view the content as appealing.

Engaged families are the first defense to monitor internet usage, content, or violent propaganda alerting to possible extremist beliefs, contacts, or future intentions.

Gaming

Online Gaming

Online gaming adds yet another level of vulnerability for our youth. We assess that online gaming is sometimes used to communicate, train, or plan terrorist activities. Many youths are very proficient in gaming techniques, online communications, and user forums, leading to interactions with online gaming enthusiasts, who are assessing vulnerable youth for possible recruitment opportunities. These online contacts might be supporters of an extremist organization and actively recruiting for their cause.

A 2003 study conducted by Loyola University-Chicago suggests online gaming promotes social interactions, develops expressive skills, aids strategy formulation, and promotes planning in a simulated environment. The gaming environment facilitates social connections by strangers sharing common interests. Online gaming can also teach rudimentary warfare protocols, rules of engagement, and other military
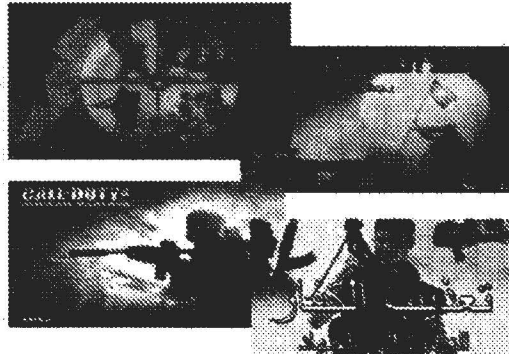
actions, which can be applied to real-life scenarios such as conducting an act of targeted violence.

CONCERNING BEHAVIOR

A Definition

The FBI defines violent extremism as encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social or economic goals. The FBI uses an intelligence-driven process in its daily investigative and analytical activities to conduct baseline collections and assessments. Empirical data is extracted from investigations to assist in the identification of concerning behaviors.

Concerning behavior is defined as behavior that comes to the attention of third parties (bystanders) that suggests a possible future intention, resulting from assessment or action that causes concern. A 2002 Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates, drafted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, suggested acts of targeted violence are rarely impulsive and some may be preventable through the detection of planning behaviors. This concept also applies within the violent extremism context, as students on the pathway to becoming radicalized or mobilizing often exhibit behaviors indicating support for extremist ideologies or highlighting future intentions.

The FBI does not advocate the application of any psychological or demographic "profiles" or check lists of indicators to identify students on a pathway to radicalization. Rather, the FBI endorses taking a holistic approach in considering the totality of concerning behaviors in the appropriate context, assessing the likelihood an individual is progressing on a trajectory to radicalization and/or future violent action in furtherance of an extremist cause.

The 2002 Safe School initiative (SSI), drafted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, shares the same conclusion. The SSI stated the use of profiles is not an effective tool for identifying students who pose a risk for targeted violence or assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for targeted violence. Rather, schools should focus on a student's behaviors and communications to determine if the student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack.

The SSI conclusion also applies within the violent extremism context, as students on the pathway to becoming radicalized often exhibit behaviors or engage in communications, indicating support for extremist ideologies or highlighting future intentions. This progression is paramount to educators who rely on recognition of such concerning behaviors and communications to initiate the disengagement process intended to direct students down a less destructive path.

Violent extremists do not share a "typical" profile. They might be self-radicalized, self-trained, and self-executing.

Radicalization

Radicalization is defined as the process by which individuals come to believe that engagement in or facilitation of nonstate violence to achieve social and political change is necessary and justified. Radicalization enabling factors can be personal, community, group, socio-political, or ideological. Research conducted on youth-related radicalization indicates a vulnerability concerning a distinct identity, meaning, adventure, and belonging in their lives. However, factors driving or inhibiting radicalization change over time and vary individually.

Normal developmental vulnerabilities common to adolescents make some amenable to the influence of violent extremism, a trajectory that through inhibitors such as community engagement, mentoring, therapy, and education can be altered or suppressed.

Enabling factors advance the radicalization process while inhibitors deter progression.

Mobilization

Mobilization is defined as the process when a radicalized individual prepares for violence or engages in violence to reinforce their beliefs. Generally, mobilization to violence is premeditated and consists of acts directed against targets symbolic to their particular cause. The FBI and other experts studying these issues observed similarities in the pre-attack behaviors of lone offenders and those perpetrators from other forms of targeted violence, including terrorists.

The student's acceptance of lethal violence to advance an ideological, political, social, or religious cause.

Mobilizing is a behavioral pre-cursor to an act of targeted violence. The concept of *"targeted violence"* contains unique characteristics that befit most offenders:

> ➢ Targeted violence is the end result after a process of thinking and behavior;
> ➢ Perpetrators do not *"just snap"*; and
> ➢ Successful attacks typically require planning and preparation related to key activities (timing, tactic, target, capability).

A shift in attacks from directed at specific targets to targets of opportunity.

In 2000, the FBI conducted a study of school violence, *The School Shooter*, resulting in the identification of *"leakage"*—a common warning behavior for students advocating violence. Leakage occurs when a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that signal an impending act. These clues emerge as subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums and are conveyed in numerous forms (e.g. stories, diaries, journals, essays, poems, manifestos, letters, songs, drawings, and videos).

Leakage is one of the strongest clues prefacing a violent act.

According to the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, published in July 2015 through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice - Office of Justice Programs, there are many factors impacting school safety. These factors include victimization, teacher injury, bullying, cyber-bullying, fights, weapons, gangs, drugs, and alcohol abuse. These factors resulted in death, suicide, theft, simple assault, property damage, hate crimes, intimidation, and forced sexual offenses. This study highlighted valuable metrics and insight into the current school safety environment:

- Nearly 85% of public schools reported a criminal incident, resulting in an estimated 1.9 million crimes.
- Over 23% of public schools reported that bullying among students occurred on a daily or weekly basis; 22% of students reported being bullied at a public school.
- Nearly 7% of students reported being cyber-bullied during the school year.
- Over 16% of public schools reported gang activity.
- Over 2% of public school reported cult or extremist activities.
- Nearly 7% of students reported being the target of hate-related words and 25% of public schools reported hate-related graffiti.
- Nearly 88% of public schools utilize controlled access, monitoring, locking entrances, or security staff to enhance school safety.

Leakage applies to today's violent extremism environment, particularly through discovery—the uncovering of posted electronic messages, pictures, or videos on social media platforms that are of a violent nature or support violent extremist ideologies. Discovery can also take the form of written or verbal communications that reveal planned travel overseas or a willingness to commit a violent act.

To address leakage, a body of research suggests interactions extremists have with individuals occurring within their own social circles provide clues to their future intentions. Third parties who interact with radicalizing youth are referred to as *Bystanders*—individuals such as family members, peers, authority figures, and strangers whose relationship and level of interaction with an extremist enables them to witness or become aware of activities or behavior that may indicate radicalization or mobilization to violence. A student's interactions with a bystander provide opportunities for observations of suspicious behaviors and actions; or information relevant to future intentions. The key is communicating these observations and information in a timely manner to the proper authorities or a trusted community partner, mitigating a potential threat before an individual mobilizes to violence.

No behaviors depict an individual's willingness to commit a violent act.

The 2000 FBI School Shooter study suggests a student's personality, family, school, and social dynamics must be analyzed by school administrators and counselors to determine how best to respond to concerning behaviors or communications. Recognizing behavior or communications indicative of radicalization leading to violence allows for a community's preemptive action, including intervention or disruption, prior to mobilization.

An intervention takes many forms, including risk mitigation and conflict resolution; or disengagement. An intervention is conducted by experts from multiple disciplines, and if unsuccessful, law enforcement executes a disruption to mitigate the threat to the local community.

OUTCOMES OF EMBRACING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Abuse, Injury or Death

The actions of violent extremists result in multiple outcomes such as abuse, injury, death, or incarceration.

For example, American youth traveled to conflict zones where education is no longer needed but instead received lessons in violent extremism and military training that includes proficiency

with AK-47s. Science, history, art, and sports are considered incompatible with the pursuit of the extremists' cause. The indoctrination of youth is essential to sustaining violent agendas, and requires youth to disavow and disregard their parent's wishes. When allowed to pledge support or conduct horrific acts on behalf of violent extremist organizations, it controls our youth and their beliefs for years to come.

Youth who traveled to conflict zones were subjected to bodily abuse including rape, fingernail removal, electric shock, and beatings, or forced to watch or participate in beheadings or assassinations of entire families. These actions strengthen the violent extremists hold on youth and their developing minds. Females are particularly at risk. They are sold into slavery, forced to become child brides, and commit atrocities on behalf of a violent extremist organization.

If a student succeeds in traveling to a conflict area, chances are great he or she will not return. There are reported instances of individuals experiencing doubt and wishing to return to the U.S., who were assassinated by extremists for desiring to leave.

Victim

A student can perpetrate an act of targeted violence, but can also become a victim. Victims who are targeted include: members of a particular religious faith or racial population; United States government facilities, employees and their families; law enforcement personnel and their families; military personnel and their families; and, individuals whom violent extremists oppose. Additionally, members of the public have been innocent victims, along with individuals who speak out against others based on personally-held beliefs—a retaliatory action.

Families often experience shame and are victimized because their children support extremist ideologies. Religious and social stigmas are attached to children joining criminal or extremist organizations. This results in a family's rejection or ostracization within their local community.

Intervention

Intervention is not a new concept for schools who are already engaged in secondary and tertiary forms of prevention to address behavioral issues. Many schools already possess Crisis Response Teams or Behavioral Assessment and Care Teams in place to develop intervention strategies for students in need of support. Existing teams can expand their scope to include violent extremism-specific concerning behavior. Intervention strategies that address violent extremism-specific concerning behavior should involve those who can most appropriately respond to the student's perceived grievance. The response should leverage the strengths of governments, community organizations, social service agencies, and other professionals to provide what is commonly referred to as an *"Off-Ramp"*.

The goals of intervention are fourfold:

> Facilitate a student's disengagement from a violent trajectory;
> Facilitate a student's disengagement from a violent ideology;
> Design, develop, and implement an *"Off-Ramp"* specific to the student; and
> Assist with the student's social and emotional well-being so they are better-equipped to be productive in the classroom and the community at-large.

The school formulates an intervention plan in conjunction with the community and non-law enforcement entities on the federal or state level. Ideally, an intervention cadre should contain professionals from the local community representing multiple disciplines such as mental health, social workers, law enforcement, school resource officers, faith-based organizations, and/or crisis intervention teams.

A community-led intervention program's focus is disengagement or containment—resulting in violence prevention.

> Disengagement – The process of reducing a student's social and psychological commitment to violence and he/she no longer views violence as an answer to a grievance.

> Containment – Allows for increased engagement between a student and local community members or agencies.

The plan is tailored to the student, allowing the best community resource to address the underlying issues resulting in violent extremist beliefs. The plan or *"Off Ramp"* may involve mental health evaluations, social services, job skills counseling, housing support, religious education, or substance abuse counseling.

The optimal outcome of an intervention is disengaging a student from a violent trajectory.

Interventions should also consider Conflict Resolution Education or Targeted School-based Social Information-Processing Interventions that aim to resolve disputes or direct prevention efforts to students who are at-risk for violence or already exhibiting concerning behaviors. The *National Institute of Justice (NIJ), Office of Justice Programs,* offers myriad evidence-based programs that provide strategies to manage conflict and develop social cognitive competence in school-aged children.

Disruption

If a student continues on a trajectory to violence, the one remaining option is a law enforcement disruption. Violent extremists commit a wide array of criminal violations that occur when those with extremists views act with the intent to encourage, endorse, condone, justify or support violence. Historically, the FBI has investigated a variety of violent extremist actions: racially-motivated violence, religiously-motivated violence, and socially-motivated violence.

These types of violent actions result in disruptions, such as criminal arrests and convictions under federal and state charges, to include:

> Material support for terrorism
> Conspiracy to kill, injure, or maim
> Using a Weapon of Mass Destruction
> Providing financial support
> Providing false statements
> State weapons offenses

The FBI, state, local, or tribal law enforcement partners cannot arrest their way out of the current threat environment; however, the FBI is committed to providing options for youths to help them disengage from violent extremism or a trajectory to violence. Arrests remain a viable option, however, if disengagement activities are not successful.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT AND WHEN?

The disengagement process begins when observations lead to contemplating two key questions: *Who should I tell and When?* The FBI advocates for the empowerment of school districts to affect change when concerning behavior or communications are exhibited by an at-risk student.

The totality of concerning behaviors or communications provide context that aids assessment of an individual's progression on a trajectory to radicalization or future violence.

Many times, fellow students or educators observe behaviors or are privy to another student's communications and commitment to a violent ideology that may be indicative of future intentions. Students likely feel awkward, reluctant, or fearful discussing a fellow student and their beliefs. Educators may be reluctant to notify law enforcement of a student's exhibited behaviors for fear of a law enforcement action. Overcoming these obstacles requires

establishing life lines between students, educators, and local communities, allowing for communication of information without fear of reprisal or becoming a target of fellow students. These relational life lines initiate disengagement while promoting awareness of an emerging threat within the school district. Students and educators are encouraged to convey their concerns and observations to trusted community partners, school resource officers, or a local law enforcement entity.

Based upon investigative data, a very small period of time exists between a youth embracing extremist ideologies to acting in furtherance of the ideology. Therefore, acting decisively is paramount to educators. There are limited opportunities for intervention with at-risk youth and schools must be cognizant of this. Law enforcement refers to the time between radicalization and crossing the threshold to a violent action as *"flash to bang"*.

The time between "flash to bang" can be relatively small.

The implications of communicating concerning behaviors or communications from at-risk youth are significant:

- Aids prevention activities;
- Enhances school safety;
- Aids a student's disengagement from a violent trajectory;
- Fosters open lines of communication within the student body and administrators; and
- Enhances overall school climate.

Several intervention points that impact outcomes are available to schools and communities. Countering a potential negative outcome results when a school communicates observations and actions of an at-risk student to trusted community partners; or intervenes when a student embraces violent ideologies or acts on behalf of an extremist organization. As the graphic on page 24 illustrates, an act of targeted violence results from a spectrum of concerning behaviors, manifesting into several risk categories cited below:

- Disenfranchised – student feeling lost, lonely, hopeless, or abandoned;
- Mental Health – student exhibiting a mental health disorder;
- Group Supporters – student supporting a designated terrorist organization or a domestic extremist movement;
- HVE – Homegrown Violent Extremist inspired by Al-Qa'ida/ISIL;
- Active Shooter – student using violence to address a personal grievance;
- Foreign Traveler – student desiring to travel overseas and join a foreign fighter network;
- Criminal Element – student conducting criminal activities for financial gain.

Violent extremism is not a linear progression but an evolving dynamic situation.

The following community partners/roles facilitate disengagement activities within high schools, including the initiation of interventions:

Community Roles In Disengagement

Schools:

Teacher	Resource Officer	Nurse
Coach	Principal	Administrators
Superintendents	School Boards	Guidance counselors
Grief counselors	Volunteers	

Community:

Community or civic leaders	Faith-based leaders	Mental health
Hospitals	Social Workers	Crisis Intervention
Family Physician	Parents and family members	NGOs
Coaches	Super Users	Extra Curricula Leads

Law Enforcement:

Local Police Department	County Sheriff	State Police
Major City Chief	District Attorney	U.S. Attorney Office
Local FBI Field office	FBI Resident Agency	FBI CVE Program

The FBI encourages schools and their local communities to lead interventions of at-risk youth, unless the subject is mobilizing to violence. Interventions and corresponding action plans may consist of threat assessments, safety plans, progress updates, and reassessments of the student. For a comprehensive intervention for an at-risk youth, schools should consider utilizing school administrators, faculty, coaches, and representatives from state/local law enforcement or school resource officers to staff your intervention teams.

Schools may be reluctant to contact law enforcement on a subject exhibiting concerning behaviors or communications. In these instances, schools should leverage community resources to alert them to these behaviors and communications, commencing the disengagement process.

If a youth's intentions are conducting a violent act, law enforcement (i.e. local/state/tribal/federal) should be notified to initiate disengagement or execute a disruption. Law enforcement will aid threat mitigation activities and frame an overall school and community safety efforts.

It's imperative schools maintain a compendium of local law enforcement, civic leaders, and trusted partners to aid in developing an individualized school support network and action plan. Establishing a support network, if not already established, should be a priority for each school. These networks will facilitate future disengagement activities on students exhibiting at-risk behaviors or communications.

Concerning Behavior – Community Intervention Decision Points
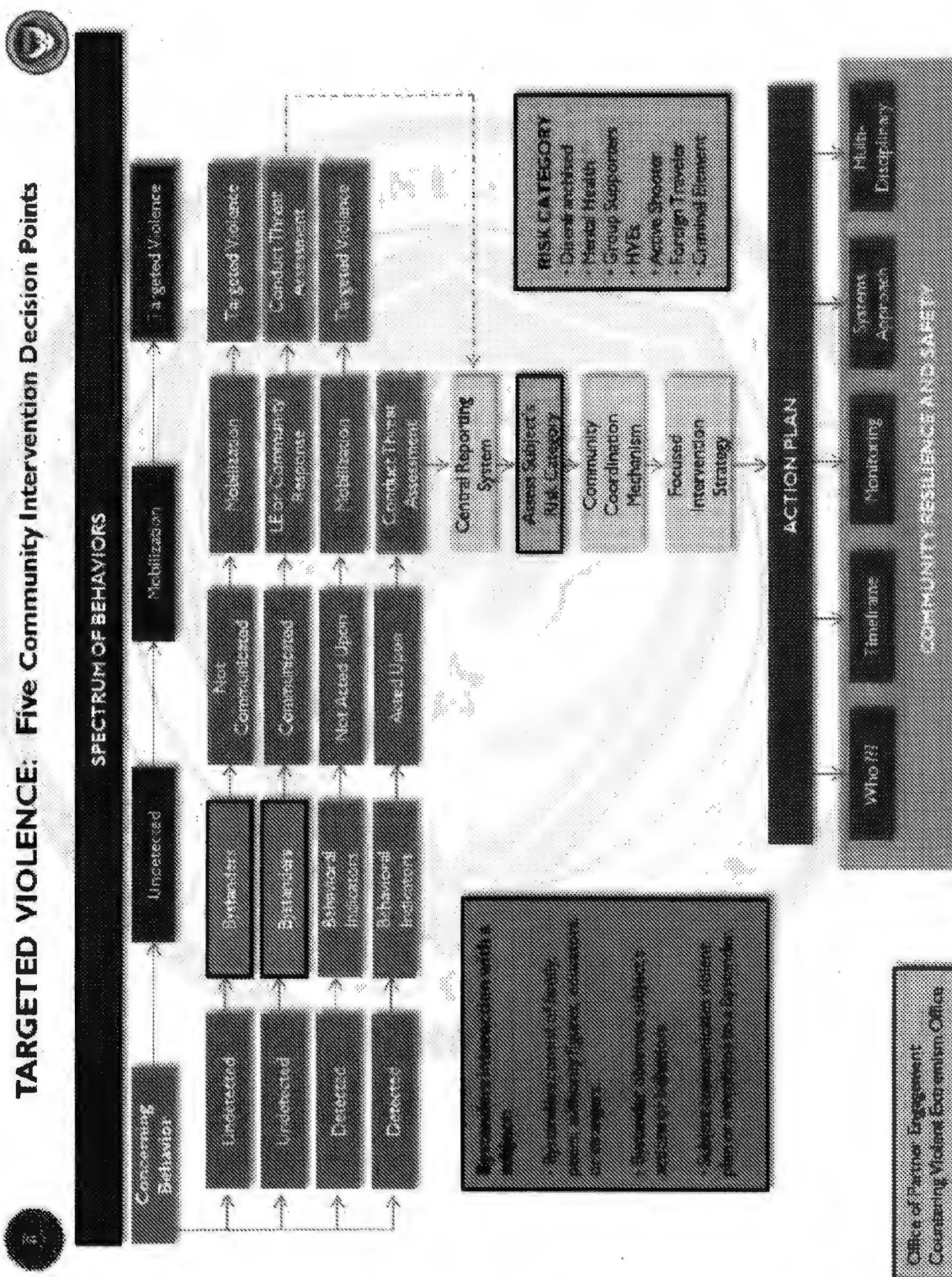
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SCHOOLS

The following list of recommendations assists high schools with establishing collaborative partnerships within their local communities.

❖ **Establish Threat Assessment Teams**

In 2013, the State of Virginia adopted House Bill 2344, mandating the creation of threat assessment teams (TAT) and procedures for intervention with students whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students. Convening a TAT allows for intervention with students exhibiting concerning behaviors driven by personal and ideological beliefs. All states should consider legislative action or similar measures to curb the spread of extremism within their local communities. Legislation consistent with constitutional rights and freedoms should be a foundational component of a TAT.

❖ **Educate on the Role of Intervention**

Local school officials play an integral role in the intervention process, especially for atrisk youth radicalizing or mobilizing to violence. Faculty members are crucial partners in identifying at-risk youth and initiating the disengagement process. A typical intervention is comprised of a multidisciplinary team representing various job roles within the local community, including schools. The FBI is developing training which educates school staff on the intervention process and its role in disengagement.

❖ **Empower School Boards, Administrators, and Faculty**

School administrators and faculty are empowered to initiate disengagement activities or craft affirmative messages that dissuade youth from dangerous paths. These efforts help students resist the temptations of extremist messages and their violent agendas. Schools should embrace diversity in school programming, data-informed work, and affirmative messaging thus eliminating cultural stigmas, intolerance, and prejudice. These factors often promote hatred resulting in targeted violence.

❖ **Enhance Domain awareness**

Communities have access to resources to assist youth in addressing risk factors and overcoming developmental issues and socio-economic adversities. Schools should maintain an inventory of those community partners, mental health practitioners, social services, and state/local/tribal law enforcement to build a localized collaborative network. These collaborative partnerships will aid high schools during a time of need and will eventually staff local intervention programs.

❖ **Strengthen Family Outreach and Engagement**

Families are the first line of defense in keeping youth safe from violent extremism. High schools should develop outreach and engagement programs that educate families about the various forms of violent extremism and ways to identify at-risk youth or concerning behaviors and communications. In fact, many of the most fruitful and positive leads reported to authorities have come from immediate family members or community leaders. It is very important that schools engage the students' families through PTA or other programs as a vital step to preventing the mobilization of possibly radicalized students.

❖ Implement Annual Violent Extremism Awareness Training

High schools can incorporate a new hour block of violent extremism awareness training as part of their core curriculums for grades 9 – 12. To assist these efforts, the [ ] developed a violent extremism awareness website that focuses on grades 9 – 12. The website is housed on http://www.cve.fbi.gov and educates youth on the perils of violent extremism and the effect on their lives, families, and communities. It is an interactive site comprised of film, games, quizzes, and media content.

❖ Establish Student-led Focus Groups to Address Safety Concerns

High schools should promote open communication through student-led focus groups representing the student body, its cultures, and concerns. Focus groups can address overall safety issues from active shooters, gangs, bullying, violent extremism, human trafficking, and police relations. This open communication leads to a better understanding of the risk factors and needs in the lives of some teens. These efforts promote exchanges of ideas aim a solution that enhances overall school safety and empowers students. To aid high schools, NIJ maintains a compendium of evidence-based strategies to combat existing risk factors and promote overall school safety. Strategies can be located at http://www.crimesolutions.gov.

❖ Focus on Afterschool Programming

Most high schools are positioned to address current student development through extensive afterschool programming such as sports or club activities. Student participation in one or more sanctioned activities promotes inclusion, team work, and builds self confidence. Schools can be instrumental in identifying employment opportunities for youth seeking to advance their job skills, allowing less idle time, to engage in other activities.

❖ **Leverage Alumni for Affirmative Messaging**

High school alumni are positive role models for imparting affirmative messaging to the student body. These role models can discuss their concerns while in high school and impart best practices for coping with the daily stressors from high school while promoting cognitive and physical development. Success stories inspire and breed continued success and development within the student body, while helping students to resist the temptations of extremism.

❖ **Develop Relational Life Lines**

High schools should consider establishing a community day through which trusted partners, community and civic leaders, state/local/tribal law enforcement, and faith-based groups, come together to promote unity. A unified approach facilitates relational life lines that assist a student who feels targeted for recruitment or begins to embrace extremist beliefs. A strong community support network promotes resiliency and helps students disengage from extremist activities without fear of reprisal.

❖ **Educate Faculty About Bystanders**

Less than half of the individuals witnessing activities or behaviors that can lead to early intervention report their observations to community members or law enforcement. Encouraging increased reporting and intercession by third parties could improve the success of efforts to curb extremist acts in the U.S.

If your high school has additional questions regarding violent extremism or desires information on other programs to build resiliency within your community, please contact trusted community partners or your local FBI office. To locate the nearest FBI office, please refer to our agency's website: https://www.fbi.gov, clicking on the *Contact Us* tab.

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