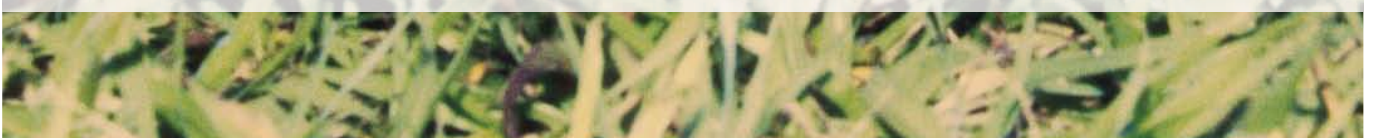# Teaching approaches that **build resilience to extremism** among young people

**Evidence-based learning for decision makers-**
policy makers, school leaders, teachers and
other practitioners, including youth and
community workers

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# What this is
# and who it is for



**This is a summary for decision makers of the key ingredients of teaching approaches and interventions that are effective in building resilience to extremism among young people. It also details support factors in schools and other education settings that maximise the benefits and impact of such interventions.**

# Why it is useful

**The aftermath of recent events have highlighted the need to combat extremisms and develop young people's resilience to potentially harmful ideologies to prevent them from being radicalised.**

- **Extremism** is more than simply stubbornness in one's views or general intolerance to others holding views which are considered by equals, peers and society as being at odds with the core beliefs of the whole;

- **Radicalisation** is the process by which people adopt an extreme position in terms of politics and religion, a violent extremist ideology, or move to violent action in support of their beliefs;

- **Resilience** is 'the ability to bounce back from adversity' (Buzzanell - p10 of report) and describes a process in which people can overcome or resist negative influences that block emotional well-being and/or achievement.

In October 2010 Home Secretary Teresa May spoke of the Government's intention to *'tackle extremism by challenging its bigoted ideology head-on' and ensuring that 'everybody integrates and participates in our national life'*.

It has underlined the continuing key role of **education**, and of **decision makers** – policy makers, school leaders, teachers and other practitioners in particular, in helping to build resilience to extremism among all young people. This should not be confused with specific interventions, delivered by specialists, that are targeted at individual young people already radicalised or at considerable risk of radicalisation. It is wrong to assume that this preventive role is the preserve of **specialists**. Rather it is the responsibility of **all decision makers (policy makers, school leaders, teachers and practitioners)** to help build resilience to extremism among young people.

The challenge for those in education is how to successfully fulfil this responsibility in their everyday practice. This **evidence-based, practical advice presents key ingredients and support factors** that will help those in schools and other education settings to meet this challenge with growing confidence.

# What it draws on

The practical advice draws on a **large-scale, in-depth research study** undertaken by OPM and NFER for DCSF (now DfE). The study aimed to provide a strong evidence base to schools and other education providers to help them choose the most appropriate interventions to build resilience to extremism among young people. The research included a systematic literature review, steering group of experts in the field, and scoping study of effective teaching approaches. It culminated in the selection of **ten case studies of effective interventions** and an **in-depth investigation** of what made them effective in building resilience to extremism among the young people involved in terms of key ingredients and support factors.

The case studies covered three broad categories.

- Programmes or interventions aimed specifically at building resilience to extremism

- Interventions or activities aimed at building resilience more generally or that illustrated one particular 'key ingredient' which it was believed may contribute towards building resilience amongst young people (for example 'helping to see multiple perspectives')

- 'Comparator' case studies – namely case studies aiming to build resilience to extremism in other areas or contexts (such as in Northern Ireland)

# What it suggests

The research identified a number of **key ingredients** of teaching approaches and interventions which can help build resilience to extremism amongst young people and of **support factors** that underpin them. The in-depth case studies highlighted how teaching activities and interventions which incorporate these key ingredients can help build resilience by counteracting the complex factors that can push or pull young people towards extremism. They also underlined how many of the key ingredients can be used to good effect by any skilled teacher, youth and community worker or practitioner.

Many of the key ingredients will feel like general principles of good teaching. Indeed, such principles provide the foundations on which to build resilience through teaching approaches. However, they are not enough by themselves. **Simply teaching well in itself is NOT sufficient to build resilience.**

The key ingredients of teaching approaches and interventions can be clustered under **three main headings:**

1. **Making a connection through good design and a young-person centred approach;**

2. **Facilitating a safe space for dialogue and positive interaction;**

3. **Equipping young people with appropriate capabilities - skills, knowledge, understanding and awareness**

Whatever the setting and resources available, the principles of **good design** and **facilitating safe space** (the first two clusters) are crucial and non-negotiable. Indeed, the case studies show that a well-designed, well-facilitated intervention can go a long way to building resilience. However, these principles need to be reinforced by approaches that equip young people with the **appropriate capabilities** - knowledge, understanding, skills and awareness - including practical tools and techniques to be resilient to extremism (the third cluster).

It is also crucial that decision makers – policy makers, school leaders, teachers and other practitioners - use their professional judgment in adapting, building on and applying these key ingredients to their particular contexts This helps to make them more relevant and effective in increasing young people's resilience to extremism.

# Key Ingredients

The **key ingredients** under each cluster are:

## 1   Making a connection through effective design and a young-person centred approach

Giving careful thought to the nature and focus of the teaching approach or intervention. Interventions which are designed to build resilience to extremism work best where they **actively target** and **involve young people**. This can help to counter some of the push/pull factors into extremism including low self esteem, young people lacking a sense of achievement and not feeling they have a place in society.

A well designed intervention or programme should:

- **be young person centred and young person led**. Having young people as peer educators, which offers a sense of empowerment and can raise self-esteem, and making materials and activities relevant to young people's lives, for example, by reflecting local community language and issues.

- **feel enjoyable to those participating and distinctly different from normal classroom lessons**. By building in: lots of opportunities for discussion and group exercises; the use of an external facilitator rather than a classroom teacher; and, taking an approach that emphasises 'honest realism' – i.e. not shying away from controversial issues.

- **have the learning objectives of the intervention communicated clearly to young people**. How the activity in question fits within the broader learning programme and/or with other agendas.

- **set concrete and tangible goals and outputs for young people to foster a sense of ownership and help to sustain their involvement over time**. For example, by presenting at a conference at the end of a project, or creating an online wiki database or film.

- **produce something 'real' to encourage young people to work together collaboratively, and foster transferable skills**. Young people said they found particularly enjoyable activities that used new technology such as film making, social messaging, online forums and video conferencing.

## Case Study - Digital Disruption

According to project deliverers a key success of the intervention was how it used creative media to produce a final deliverable - namely the scripting and production of a number of short films by young people based on exposing the nature of propaganda. The videos created remain on the internet, where they can be viewed by a wider community of young people. The participants were enthused that by remaining online, their videos could attract the attention of national media.
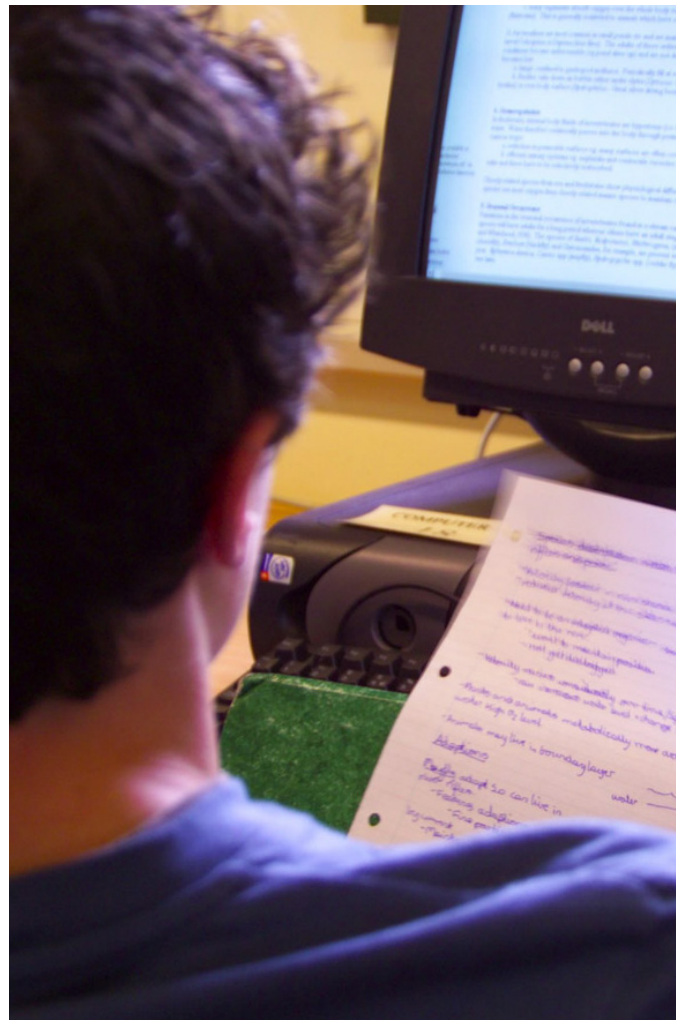
## 2 Facilitating a safe space for dialogue and positive interaction

In order to create a dialogue conducive to building resilience, facilitators - whether teachers or other practitioners - need to create a 'safe space' for all young people in a group to be able to take part in discussion, which may (and in fact often does) cover controversial issues. This is particularly important in the context of work targeted at building resilience to extremism because young people may be reluctant to engage with the issue or have a history of disengagement from formal learning. Creating a 'safe space' can mitigate factors which may push young people towards extremism by providing an opportunity for them to explore grievances and ensure their voice is heard. In order to create a 'safe space' facilitators need to:

- **recognise the key context factors that are crucial for creating a safe space**.
    – the development, preferably with young people, of agreed ground rules which are easy to remember, and which provide a vital route of recourse if things become heated or if unsavoury things are said
    – tools and techniques which enable young people to self-facilitate sensitive discussions themselves, thereby taking ownership of the safe space
    – the ability of facilitators to ensure that sessions are inclusive and supportive, and to be able to deal with a young person saying something unpalatable, incendiary or offensive.

- **have the willingness, confidence and ability to act in such a way that 'connects' with young people**. For example, by allowing honest, trusting and equal relationships to form, 'letting go' of the direction of the discussion, the appropriate use of humour and role-modelling of expected behaviours.

- **respect young people's pre-conceptions**. Otherwise, young people are likely to feel that they are being judged and are thus less likely to constructively engage with resilience-building activities. These pre-conceptions may reflect extremist or otherwise offensive thinking, but rather than ignoring them facilitators should allow the views to be aired and dealt with.

- **possess sufficient knowledge**. For example, in countering stereotypes or mistaken assumptions about a particular religion, or where this is not feasible, know how to access the necessary information.

- **be willing to admit gaps in their own knowledge**. Partial or inaccurate information can undermine participants' trust in facilitators and disengage them from the intervention, potentially exacerbating a situation that may already be sensitive and difficult to manage.

- **take the time to accurately assess the knowledge levels of their students**. Including the extremism of young people's views, so as to be able to tailor the session accordingly.

### Case Study - UK Resilience programme

Participants were equipped with an assertiveness technique to help them challenge others safely (e.g. if they felt the behaviour or an opinion of another person had threatened the safe space). They were encouraged to break the challenge down into four clear steps:

**D – Describe the problem**

**E – Explain how it makes you feel**

**A – Ask them to change their behaviour**

**L – Learn from the experience.**

Young people felt the 'DEAL' framework was a useful way to remember how to challenge others respectfully during the lesson. They also felt if could be transferred to a number of situations outside of the classroom.

# 3 Equipping young people with appropriate capabilities - skills, knowledge, understanding and awareness

Placing an **explicit focus on 'harder' skills, tools and techniques** in teaching approaches and interventions to improve personal resilience and to have real, long-lasting benefits. These include leaving young people better able to cope with life pressures and challenges, using critical thinking skills to appreciate different perspectives and come to their own view, and working well with peers. This entails teaching and learning approaches that:

- **build personal resilience and a positive sense of identity**. Supporting young people to be emotionally resilient to life's pressures and helping them to foster a positive sense of self, for example, through positive thinking, conflict-management techniques and celebrating their multi-faceted identities

- **use simple theoretical frameworks and interactive techniques**. For example, using role-play to explore complex ideas about the control we can exercise over our perceptions, emotions, behaviours, interaction with others and capacity to affect change in our lives.

- **build a 'stretch' element built into the design, and provide opportunities for young people to reflect on their achievement**. The principle that young people should be supported to develop confidence, a sense of self-worth and future aspirations by being encouraged to step outside of their comfort zone.

- **promote critical thinking skills which are crucial for interrogating and challenging extremist ideologies**. Most successfully developed through teaching methods that support inquiry and intellectual inquiry led by the young people themselves.

- **make young people aware that views and experiences other than their own exist in the world**. Giving young people the opportunity to realise that views and experiences other than that of their immediate family, peer network and/or school community also exist.

- **encourage participants to engage with a balanced range of information, and appreciate the value of an evidence-based approach**. Helping to challenge commons myths and helping young people to appreciate the complexity of, for example, global conflicts.

## Case Study - Three Faiths Forum

The **Tools for Trialogue** method used by Three Faiths Forum encouraged young people to think about their identity in terms of a series of lenses through which they see the world, as if they were putting on different pairs of coloured glasses. This simple analogy enabled the young people to consider the different facets of their identity (such as their gender, ethnicity, faith, age, nationality, political orientation, beliefs, etc), and how these aspects of themselves might affect their interpretation of events and issues, and their judgments of other people

# Support factors

The study has also shown that there are three sets of broader support factors, within schools and other education settings, that are important in enabling the key ingredients to be employed in successful teaching approaches and interventions. These factors are:

- **effective partnership working with local agencies**
- **supportive school leaders**
- **good integration with the wider curriculum.**

## Effective partnership working with local agencies

Partnership working is a way to ensure that an intervention's potential impact can be maximised in practice through:

- **creating local understanding** about the intervention, which helps to ensure that it is tailored appropriately to the local circumstances and takes into account any particular local issues or sensitivities.

- **enlisting the help of locally-trusted individuals**. This is especially relevant in terms of recruiting young people for sensitive, targeted interventions, a point raised in the literature review and supported in the case-study research.

- **developing a 'network of support'** to ensure the intervention's sustainability in different places over time.

- **recognising the key principles of effective partnership working**. Including open communication between agencies, which helps to generate shared understanding about the aims, methods and expected outcomes of the intervention; (for longer-term interventions) regular feedback on impact achieved; and encouraging local agencies to take ownership of specific aspects of an intervention.

## Supportive school leaders

Strong support from school leaders is essential in gaining the buy-in of teachers and students and, where appropriate, parents and local community representatives. It means that the intervention is more likely to be well-resourced, and have a strong and clear educational rationale for those who are involved in it, whether they are teachers, facilitators, school leaders or participants. This can best be achieved through

- strong leadership and support that ensures a good level of understanding among the leadership team, allows sufficient time for the principal staff member to plan, organise and run the intervention, and enables the provision of sufficient training for participating staff members.

## Good integration within the curriculum

If an intervention or programme is to be sustainable, it needs to be linked with and anchored in the wider curriculum. An intervention that is integrated into curriculum structures and teachers' working practices increases its potential to have maximum impact for students. It also avoids the necessity of spending time on one-off, isolated discrete interventions that may need to be repeated at further cost in the future. Good curriculum integration involves:

- **saving time and working 'smart'** - an intervention needs to have resonance with a school's ethos if it is to have practical and sustained senior leadership support. Another way to gain leaders' support is through the intervention's capacity to allow teachers to maximise the use of their time through working 'smart' – by achieving a number of goals through one piece of work.

- **maximising impact** - Interventions that are integrated into the ethos and curriculum of the school provide a coherent and sustainable approach that maximises their impact. In particular, the messages conveyed by these interventions need to be clear, consistent and regularly repeated throughout the school's daily working practices if students are to be able to absorb them.