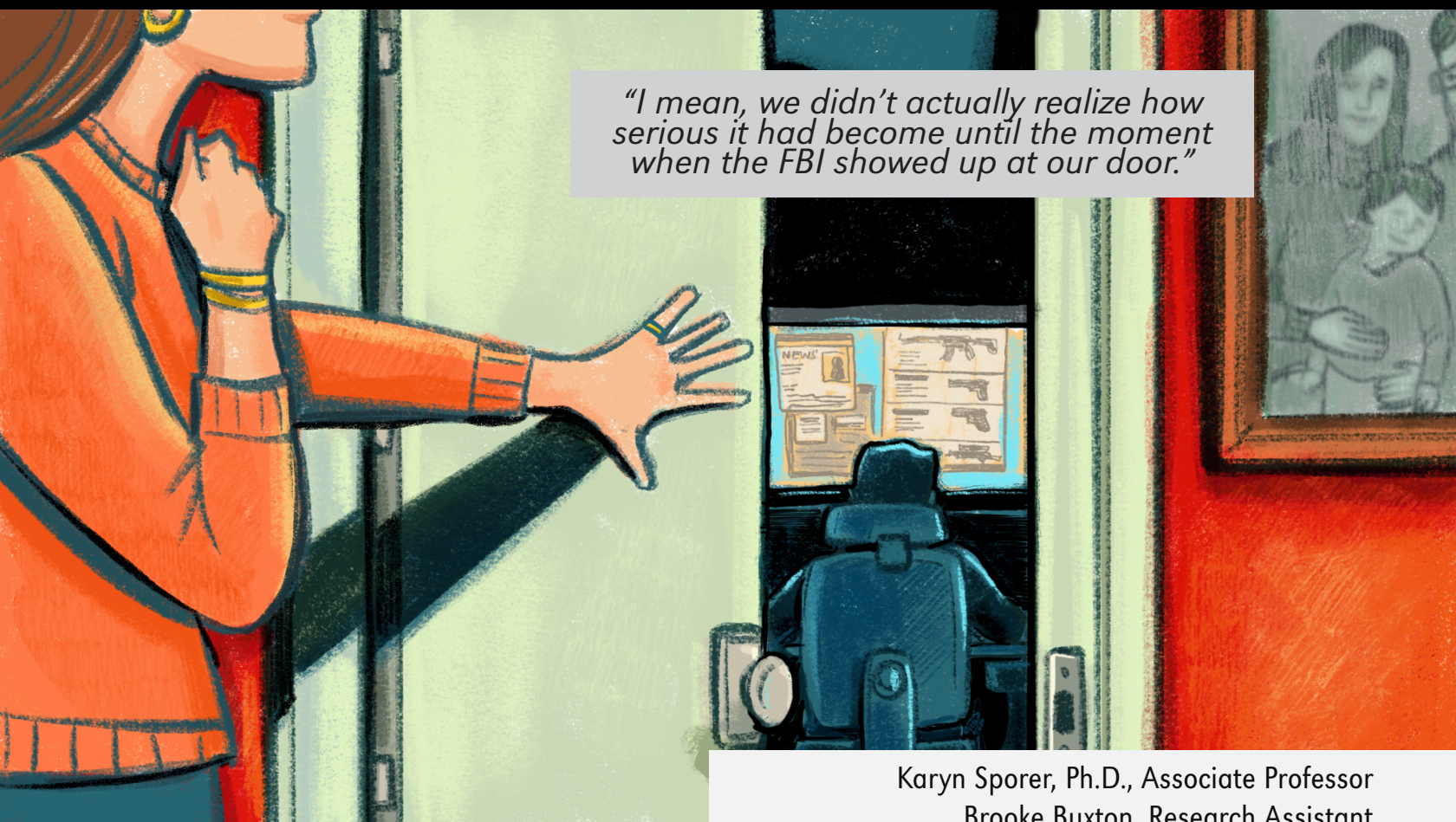


Recognizing and Getting Help for Extremist Behavior: A Guide for Families



"I mean, we didn't actually realize how serious it had become until the moment when the FBI showed up at our door."

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Intimate bystanders – such as family members, siblings, spouses, and parents – of individuals at risk of radicalizing to extremism play an important role in preventing targeted violence and terrorist attacks. Families can help with deradicalization and disengagement or involve practitioners when concerned for the safety of their loved one and others.

In a study that relied on first-hand, in-depth interviews with family members of violent extremists, researchers identified observed risk and protective factors. Overall, researchers observed that early experiences with environmental adversity (childhood physical/sexual/emotional abuse, parental incarceration, parental abandonment, household substance abuse, mental health problems, etc.) and conduct problems during adolescence (academic failure, truancy, gang involvement, police interactions/arrest history, problems with alcohol, theft, etc.) were the most prevalent risk factors reported by families.

This document provides an overview of those indicators and information on how to report concerning behavior should you suspect someone you know to be radicalizing.



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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE THE VIEWS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

Family members of violent extremists are more likely to be the first to observe radicalization and mobilization to violence. In-depth interviews with family members of violent extremists allowed NCITE researchers at the University of Maine to examine how relatives perceived the radicalization of their loved one, how they interpreted their observations, and how they responded.

"I didn't know what extremism was [...] If you asked me any of those questions before I would have said, 'huh?'"



Researchers interviewed 23 family members of 16 violent extremists using open-ended questions to help form unstructured narrative data that described different facets of their lives. These extremists were involved in ideologies such as Salafi-Jihadism, racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (RMVE), and anarchist violent extremism.

OBSERVED CHANGES IDENTIFIED BY FAMILY MEMBERS

Interviews with family members revealed that while the specific combination of indicators may differ, most observed some mix of changes to behavior, ideology, and emotions. For instance, some examples of behavioral changes may include an increased consumption of literature, videos, or propaganda that promote extremism, or changes to their appearance or legal name.

Some family members observed ideological changes such as attending extremist events or attempts to radicalize friends and family. Finally, changes in emotions may include an increase in hostility, anger, negative emotions, or secrecy.

"It's like, wait a minute. You're changing your clothes. You're changing your name. You're changing everything about you."



NATIONAL RESOURCES

Life After Hate

[Life After Hate](#) is an organization dedicated to helping individuals leave hate groups and violent extremism behind. It provides support, counseling, and resources for individuals seeking to disengage from such ideologies.

Parents for Peace

[Parents for Peace](#) is a non-governmental public health nonprofit empowering families, friends, and communities to prevent radicalization, violence, and extremism. It provides guidance and early intervention, raises public awareness, and advocates for effective policy solutions.

Evolve Program

[Evolve](#) is a confidential, no-cost program to support those moving away from extremist ideologies, conspiracy theories, grievances, or groups that justify violence.

Crisis Text Line

[Crisis Text Line](#) provides free, 24/7, text-based mental health support and crisis intervention by empowering trained volunteers to support people in their moments of need.

OTHER RESOURCES

[Facilitating Suspicious Activity Reporting at the Community Level](#) by NCITE and University of Maine

[Online Violence Prevention Model](#) by Moonshot

[A Parent and Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization](#) by PERIL and SPLC

"We were so concerned when we couldn't find him that weekend. We thought maybe he's trying to travel overseas. We called the FBI [...] and said, 'We're so concerned. Can he not be allowed to fly?'"

