



Keeping Children Safe Multi-Agency Guide

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN RETURNING TO THE UK FROM SYRIA

January 2018

Extremism in the UK today can take many different forms, for example right wing extremism, or an animal rights groups that supports violent and criminal action to achieve its aims. At present there are a wide range of extremist groups in the UK that challenge the core values of democracy, liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and diversity.

Agencies face significant challenge in identifying extremist activity that poses a risk to our communities. The Police and security agencies play a crucial role in managing and disrupting the risk presented from extremism together with the role that local authorities have in protecting vulnerable children from the risk of radicalisation. In terms of the threat of radicalisation, we are aware that young people can be exposed to extremist influences or prejudiced views from an early age which emanate from a variety of sources and media, including via the internet. At times children themselves may reflect or display views that may be discriminatory or prejudiced.

At present a significant extremist threat is posed by ISIL / ISIS (Islamic State). They are a terrorist group who are currently attempting to recruit people around the world to either move to Iraq and Syria to join their movement or carry out acts of terrorism in their own countries. Extremists target impressionable young people and their message can have a powerful impact on someone who is young, possibly unsure of their path in life, and who may lack confidence. ISIS recruiters have offered cash to British girls as young as 14 to become brides, they distribute pictures of potential future husbands, footage of their fighters, their victory in battle, the themes of adventure and freedom from parental control in an attempt to appeal them.

It is estimated that, since 2011, over 500 young British Muslims have travelled to Syria, including 70 girls. This is not an issue of faith but one of radicalisation. Additionally, a number of British children either travelled or were taken to Syria by their parents to join terrorist organisations. As the situation in Syria continues, and as Daesh (also known as IS or ISIL) in particular loses territory, many children return to the UK or flee to the UK. Many of these young people have been exposed to terrorism and extremist ideology, and witnessed incidents such as violence, murder, death, beheadings, rape and many other horrors that will almost certainly have had an impact on their mental and emotional development. Some will have undertaken military training, and/or been involved in terrorist activity during their time in Syria.

Police will work closely with local authorities throughout the return and management of minors. In the event that local authorities initiate any court proceedings as a result of police information, they should consult the police at least two weeks before the proceedings and

provide police with copies of court statements. This will help police advise whether additional relevant material exists for disclosure that could support the proceedings.

The Department for Education, in collaboration with the Home Office, has produced [guidance](#) on safeguarding these children and minimising the risk they could potentially pose upon their return. This guidance was developed following group and individual meetings with a number of local authorities. It provides local authorities with advice on how to manage cases involving British children who return to England from Syria and the centrally funded support available to help safeguard them.

Further support is available for agencies from:

[The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust](#) - This is a national programme (funded by the Home Office) that provides expert support on the mental and emotional needs of returning children to help them reintegrate and build a stable relationship in the UK. They have representatives who are able to attend initial safeguarding [strategy meetings](#) to offer advice and share their experiences from safeguarding returning children in other local authority areas, on top of offering appropriate interventions if required and can be contacted on Tel. 0208 938 2226 or by e mail at ReturningFamilies@tavi-port.nhs.uk;

A linked Home Office programme to provide key worker support to help safeguard returning children and provide stability to their family is being developed. Local authorities can obtain more information at Returning.Families@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk;

The Home Office has a Desistance and Disengagement programme aimed at changing the behaviour and beliefs of people who are unsuitable for Channel, given they may be of a higher risk or already radicalised. Accordingly this Desistance and Disengagement programme provides funding for more intensive and bespoke interventions than Channel. More information on the programme can be obtained from the Home Office at D&DProgramme@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk.