

Handbook

Important questions and topics to look at when dealing with children from families affiliated with violent extremism

Start

Disclaimer

This tool is a proof-of-concept. Further implementations are required before regular use within an organization such as information security and privacy requirements, localization needs including translation.

This tool is not deterministic: the outputs are only suggestions and the aim of the tool is to support the own professional judgment of the practitioner by providing inputs from the literature.”

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Introduction

This handbook aims at bringing state-of-the-art knowledge about children growing up in families with links to violent extremism. The inputs were gathered thanks to an extensive literature review and the analysis of approximately 30 interviews and cases presented by several practitioners throughout Europe. The selection of relevant information was completed with the help of practitioners during several co-creation workshops.

This handbook is meant to guide you in your practice, to help you understand the challenges these children and families may face, as well as the key elements to take into account regarding potential interventions.

Next



Three categories

In this handbook a distinction is made between three categories of children: returnees (often affiliated with jihadist groups from conflict zones), domestic jihadists, and right wing extremists. Some questions in this handbook are only relevant for one category of children and not all three of them. In the next step you can select one of the categories.



Returnees



Domestic jihadists



Right wing extremism

Next



Place of birth

Where is the child born and where did the child spend its early years?

Which category is therefore most applicable to the child? Click on one categories to see the questions only relevant for that category.

Returnees

Domestic jihadists

Right wing
extremism



Topic overview

Click on a topic to learn more

**Basic information of
the child**

Family (household)

Parents

**ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)**

Physical development

**Cognitive
development**

**Social-emotional
development**

Global development



Basic information of the child

Subtopics

Birth certificate

Travel history



Returnees

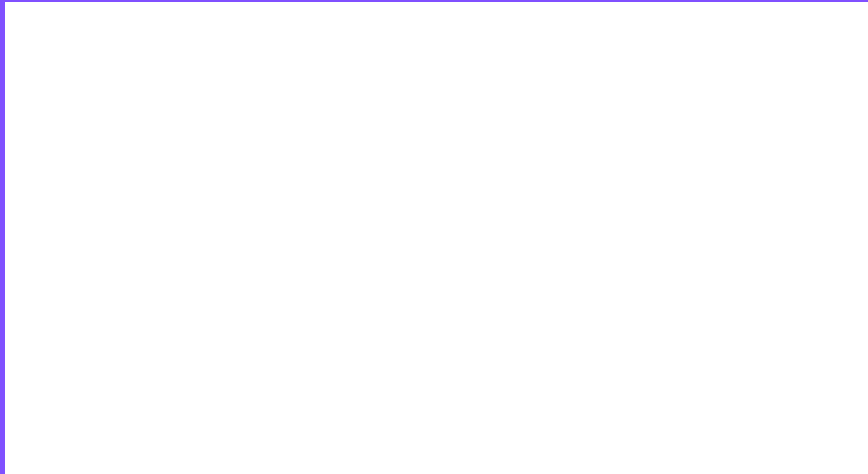
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Basic information of
the child

Birth certificate

Does the child have all relevant civil documentation such as a birth certificate or identification card?



Children who are born abroad, often in ISIS-territory, may lack proper documents such as birth certificates which would confirm their place of birth and provide them legal rights (citizenship). Later this documentation may also open the child up to exposure later in life (e.g., confirming that they may have been born in ISIS-held territory), leading to stigmatization.

In helping these children, sometimes the first step of an intervention is administrative: ensuring children get all the correct legal documentation.

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Returnees

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Basic information of the child

Travel history

What is the travel history of the child?



Children born abroad may face challenges related to their legal status and documentation, which can impact their access to services and rights. They may also face stigmatization or discrimination due to their place of birth, particularly if it is associated with ISIS territory. Additionally, they may have limited exposure to their home culture and language, which can impact their sense of identity and belonging.

Children that were brought to conflict zones or war zones may have experienced trauma and violence firsthand, which can have significant impacts on their mental health and well-being. They may also have been exposed to extremist ideologies or propaganda, which can impact their beliefs and attitudes. Returning to their home countries after living in a conflict zone can also be challenging, as they may struggle with adjusting to a new environment and culture.

Furthermore, they may face stigma or discrimination due to their association with the conflict zone.

Overall, both groups of children face unique challenges that may require specialized support and interventions from front-line practitioners who work with them.



Make a timeline of the travel history.

Next



Family (household)

Subtopics

Family structure

Relationships

Loyalty conflicts



Returnees

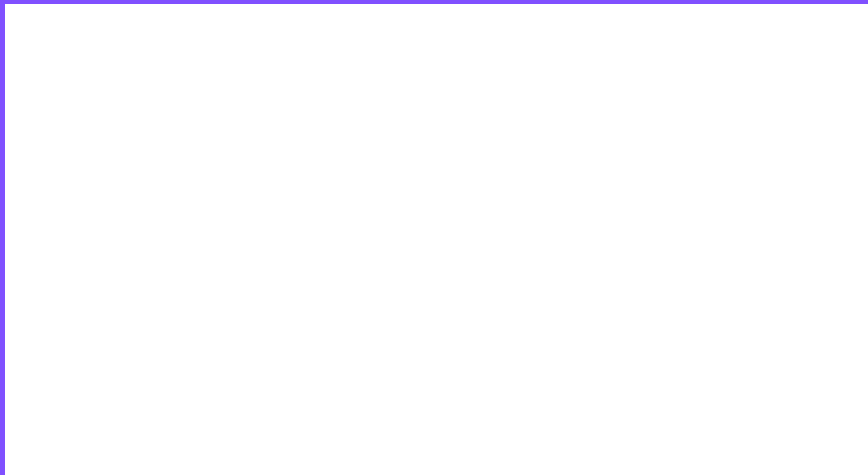
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Family (household)

Family structure

What does the family structure look like?
(Who are the key people for the child?)



Understanding the family structure of a child that lives with a violent extremist family member is important because it can help identify some of the shared and unique features of the family environment and how those may impact the child.

There are shared features between families where violent extremism is present as well as other challenging environments such as families linked with gangs, refugee settings, or cults. Examples include social isolation, ideological indoctrination, discrimination, and limited access to services.

Unique features are distinct to families where violent extremism is present. Examples include exposure to extremist ideology, propaganda, or violence; potential involvement in terrorist activities; and potential exposure to trauma and violence.

Understanding the family structure can help identify potential risks and protective factors for the child. For example, if the child has a close relationship with a family member who is involved in violent extremism, this may increase their risk of exposure to extremist ideology or propaganda. On the other hand, if the child has a strong relationship with a non-violent family member or caregiver, this may serve as a protective factor and help mitigate some of the negative impacts of living in a family environment where violent extremism is present.



Make a genogram or sociogram.

Next



Returns

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Family (household)

Relationships

Can you describe the relationships of the child with the most important family members in their life?



Attachment is vital for a child's well-being, providing a sense of security and trust in their caregiver. Damage to secure attachment can harm a child's emotional and psychological health, potentially leading to various issues. Secure attachment can be impacted by factors such as being removed from parents or caregivers, which may occur if a child is taken to a violent extremist group for training or separated from their parent upon return, or if a parent spends time in prison.

Always consult a competent and skilled professional in the field of attachment issues when these factors are or have been present.

Next



Returnees

Domestic jihadists

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Family (household)

Loyalty conflicts

Are there any signs of the loyalty conflicts for the child between the VE home culture and people outside of this home culture?



Children with family members involved in violent may experience inner conflict and associated conflict of loyalty. This means that they may feel torn between their loyalty to their family and the beliefs or values expressed by their family members who are associated with violent extremism, and those experienced outside the family who may oppose these (e.g. views learned at school, with friends, etc.). This can be challenging for them to navigate.

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Parents

Subtopics

Stressors of parents

Parenting styles

Expression of ideas & beliefs

Ideological indoctrination

Reported child neglect & abuse

Engagement with social workers



Returns

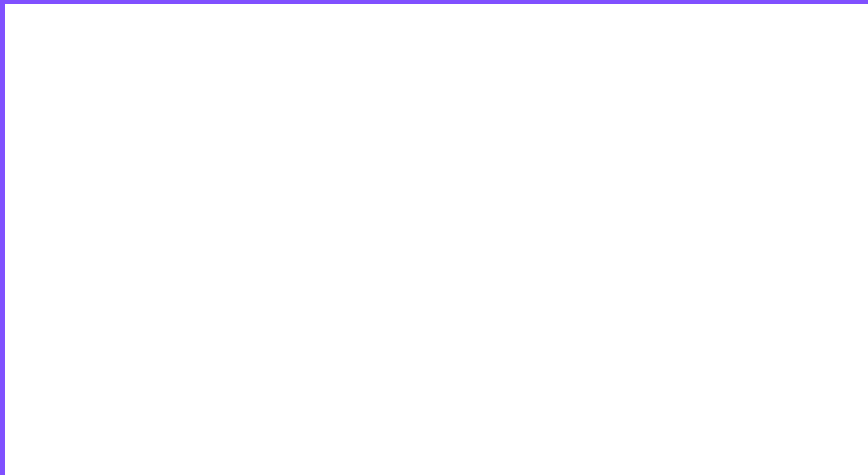
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Stressors of parents

What stressors do parents experience in their daily life (due to past events)?



Persons involved in violent extremism may have experienced stressful or traumatic events while involved in the movement which may continue to impact them today.

Returnee Jihadist families may have difficulty adapting to new communities.

Absence of a parent or family member (due to divorce/separation, death, imprisonment, staying behind in a conflict zone).

Parents may also struggle with their child's inner conflict due to opposing values and customs in their home environment and in school, which can lead to conflicts of loyalty, adjustment issues, fear, and intense stress. These strains can indirectly affect parents as they try to support their child through these challenges.

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Returns

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Parenting styles

Do parents display authoritarian or strict parenting style?



Authoritarian attitudes have been noted in many cases across all ideologies. This authority would be used to influence family members and 'control youth behaviours in ideologically aligned ways'. It can translate to different actions in the daily life: from pressure to maintain certain (gendered) roles, behaviours or beliefs; to punitive actions; to extensive physical trainings.

Next



Returns

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Expression of ideas & beliefs

Do parents express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs which promote or justify violence, and/or themselves conduct violent behaviours?



In families affiliated with violent extremism, there may be internal violence and control over the children. For example, this may occur if children reject or push back against their parents beliefs, or act in ways other than their parents demand. Violent extremist aligned family members may also call for, or justify violence against the 'out group'.



Prevention efforts should focus on assessing behavior rather than religion or ideology, as it is not always possible to assess the level of radicalization a family or individual may have. Furthermore, simply holding undesirable views does not necessarily equate to illegal activity or harm to children.

Next



Returnees

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Ideological indoctrination

Do parents try to ideologically indoctrinate their children ?



Children who are exposed to extremist ideology at a young age may be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life. Additionally, children who witness conflicts between their parents and non-extremist relatives may experience emotional distress and trauma. However, children may also turn away from an ideology if they see negative impacts on family members.

Next



Returnees

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Reported child abuse & neglect

Is there a reported history/ evidence of child abuse/neglect?



Children who experience abuse or neglect may be at increased risk for a range of negative outcomes, including physical and mental health problems, developmental delays, and difficulties with social relationships. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect may also be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life.



It is important to provide support and resources to children who have experienced abuse or neglect, as well as their families, in order to promote healthy development and prevent further harm.

Next



Returnees

Domestic jihadists

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Parents

Engagement with social workers

Are parents/guardians willing to engage with social workers? Or are they evasive/resistant?



Family cooperation with authorities may differ context to context based on levels of trust with authorities. However, building trust with families is important in order to establish effective communication and collaboration. Difficulties can arise when there is a lack of trust between families and professionals, or when there are too many actors involved in working with these families.



Do:

- Establish a form of trust with the child and its parents.
- Provide effective and clear communication.
- Provide mentorship to the child.
- Show empathy, sensitivity and a willingness to learn from the family.



Don't:

- Stigmatize or demonize families or individuals who have been affected by violent extremism.
- Assume that all families who have been affected by violent extremism are the same or have similar experiences.
- Focus solely on security concerns at the expense of other important issues, such as mental health and social support.

Next



ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Subtopics

Experience of violence

Adverse childhood
experiences



Returns

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)

Experience of violence

Has the child experienced violence (as a witness/victim/participant) ?



Children in families impacted by violent extremism can be exposed to violence in various ways. For example, they may be exposed to violence through extremist propaganda or media, which can normalize violent behavior and desensitize them to its effects. Children may also be forced to take part in violence themselves, or they may witness violence within their family or community. In conflict zones, children may be exposed to public violence such as beatings, executions, and stonings as a means of desensitizing them to violence. It is important to note that families may not reveal that children were exposed to violence, which can negatively impact interventions or support they may require.

Boys are more likely to be exposed to violence and may be trained in military service or encouraged to fight. They may also be raised with a focus on strength and defense. Girls, on the other hand, may be expected to take care of the home and be obedient to their father. In some cases, girls may be married off to members of the group. Girls are also more likely to internalize trauma from exposure to violence. However, it is important to note that these gendered experiences are not universal and can vary depending on the specific context and family dynamics involved.



Click here to read more about actions that can be taken.

Next

Experience of violence



Children in families impacted by violent extremism may experience a range of psychological symptoms, including trauma disorders such as dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, traumatic nightmares/games/reliving/grief. Children may also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can include anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. The document also notes that boys and girls may express these symptoms differently, with girls being more likely to internalize their symptoms while boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors.

Be aware of these symptoms and consult a clinically trained professional to offer suitable support or interventions for the child.

Adverse childhood experiences

Are there any other observed/reported adverse childhood experiences?



Children in VE-affiliated families have, in many cases, been recorded to have multiple ACEs present in their family.

They may experience unique challenges related to their exposure to extremist ideology, social isolation, disrupted family relationships due to incarceration or other forms of separation, and conflicts of loyalty between opposing values and customs in their home environment and in school. These factors can contribute to adjustment issues, fear, intense stress, language barriers, learning/attention difficulties, and bullying. It is important to recognize that not all children in VE families will experience these factors in the same way or to the same degree.



Always be aware of any psychological symptoms including trauma disorders such as dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, traumatic nightmares/games/reliving/grief. Be aware of these symptoms and consult a clinically trained professional to offer suitable support or interventions for the child.



Physical development

Subtopics

Physical neglect



Returns

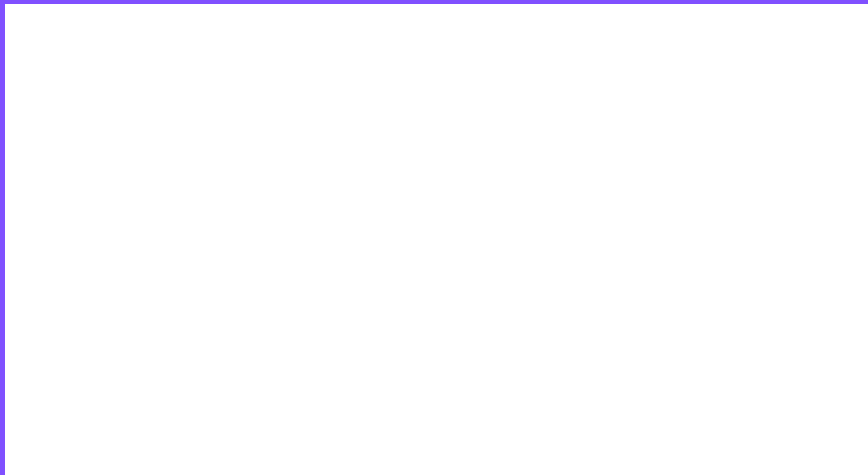
Domestic jihadists

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Physical development

Physical neglect

Are there any documented signs of physical child neglect?



Children may experience malnutrition, poor hygiene, and inadequate healthcare due to living in conflict zones or being displaced from their homes. They may also be exposed to environmental hazards such as landmines or unexploded ordnance. Additionally, children may be forced to engage in physical activity that is not developmentally appropriate or that puts them at risk of injury. For example, boys may be trained in military tactics or forced to participate in combat, while girls may be subjected to early marriage or sexual violence. These factors can contribute to physical health problems and developmental delays. It is important to note that not all children in VE families will experience these factors in the same way or to the same degree.

Next



Cognitive development

Subtopics

Expression of extreme
ideas & beliefs

Language
development



Returnees

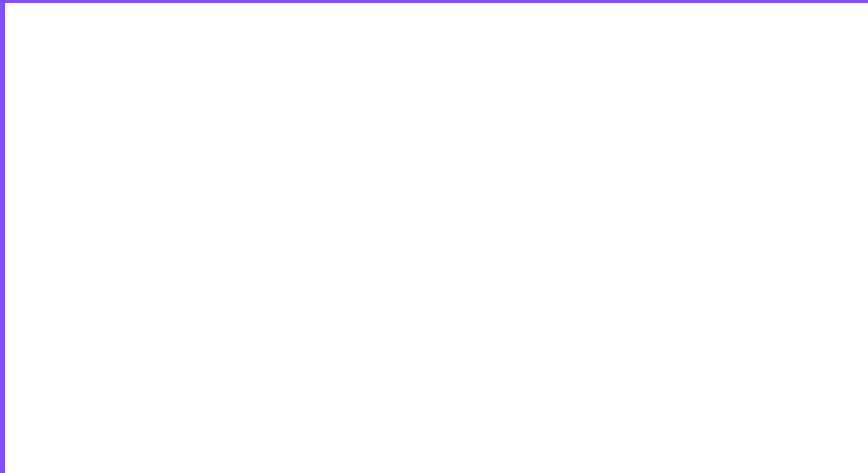
Domestic jihadists

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Cognitive development

Expression of extreme ideas & beliefs

Does the child express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs (particularly those that encourage or justify violence)?



Children exposed to violent extremist propaganda or ideology may develop a narrow worldview, struggle with critical thinking, and exhibit intolerance. Limited education access can hinder cognitive development. Not all children in VE families experience these factors equally.

Children's behavior or statements alone do not indicate radicalization, especially at a young age. However, children of jihadist parents may exhibit signs such as discussing martyrdom, intolerance, and attempting to indoctrinate others. Young children are more likely to mimic behavior without fully understanding it.

Radicalized individuals often display strong in/out-group cognitions, perceiving their group as marginalized or superior. Racist attitudes and authoritarian behaviors are common across ideologies, influencing family members and controlling youth behaviors. In jihadist ideology, values, behaviors, and roles are shaped by the extremist worldview.

Young children may be unaware of their family's extremist history. Desensitization to violence and encouragement to participate in it can lead to increased aggression and social exclusion.



Focus on:

- Critical thinking skills.
- Cognitive development through activities.
- Trauma-focused mental health support.
- Positive parenting for cognitive growth.
- Diverse peer socialization support.

Next



Returnees

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Cognitive
development

Language development

Is the child's (native) language development age appropriate?



Language development that stays behind (eg. mutism, speaking in short sentences, not expressing oneself) can be a symptom of PTSD, of neglect or of developmental issues.

Additionally, it is important to take into account bilingualism.

Next



Social-emotional development

Subtopics

Separation

Panic, anxiety & fear

Forming healthy
relationships



Returnees

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Social-emotional
development

Separation

Was there a period of time when the child was separated from the family or a single family member, and what was the context?



Attachment in children of VE-affiliated parents is often insecure. Especially in returnee children who were or are separated from their parents or abandoned at some point (camp, refugee, fighting, separation from father, death of a parent, incarceration of a parent or the child itself, child placed in foster care).

Abduction of a child may occur in jihadist (traveller) affiliated families. Children may be abducted by one or both parents, and in some cases a sibling.

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Returns

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Social-emotional development

Panic, anxiety & fear

Can the child be alone for a little while, or is their panic and high anxiety, fear of separation?



There are unique attachment issues. For example, from around two years old there is specific attachment to the parents. The attachment has a negative effect when there is malnutrition, maltreatment, or when the parent is mentally ill for example. There are three types of attachment that can be measured on returnees: secure, ambivalent, or unsafe. To measure the types of attachment, the mother needs to be present. If you take the mother out of the picture, attachment becomes very difficult to assess. For example, attachment is very difficult to assess in foster homes, where the mother is of course absent. Children in these environments tend to be very needy and behave younger than their actual age. This shows how attachment combined with trauma is very toxic.

There is a quote which fits this context perfectly: 'A child who has been mistreated by parents actually never stops loving his parents but stops loving him/herself'. We see how attachment issues impact the child's self-esteem, self-worth etc. Children are very dependent on their parents. There is currently no research on specific types of separation, but again, age becomes important in the analysis.

This may be particularly applicable to children who have been separated from a parent (e.g. in prison, in a conflict zone), or if the parent has suffered physically or mentally from their time with a violent extremist group.

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Returnees

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Social-emotional
development

Forming healthy relationships

Can the child form healthy relationships in their own environment and especially with their peers?



Children in violent extremist affiliated families have been noted to develop anxiety, depression, attachment disorders, have difficulty maintaining relationships, low self-esteem, or lacking a sense of belonging and trust.

They have also been noted to develop many of the above, and also: eating disorders, lack of empathy, nervousness, sadness, sleeping disorders, and inhibition of play, amongst other challenges.

On the other hand, a healthy social life for the child is usually a protective factor, whether it is related to the child's social skills and/or community acceptance (coming from the others).

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Global development

Subtopics

Age

Physical & mental
handicaps

Age-appropriate
development



Returns

Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Global development

Age

Is the child a teenager?



Adolescence is a time of significant physical, cognitive, and social development, and exposure to extremist ideology or violence can disrupt this process. Teenagers may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment into extremist groups or radicalization due to their desire for identity formation and belonging. They may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviors or act out in response to trauma or stress. Additionally, teenagers may face challenges related to education and employment opportunities, as well as social stigma and discrimination due to their family background.

Next



Returns

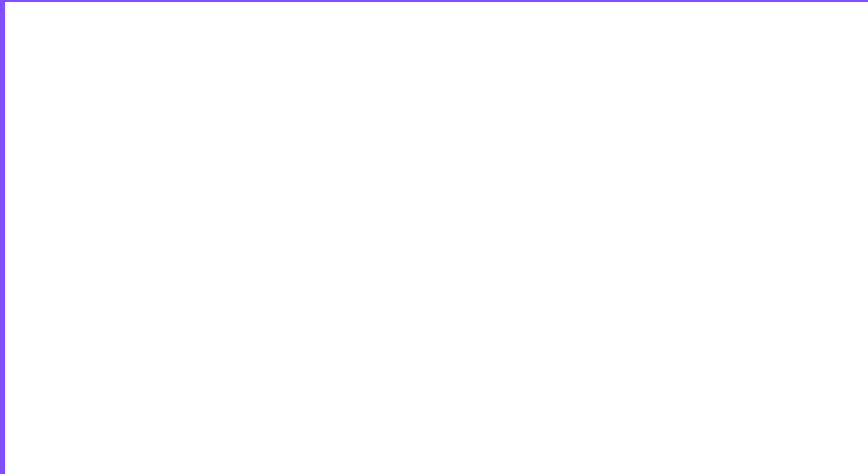
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Global development

Physical & mental handicaps

Does the child suffer from a physical or mental handicap?



Children with a form of neurodiversity are more vulnerable for child abuse and neglect, for other mental problems such as depression, and other reactions to ACEs.

A neurodiversity diagnosis may be mistaken for PTSD (with often similar symptoms).

Children may have missed help and appropriate care in the early years. Additionally, cases have shown discrimination from the parents and the community towards the handicapped child.

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Global development

Age-appropriate development

Does the child show an age-appropriate development level of the following skills and processes: empathy, identity development, self-control (agency)?



The literature has shown that these components of a child's development can be strong protective factors in VE families.

Next



You have completed all questions.



Topic overview

Click on a topic to learn more

**Basic information of
the child**

Family (household)

Parents

**ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)**

Physical development

**Cognitive
development**

**Social-emotional
development**

Global development



Basic information of the child

Subtopics

Travel history



Returns

Domestic jihadists

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Basic information of the child

Travel history

What is the travel history of the child?



Children raised with or by violent extremist-linked family members in Europe might experience frequent relocations, both within cities and across countries, which results in an unstable educational and social environment for them.

In some cases parents may face prosecution due to their travel or activities in conflict zones which may result in prison time. In some cases, family members may have also been killed in these conflict zones.



Make a timeline of the travel history.

Next



Family (household)

Subtopics

Family structure

Relationships

Loyalty conflicts



Returnees

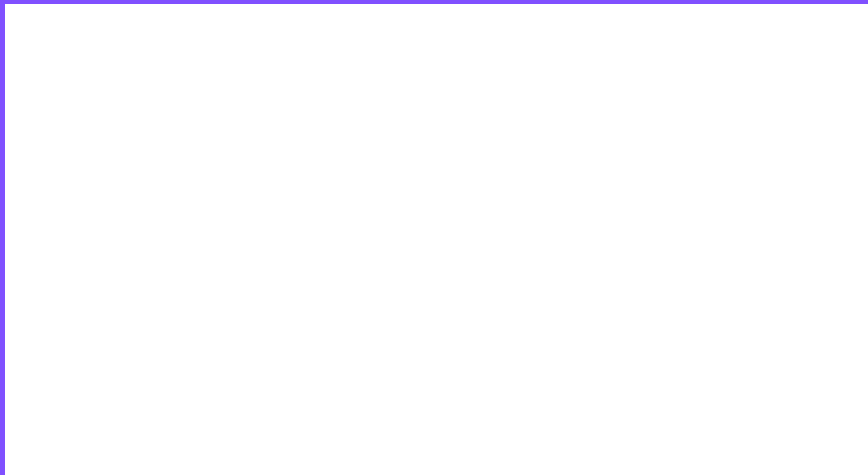
Domestic jihadists

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Family (household)

Family structure

What does the family structure look like?
(Who are the key people for the child?)



Understanding the family structure of a child that lives with a violent extremist family member is important because it can help identify some of the shared and unique features of the family environment and how those may impact the child.

There are shared features between families where violent extremism is present as well as other challenging environments such as families linked with gangs, refugee settings, or cults. Examples include social isolation, ideological indoctrination, discrimination, and limited access to services.

Unique features are distinct to families where violent extremism is present. Examples include exposure to extremist ideology, propaganda, or violence; potential involvement in terrorist activities; and potential exposure to trauma and violence.

Understanding the family structure can help identify potential risks and protective factors for the child. For example, if the child has a close relationship with a family member who is involved in violent extremism, this may increase their risk of exposure to extremist ideology or propaganda. On the other hand, if the child has a strong relationship with a non-violent family member or caregiver, this may serve as a protective factor and help mitigate some of the negative impacts of living in a family environment where violent extremism is present.



Make a genogram or sociogram.

Next

Relationships

Can you describe the relationships of the child with the most important family members in their life?



Attachment is vital for a child's well-being, providing a sense of security and trust in their caregiver. Damage to secure attachment can harm a child's emotional and psychological health, potentially leading to various issues. Secure attachment can be impacted by factors such as being removed from parents or caregivers, which may occur if a child is taken to a violent extremist group for training or separated from their parent upon return, or if a parent spends time in prison.

Always consult a competent and skilled professional in the field of attachment issues when these factors are or have been present.

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Family (household)

Loyalty conflicts

Are there any signs of the loyalty conflicts for the child between the VE home culture and people outside of this home culture?



Children with family members involved in violent may experience inner conflict and associated conflict of loyalty. This means that they may feel torn between their loyalty to their family and the beliefs or values expressed by their family members who are associated with violent extremism, and those experienced outside the family who may oppose these (e.g. views learned at school, with friends, etc.). This can be challenging for them to navigate.

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Parents

Subtopics

Stressors of parents

Parenting styles

Expression of ideas & beliefs

Ideological indoctrination

Reported child neglect & abuse

Engagement with social workers



Returns

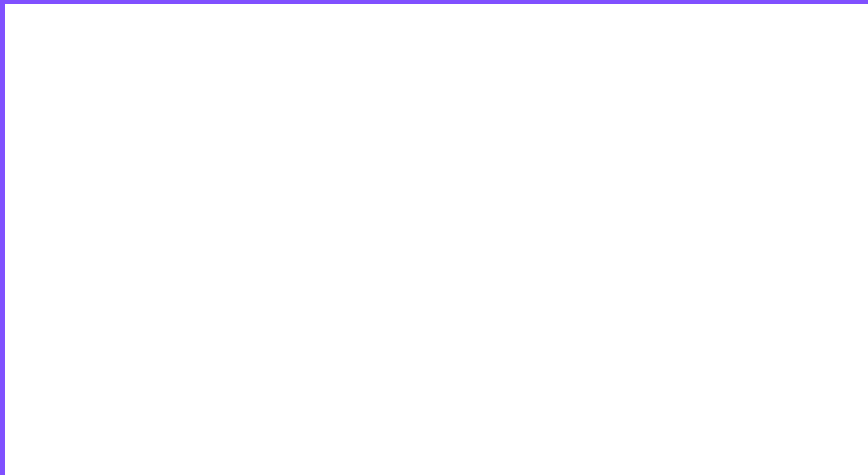
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Stressors of parents

What stressors do parents experience in their daily life (due to past events)?



These families can suffer from social isolation, stigma and discrimination, financial difficulties, legal issues, and fear of reprisals. Parents may also struggle with their child's inner conflict due to opposing values and customs in their home environment and in school, which can lead to conflicts of loyalty, adjustment issues, fear, and intense stress. These strains can indirectly affect parents as they try to support their child through these challenges.

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Returns

Domestic jihadists

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Parents

Parenting styles

Do parents display authoritarian or strict parenting style?



Authoritarian attitudes have been noted in many cases across all ideologies. This authority would be used to influence family members and 'control youth behaviours in ideologically aligned ways'. It can translate to different actions in the daily life: from pressure to maintain certain (gendered) roles, behaviours or beliefs; to punitive actions; to extensive physical trainings.

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Expression of ideas & beliefs

Do parents express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs which promote or justify violence, and/or themselves conduct violent behaviours?



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Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Parents

Ideological indoctrination

Do parents try to ideologically indoctrinate their children ?



Children who are exposed to extremist ideology at a young age may be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life. Additionally, children who witness conflicts between their parents and non-extremist relatives may experience emotional distress and trauma. However, children may also turn away from an ideology if they see negative impacts on family members.

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Returnees

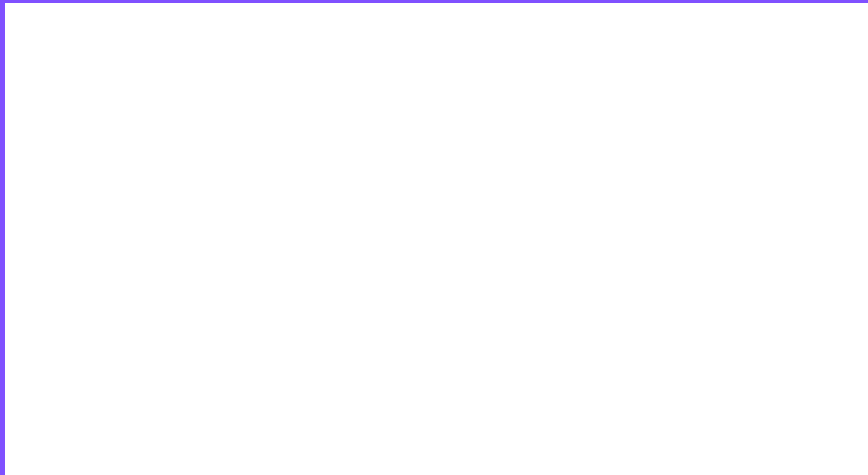
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Parents

Reported child abuse & neglect

Is there a reported history/ evidence of child abuse/neglect?



Children who experience abuse or neglect may be at increased risk for a range of negative outcomes, including physical and mental health problems, developmental delays, and difficulties with social relationships. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect may also be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life.



It is important to provide support and resources to children who have experienced abuse or neglect, as well as their families, in order to promote healthy development and prevent further harm.

Next

Engagement with social workers

Are parents/guardians willing to engage with social workers? Or are they evasive/resistant?



Family cooperation with authorities may differ context to context based on levels of trust with authorities. However, building trust with families is important in order to establish effective communication and collaboration. Difficulties can arise when there is a lack of trust between families and professionals, or when there are too many actors involved in working with these families.



Do:

- Establish a form of trust with the child and its parents.
- Provide effective and clear communication.
- Provide mentorship to the child.
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Don't:

- Stigmatize or demonize families or individuals who have been affected by violent extremism.
- Assume that all families who have been affected by violent extremism are the same or have similar experiences.
- Focus solely on security concerns at the expense of other important issues, such as mental health and social support.



ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

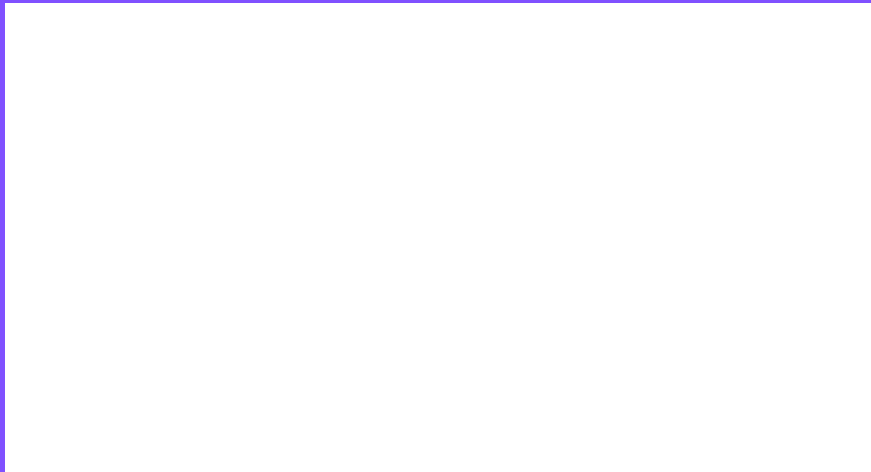
Subtopics

Experience of violence

Adverse childhood
experiences

Experience of violence

Has the child experienced violence (as a witness/victim/participant) ?



Children in families impacted by violent extremism can be exposed to violence in various ways. For example, they may be exposed to violence through extremist propaganda or media, which can normalize violent behavior and desensitize them to its effects. Children may also be forced to take part in violence themselves, or they may witness violence within their family or community. In conflict zones, children may be exposed to public violence such as beatings, executions, and stonings as a means of desensitizing them to violence. It is important to note that families may not reveal that children were exposed to violence, which can negatively impact interventions or support they may require.

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[Click here to read more about actions that can be taken.](#)

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Experience of violence



Children in families impacted by violent extremism may experience a range of psychological symptoms, including trauma disorders such as dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, traumatic nightmares/games/reliving/grief. Children may also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can include anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. The document also notes that boys and girls may express these symptoms differently, with girls being more likely to internalize their symptoms while boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors.

Be aware of these symptoms and consult a clinically trained professional to offer suitable support or interventions for the child.

Adverse childhood experiences

Are there any other observed/reported adverse childhood experiences?



Children in VE-affiliated families have, in many cases, been recorded to have multiple ACEs present in their family.

They may experience unique challenges related to their exposure to extremist ideology, social isolation, disrupted family relationships due to incarceration or other forms of separation, and conflicts of loyalty between opposing values and customs in their home environment and in school. These factors can contribute to adjustment issues, fear, intense stress, language barriers, learning/attention difficulties, and bullying. It is important to recognize that not all children in VE families will experience these factors in the same way or to the same degree.



Always be aware of any psychological symptoms including trauma disorders such as dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, traumatic nightmares/games/reliving/grief. Be aware of these symptoms and consult a clinically trained professional to offer suitable support or interventions for the child.

Next



Physical development

Subtopics

Physical neglect

Physical neglect

Are there any documented signs of physical child neglect?



Children may be forced to engage in physical activity that is not developmentally appropriate or that puts them at risk of injury. For example, boys may be trained in military tactics or forced to participate in combat, while girls may be subjected to early marriage or sexual violence. These factors can contribute to physical health problems and developmental delays. It is important to note that not all children in VE families will experience these factors in the same way or to the same degree.

Next



Cognitive development

Subtopics

Expression of extreme
ideas & beliefs

Language
development



Returns

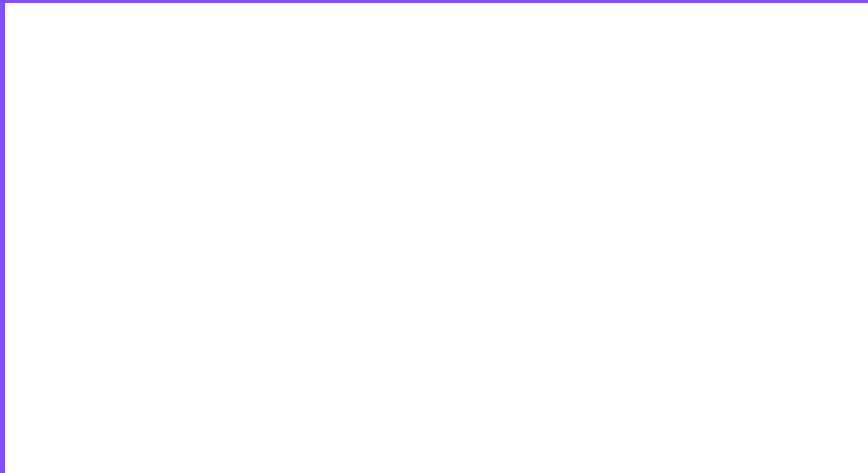
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Cognitive development

Expression of extreme ideas & beliefs

Does the child express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs (particularly those that encourage or justify violence)?



Children exposed to violent extremist propaganda or ideology may develop a narrow worldview, struggle with critical thinking, and exhibit intolerance. Limited education access can hinder cognitive development. Not all children in VE families experience these factors equally.

Children's behavior or statements alone do not indicate radicalization, especially at a young age. However, children of jihadist parents may exhibit signs such as discussing martyrdom, intolerance, and attempting to indoctrinate others. Young children are more likely to mimic behavior without fully understanding it.

Radicalized individuals often display strong in/out-group cognitions, perceiving their group as marginalized or superior. Racist attitudes and authoritarian behaviors are common across ideologies, influencing family members and controlling youth behaviors. In jihadist ideology, values, behaviors, and roles are shaped by the extremist worldview.

Young children may be unaware of their family's extremist history. Desensitization to violence and encouragement to participate in it can lead to increased aggression and social exclusion.



Focus on:

- Critical thinking skills.
- Cognitive development through activities.
- Trauma-focused mental health support.
- Positive parenting for cognitive growth.
- Diverse peer socialization support.

Next



Returnees

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Cognitive
development

Language development

Is the child's (native) language development age appropriate?



Language development that stays behind (eg. mutism, speaking in short sentences, not expressing oneself) can be a symptom of PTSD, of neglect or of developmental issues.

Additionally, it is important to take into account bilingualism.

Next



Social-emotional development

Subtopics

Panic, anxiety & fear

Forming healthy
relationships



Returns

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Social-emotional development

Panic, anxiety & fear

Can the child be alone for a little while, or is their panic and high anxiety, fear of separation?



There are unique attachment issues. For example, from around two years old there is specific attachment to the parents. The attachment has a negative effect when there is malnutrition, maltreatment, or when the parent is mentally ill for example. There are three types of attachment that can be measured on returnees: secure, ambivalent, or unsafe. To measure the types of attachment, the mother needs to be present. If you take the mother out of the picture, attachment becomes very difficult to assess. For example, attachment is very difficult to assess in foster homes, where the mother is of course absent. Children in these environments tend to be very needy and behave younger than their actual age. This shows how attachment combined with trauma is very toxic.

There is a quote which fits this context perfectly: 'A child who has been mistreated by parents actually never stops loving his parents but stops loving him/herself'. We see how attachment issues impact the child's self-esteem, self-worth etc. Children are very dependent on their parents. There is currently no research on specific types of separation, but again, age becomes important in the analysis.

This may be particularly applicable to children who have been separated from a parent (e.g. in prison, in a conflict zone), or if the parent has suffered physically or mentally from their time with a violent extremist group.

Next



Returns

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Social-emotional
development

Forming healthy relationships

Can the child form healthy relationships in their own environment and especially with their peers?



Children in violent extremist affiliated families have been noted to develop anxiety, depression, attachment disorders, have difficulty maintaining relationships, low self-esteem, or lacking a sense of belonging and trust.

They have also been noted to develop many of the above, and also: eating disorders, lack of empathy, nervousness, sadness, sleeping disorders, and inhibition of play, amongst other challenges.

On the other hand, a healthy social life for the child is usually a protective factor, whether it is related to the child's social skills and/or community acceptance (coming from the others).

Next



Global development

Subtopics

Age

Physical & mental
handicaps

Age-appropriate
development



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Global development

Age

Is the child a teenager?



Adolescence is a time of significant physical, cognitive, and social development, and exposure to extremist ideology or violence can disrupt this process. Teenagers may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment into extremist groups or radicalization due to their desire for identity formation and belonging. They may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviors or act out in response to trauma or stress. Additionally, teenagers may face challenges related to education and employment opportunities, as well as social stigma and discrimination due to their family background.

Next

Physical & mental handicaps

Does the child suffer from a physical or mental handicap?



Children with a form of neurodiversity are more vulnerable for child abuse and neglect, for other mental problems such as depression, and other reactions to ACEs.

A neurodiversity diagnosis may be mistaken for PTSD (with often similar symptoms).

Children may have missed help and appropriate care in the early years. Additionally, cases have shown discrimination from the parents and the community towards the handicapped child.

Next



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Global development

Age-appropriate development

Does the child show an age-appropriate development level of the following skills and processes: empathy, identity development, self-control (agency)?



The literature has shown that these components of a child's development can be strong protective factors in VE families.

Next



You have completed all questions.



Topic overview

Click on a topic to learn more

**Basic information of
the child**

Family (household)

Parents

**ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)**

Physical development

**Cognitive
development**

**Social-emotional
development**

Global development



Basic information of the child

Subtopics

Travel history



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Basic information of the child

Travel history

What is the travel history of the child?



Children raised with or by violent extremist-linked family members in Europe might experience frequent relocations, both within cities and across countries, which results in an unstable educational and social environment for them.

In some cases parents may face prosecution due to their travel or activities in conflict zones which may result in prison time. In some cases, family members may have also been killed in these conflict zones.



Make a timeline of the travel history.

Next



Family (household)

Subtopics

Family structure

Relationships

Loyalty conflicts



Returnees

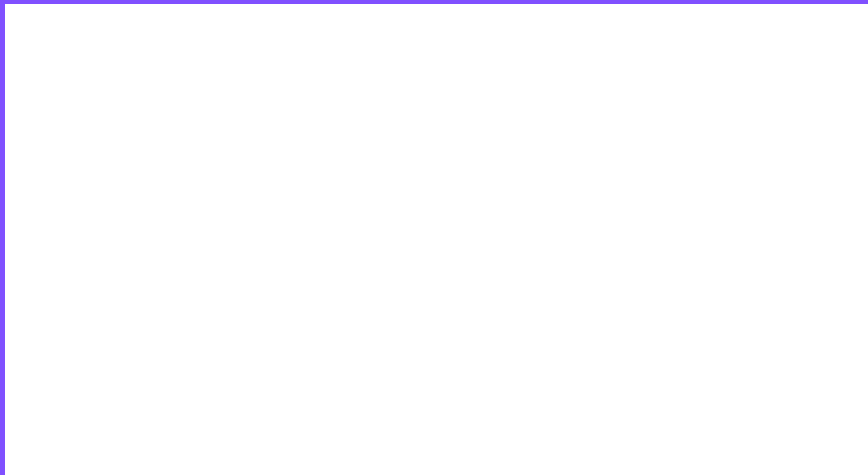
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Family (household)

Family structure

What does the family structure look like?
(Who are the key people for the child?)



Understanding the family structure of a child that lives with a violent extremist family member is important because it can help identify some of the shared and unique features of the family environment and how those may impact the child.

There are shared features between families where violent extremism is present as well as other challenging environments such as families linked with gangs, refugee settings, or cults. Examples include social isolation, ideological indoctrination, discrimination, and limited access to services.

Unique features are distinct to families where violent extremism is present. Examples include exposure to extremist ideology, propaganda, or violence; potential involvement in terrorist activities; and potential exposure to trauma and violence.

Understanding the family structure can help identify potential risks and protective factors for the child. For example, if the child has a close relationship with a family member who is involved in violent extremism, this may increase their risk of exposure to extremist ideology or propaganda. On the other hand, if the child has a strong relationship with a non-violent family member or caregiver, this may serve as a protective factor and help mitigate some of the negative impacts of living in a family environment where violent extremism is present.



Make a genogram or sociogram.

Next



Returns

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Family (household)

Relationships

Can you describe the relationships of the child with the most important family members in their life?



Attachment is vital for a child's well-being, providing a sense of security and trust in their caregiver. Damage to secure attachment can harm a child's emotional and psychological health, potentially leading to various issues. Secure attachment can be impacted by factors such as being removed from parents or caregivers, which may occur if a child is taken to a violent extremist group for training or separated from their parent upon return, or if a parent spends time in prison.

Always consult a competent and skilled professional in the field of attachment issues when these factors are or have been present.

Next

Loyalty conflicts

Are there any signs of the loyalty conflicts for the child between the VE home culture and people outside of this home culture?



Children with family members involved in violent may experience inner conflict and associated conflict of loyalty. This means that they may feel torn between their loyalty to their family and the beliefs or values expressed by their family members who are associated with violent extremism, and those experienced outside the family who may oppose these (e.g. views learned at school, with friends, etc.). This can be challenging for them to navigate.



Parents

Subtopics

Stressors of parents

Parenting styles

Expression of ideas & beliefs

Ideological indoctrination

Reported child neglect & abuse

Engagement with social workers



Returns

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Parents

Stressors of parents

What stressors do parents experience in their daily life (due to past events)?



These families can suffer from social isolation, stigma and discrimination, financial difficulties, legal issues, and fear of reprisals. Parents may also struggle with their child's inner conflict due to opposing values and customs in their home environment and in school, which can lead to conflicts of loyalty, adjustment issues, fear, and intense stress. These strains can indirectly affect parents as they try to support their child through these challenges.

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Returns

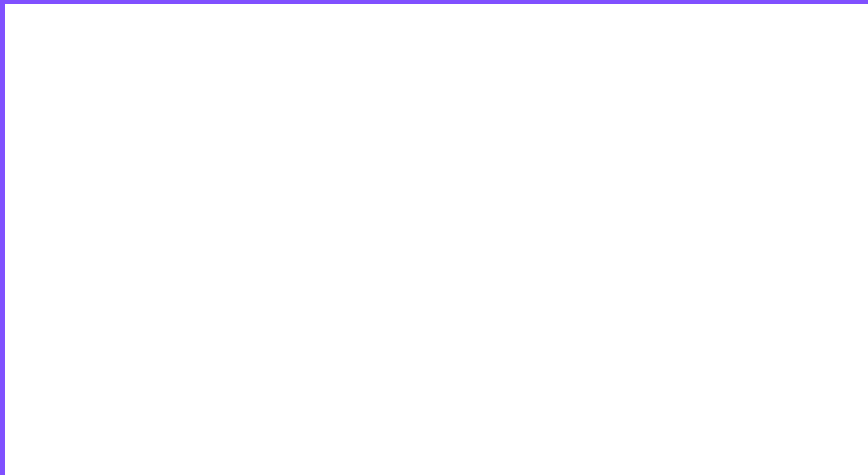
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Parents

Parenting styles

Do parents display authoritarian or strict parenting style?



Strong hierarchical power structures can be reinforced in far-right affiliated families, which may help prime them for authoritarian power structures beyond the family. Some of these behaviours and practices include instilling a superiority complex, use of Aryan names for children and generally controlling behaviour.

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Parents

Expression of ideas & beliefs

Do parents express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs which promote or justify violence, and/or themselves conduct violent behaviours?



In families affiliated with violent extremism, there may be internal violence and control over the children. For example, this may occur if children reject or push back against their parents beliefs, or act in ways other than their parents demand. Violent extremist aligned family members may also call for, or justify violence against the 'out group'.



Prevention efforts should focus on assessing behavior rather than religion or ideology, as it is not always possible to assess the level of radicalization a family or individual may have. Furthermore, simply holding undesirable views does not necessarily equate to illegal activity or harm to children.

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Parents

Ideological indoctrination

Do parents try to ideologically indoctrinate their children ?



Children who are exposed to extremist ideology at a young age may be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life. Additionally, children who witness conflicts between their parents and non-extremist relatives may experience emotional distress and trauma. However, children may also turn away from an ideology if they see negative impacts on family members.

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Returnees

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Parents

Reported child abuse & neglect

Is there a reported history/ evidence of child abuse/neglect?



Children who experience abuse or neglect may be at increased risk for a range of negative outcomes, including physical and mental health problems, developmental delays, and difficulties with social relationships. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect may also be more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism later in life.



It is important to provide support and resources to children who have experienced abuse or neglect, as well as their families, in order to promote healthy development and prevent further harm.

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Parents

Engagement with social workers

Are parents/guardians willing to engage with social workers? Or are they evasive/resistant?



Family cooperation with authorities may differ context to context based on levels of trust with authorities. However, building trust with families is important in order to establish effective communication and collaboration. Difficulties can arise when there is a lack of trust between families and professionals, or when there are too many actors involved in working with these families.



Do:

- Establish a form of trust with the child and its parents.
- Provide effective and clear communication.
- Provide mentorship to the child.
- Show empathy, sensitivity and a willingness to learn from the family.



Don't:

- Stigmatize or demonize families or individuals who have been affected by violent extremism.
- Assume that all families who have been affected by violent extremism are the same or have similar experiences.
- Focus solely on security concerns at the expense of other important issues, such as mental health and social support.

Next



ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Subtopics

Experience of violence

Adverse childhood
experiences



Returns

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ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)

Experience of violence

Has the child experienced violence (as a witness/victim/participant) ?



Children in families impacted by violent extremism can be exposed to violence in various ways. For example, they may be exposed to violence through extremist propaganda or media, which can normalize violent behavior and desensitize them to its effects. Children may also be forced to take part in violence themselves, or they may witness violence within their family or community. In conflict zones, children may be exposed to public violence such as beatings, executions, and stonings as a means of desensitizing them to violence. It is important to note that families may not reveal that children were exposed to violence, which can negatively impact interventions or support they may require.

Boys are more likely to be exposed to violence and may be trained in military service or encouraged to fight. They may also be raised with a focus on strength and defense. Girls, on the other hand, may be expected to take care of the home and be obedient to their father. In some cases, girls may be married off to members of the group. Girls are also more likely to internalize trauma from exposure to violence. However, it is important to note that these gendered experiences are not universal and can vary depending on the specific context and family dynamics involved.



Click here to read more about actions that can be taken.

Next

Experience of violence



Children in families impacted by violent extremism may experience a range of psychological symptoms, including trauma disorders such as dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, traumatic nightmares/games/reliving/grief. Children may also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can include anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. The document also notes that boys and girls may express these symptoms differently, with girls being more likely to internalize their symptoms while boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors.

Be aware of these symptoms and consult a clinically trained professional to offer suitable support or interventions for the child.

[Next](#)



Returns

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ACE (Adverse
Childhood
Experiences)

Adverse childhood experiences

Are there any other observed/reported adverse childhood experiences?



Children in VE-affiliated families have, in many cases, been recorded to have multiple ACEs present in their family.

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Physical development

Subtopics

Physical neglect



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Physical development

Physical neglect

Are there any documented signs of physical child neglect?



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Next



Cognitive development

Subtopics

Expression of extreme
ideas & beliefs

Language
development



Returns

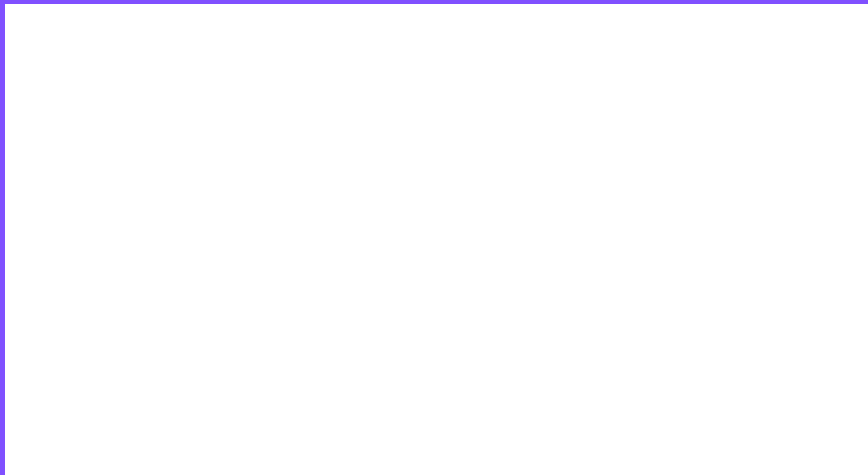
Domestic jihadists

Right wing extremism

Cognitive development

Expression of extreme ideas & beliefs

Does the child express and/or display extreme ideas and/or beliefs (particularly those that encourage or justify violence)?



Children exposed to extremist propaganda may develop a narrow worldview, struggle with critical thinking, and exhibit intolerance. Limited access to education or exposure to an extremist-focused curriculum can hinder cognitive development. It's important to remember that not all children in violent extremist families will experience these factors in the same way.

Children's behavior or statements alone do not indicate radicalization, especially in young age. In far-right families, children may speak of being under attack from outgroups (e.g., immigrants, minority groups) and express a need for weapon training.

Radicalized individuals often have strong in-group/out-group perceptions, viewing their group as marginalized or superior. They may hold racist attitudes and display prejudice and hatred towards specific ethnic, religious, or sexual minority groups.

Authoritarian attitudes are common across ideologies and are used to control family members, particularly shaping youth behaviors.

Children in far-right affiliated families may mimic xenophobic behaviors, embrace national superiority, anti-democratic beliefs, accept violence, and discriminate against non-white individuals or those with disabilities. They may also be taught to perceive the world as dangerous, leading to a fearful outlook.



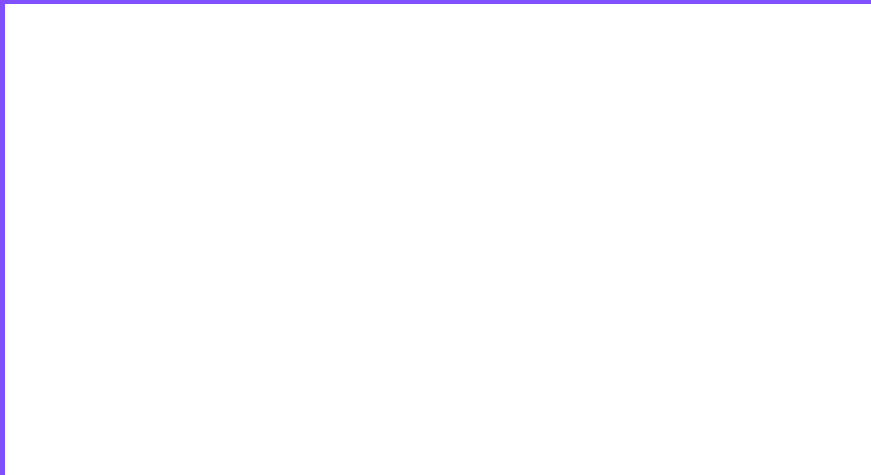
Focus on:

- Critical thinking skills.
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Next

Language development

Is the child's (native) language development age appropriate?



Language development that stays behind (eg. mutism, speaking in short sentences, not expressing oneself) can be a symptom of PTSD, of neglect or of developmental issues.

Additionally, it is important to take into account bilingualism.

Next



Social-emotional development

Subtopics

Panic, anxiety & fear

Forming healthy
relationships



Returns

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Right wing extremism

Social-emotional development

Panic, anxiety & fear

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Forming healthy relationships

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Global development

Subtopics

Age

Physical & mental
handicaps

Age-appropriate
development



Returnees

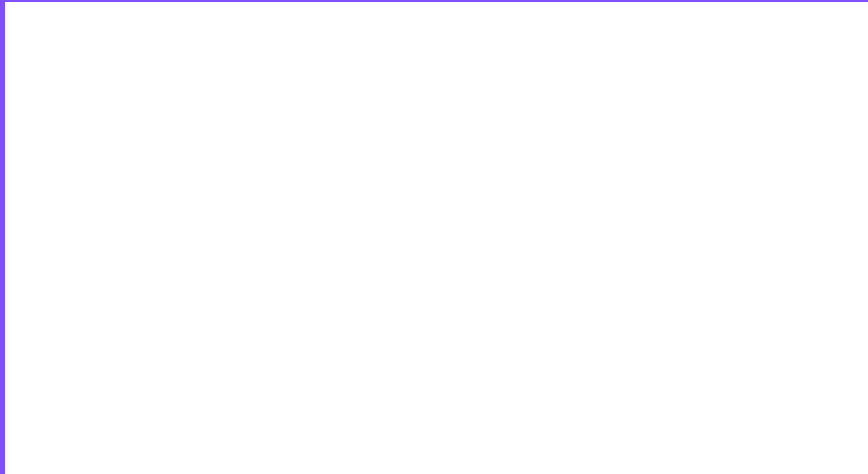
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Global development

Age

Is the child a teenager?



Adolescence is a time of significant physical, cognitive, and social development, and exposure to extremist ideology or violence can disrupt this process. Teenagers may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment into extremist groups or radicalization due to their desire for identity formation and belonging. They may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviors or act out in response to trauma or stress. Additionally, teenagers may face challenges related to education and employment opportunities, as well as social stigma and discrimination due to their family background.

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Returns

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Global development

Physical & mental handicaps

Does the child suffer from a physical or mental handicap?



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Returnees

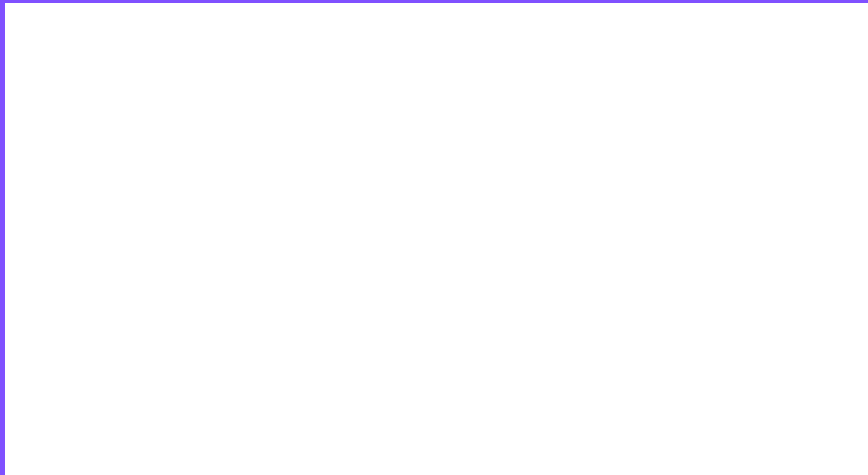
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Global development

Age-appropriate development

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Next



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