

A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE ON PREVENTING RADICALISATION IN SCHOOLS

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About the European Foundation for Democracy

The **European Foundation for Democracy** is a Brussels and Berlin-based policy institute that has, for more than a decade, been working with different civil society, academic, governmental and other stakeholders on radicalisation prevention initiatives.

We work to address all forms of radicalisation which can lead to violent extremism regardless of the political or religious ideology that may drive this. Specifically, we support initiatives to strengthen resilience of different communities in various countries by empowering credible pro-democratic voices - both individuals and organisations - to prevent radicalisation in our societies. We engage with grassroots organisations, policy experts, government institutions and officials, politicians and the media throughout Europe to collaborate on prevention initiatives with the objective of ensuring that the universal values of the Enlightenment - political pluralism, individual freedoms and democratic government - remain the bedrock of European security and prosperity.

About the Counter Extremism Project

The **Counter Extremism Project** is a non-profit, non-partisan, international policy organisation formed to address the threat from extremist ideologies. It does so by uncovering financial support networks, challenging the narrative of extremists and their online recruitment tactics and working with governments to create effective laws, policies and regulations.

CEP uses its research and analytical expertise to build a global movement against the threat to pluralism, peace and tolerance posed by extremism of all types. In the United States, CEP is based in New York City with a team in Washington, D.C.

This document is an English-language translation of the introductory sections of the handbook for teachers for application in schools and vocational training institutes in Germany and includes the Table of Contents, Summary and Introduction to the guide.

We would like to develop a series of regional/national editions of the handbook for use by practitioners across Europe. We are therefore actively seeking funding and sponsorship opportunities and partners, as well as other support to undertake the on-the-ground research and practical engagement with education practitioners in the different European jurisdictions in order to develop the series.

If you would like to be involved in this initiative, volunteer your services or indeed donate to the project, or would like any additional information, please contact John.Duhig@europeandemocracy.eu

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary

Introduction

Identity and participation

Identity

Challenge 1 | “How should I speak to my students about politically-sensitive issues (such as Islamism, the Arab-Israeli conflict or the war in Syria)?”

Challenge 2 | Conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim students as well as ideological, theological and other disagreements between Muslims

Challenge 3 | A student describes himself/herself as a Muslim (or Turkish, Kurdish ...) rather than as German

Challenge 4 | “My students want a prayer room”

Challenge 5 | “I am unable to identify the mother of my student because she is wearing a niqab”

Participation

Challenge 6 | A female student wears inappropriate clothing for physical education or chemistry lessons

Challenge 7 | “My students stay away from class to attend Friday prayers”

Challenge 8 | During Ramadan, students are unable to concentrate in class, attend excursions or physical education classes

Challenge 9 | “My students do not want to or are prevented from attending sex education classes”

Challenge 10 | A student is not permitted to attend a school trip

Challenge 11 | A student does not want to attend physical education classes or swimming lessons

Intercultural awareness

Recognising ideology, preventing radicalisation

Challenge 12 | Conspiracy theories

Challenge 13 | “I do not accept anything but the Quran”

Challenge 14 | Proselytising to classmates

Challenge 15 | Lauding of terrorist attacks

Challenge 16 | “My students defend an honour killing”

Challenge 17 | Acceptance of female authority

Challenge 18 | “One of my students visits a Salafist mosque”

Challenge 19 | “Are there certain behaviour patterns or signs by means of which can I find out whether a student is radicalising?”

Challenge 20 | How to differentiate between radicalisation and mere practicing of religion?

Challenge 21 | “What should I do when observing tendencies towards radicalisation?”

How to deal with extreme cases

Challenge 22 | Islamist propaganda

Challenge 23 | A student is in the process of being forced into marriage

Challenge 24 | A Salafist approaches students in front of the school

Challenge 25 | “A student does not come to class any longer and I am afraid that he or she will leave the country”

Checklist of indicators of radicalisation

Help in extreme cases plus helpful initiatives and projects in Germany

SUMMARY

In recent years, German schoolteachers have been facing increasing challenges in the classroom. Discussions and potential conflict about political events and/or religious beliefs mingle with patriarchal traditions, which can sometimes dominate school life to an extent, putting the learning potential of students at risk. Discussions on issues such as patriarchal structures and traditions, orthodox Islam, Islamism and Salafism are often emotionally charged, which may overwhelm educators. This is where this handbook comes in. Its aim is to present useful, practical options for action, showing how educators can react to situations that are challenging in professional, legal, or emotional terms, with an appropriately pedagogical approach. The empirical basis for this handbook comprises an analysis of the existing literature and from discussions and meetings with staff at counselling centres in Germany. Critical to this publication, indeed, were the approximately two-dozen background discussions with teachers and social workers, dealing on a daily basis with the situations described above. These interviews highlighted that many currently available guidebooks were often too abstract and counselling centres did not provide sufficient information regarding their services.

This handbook contributes to differentiating and assessing certain types of adolescent behaviour and at the same time encourages educators to deal individually with their students, rather than ignoring obvious problems, procrastinating about addressing these, or even warning about terrorist threats prematurely. We have therefore collected, in discussions with practitioners from all over Germany, the most frequently asked questions that occur repeatedly in everyday school life.

INTRODUCTION

Facing challenges based on different political, social or religious contexts is not a new phenomenon in schools; however, many of these have become ever more important in recent months and years. Students have, for instance, always questioned the authority of the school as an institution—as well as that of the teachers representing the institution. What is comparatively new when working with children and adolescents however, is a religious or ideological component that is both quantitatively and qualitatively increasing. Certain interpretations of religion may aggravate or obstruct teaching and on occasion even pose a threat to social cohesion at school or, indeed, act as a barrier to closer integration of individuals.

This handbook focuses on the topics of patriarchal structures and traditions, orthodox Islam, Islamism and Salafism, which can often intertwine one with the other. Other challenges that may appear within the school environment, e.g. dealing with right-wing extremism, are much better documented and there are many guides and handbooks available, as well as training and qualification opportunities, addressing these issues. Some of these are listed in the Annex.

What are concrete examples? Case studies and options for action

Teachers need to know how to react to situations in which female students do not attend physical education classes, because boys and girls are taught together, or students who miss class to attend Friday prayers. It becomes more difficult however for teachers and social workers on noticing students behaving in a way that may point toward a gradual adoption of radical ideology or indeed, if such a development is already manifesting itself. An example of this might be praising of terrorist attacks. At the same time, statements such as “*The West has always oppressed Muslims*” or “*Everybody mourns for Paris, but no one mourns for Baghdad or Beirut*” may very well be nothing more than expressions of an often difficult search for identity, or a simple provocation from students.

In this respect, distinguishing between patriarchal traditions or religious interpretations, which may cause problems with classmates and teachers at school, and the actual radicalisation of a student, is both a challenge and a necessity. What must be avoided in general is assuming a degree of radicalisation among all students who stand out because of their specific religious understanding and interpretation, as this would place them all under a cloud of general suspicion. In particular, prematurely inviting the local police services to come to your school to deal with a specific situation may have a significant counterproductive

impact. It is important for educators to identify symptoms of possible radicalisation in a student as soon as possible so that they can deal with each case individually. Nobody, after all, wants to read in the press about a student who has left for Syria or Iraq to fight with the so-called Islamic State.

Admittedly, only a few radicalised adolescents actually decide to pursue their political/religious goals through violent means, risking their lives in the pursuit of Islamist ideologies. But very many individuals can support ideas that are incompatible with the values of our free, open and democratic societies. This can pose a significant challenge for individuals to live in peaceful coexistence in Germany and more broadly, of course, on the continent as a whole.

How to distinguish between adolescent provocation and Islamist agitation?

Increasingly, teachers are wondering if there are certain behavioural patterns or some unambiguous signs by which they can determine whether a student is radicalising or not? Could it be that my student is merely regurgitating what family members, TV, or the local mosque community say? Or is it more serious and my student is, in fact, in the process of being radicalised?

Below is a list of FAQs. We will also describe a number of scenarios in detail that have actually occurred in German classrooms, exactly as described or in a similar manner. The FAQs and scenarios will be followed by recommended options for action. These should guide and support educators in improving their interpretation of student behaviour. This handbook contributes to differentiating and assessing certain types of adolescent behaviour while, at the same time, aims to help educators to tackle problems, find support and exploit all possibilities of preventative action to be undertaken in cooperation with the school authorities before engaging with the police and security services. We have compiled the FAQs that occur repeatedly in everyday school life following discussions with educators from all over Germany.

Background information and case study examples should assist in providing educators with the confidence to deal with the issues described below, even when possessed with just a rudimentary knowledge of the students' cultures and religious traditions and beliefs. In this way, students should be supported to develop resistance against Islamist and other propaganda and attempts at radicalisation. At the same time, the handbook will also offer guidance in identifying potentially alarming behavioural patterns at an early stage and

create structures and systems for teachers and the school more generally, to determine the range of possible options available for dealing with specific cases of radicalisation.

Please consult our **checklist** to find out about specific behaviour and behavioural changes that may point towards radicalisation. There is also a section with selected **teaching material** that may help you to deal with politically-sensitive issues, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Syria, Islamism, etc. etc.

In addition, we have compiled an overview of vetted **external institutions and organisations** that are highly experienced with implementing prevention methodologies and de-radicalisation programmes, which you may find useful to contact.

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