



FROM CONCERN TO CONVERSATION

A guide for parents and legal guardians on what to do when your child expresses hate and extreme views



Part of

Navigera hat (Navigating hate)

A toolkit for local authorities to address, take action and support children's right to grow up free from hate



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This guide is aimed at parents, legal guardians and other relatives of children and young people – whether you simply have concerns, or those concerns appear to be justified.

For several years, Save the Children Sweden has been dealing with parents and legal guardians of children who have expressed hate and extreme views. In this context, we can see just how important family members are in halting the process when a child or young person starts adopting extreme ideas. We also meet many parents and guardians who feel alone and genuinely concerned about their children.

For some parents and legal guardians, it can be hard to know what to do about these concerns.

“Is my concern justified?”

“Am I overreacting?”

We always encourage parents and legal guardians to take their concerns seriously, to start asking their child questions, and to seek help from other adults to get a clearer picture of the situation. When these concerns are confirmed, they are often accompanied by feelings of shame, guilt and powerlessness.

“How could this happen?” “Our family just doesn’t think that way about others!”

These are common feelings, but they are so hard to carry on your own.

You play an important part in your child’s life. You know your child best, and your being there and caring means a great deal. Research also shows that support from family members in particular plays a significant role in a child’s sense of security and development.

The resources we share here aim to support and inspire you in talking to your child and seeking help when needed, and ultimately to strengthen your bond with your child.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

As a parent or legal guardian, trying to support your child can feel both rewarding and overwhelming, all at the same time. Every situation is unique, and it often takes time for a difficult situation to turn around. The important thing at times like this is that there are trusted adults around the child.

We know that parents and legal guardians within the same family often experience this kind of situation differently. It's common to wonder how serious the concern is, or to hope that it will go away on its own. "Is it really that serious?" "It'll probably just pass." In some families, there isn't always someone to share your concerns with. Sometimes, another adult close to the child may influence them in a way that raises questions. Whatever your particular situation may be, you're not alone in feeling unsure.

To help you cope, it's important that you yourself also receive support. Perhaps there is someone in your family, among your friends or in your child's circle of friends, that you can turn to? There are also professional support services and support groups for families that can be a valuable addition.

ON HATE, VIOLENCE AND EXTREMISM IN CHILDREN'S DAILY LIFE

Extremism is when a person or group holds views that are far removed from what is considered acceptable in a democratic society. Often, this involves rejecting democratic values, such as freedom of expression and the equal worth of all people. Something that all forms of extremism have in common is that they often paint a simplified picture of the world – with clearly defined enemies and the belief that violence could be a solution

Violent extremism involves encouraging threats, hatred and violence in order to influence others and bring about change in society

Children can encounter extremist content and even violent extremism in a variety of ways. It can happen, for instance, when a child is gaming or using social media. It can also happen at school or among friends.

There are growing concerns nowadays about a fascination with violence, whereby children and young people are exposed to increasingly graphic violence online – which can open the door to other violence-glorifying environments, and groups where violence is seen as normal and is encouraged.

These days, it is harder than ever for parents, legal guardians and other adults to keep up with the digital spaces where children and young people socialise and find inspiration. It is difficult for adults and children alike to know what is true online, while at the same time extremist groups have vast opportunities to spread their messages. These developments have shaped the digital

world that children connect with today. Groups that glorify violence are easily accessible online and actively seek out young people on their platforms – often luring them with a sense of community and belonging, which is highly attractive to many.

Online, extremism is spread through channels such as social media, forums, videos, games and gaming-related platforms. Children and young people can come across extremist content without actively looking for it – for example, through algorithms that recommend such content, or by someone contacting them directly.

As a parent or legal guardian, you don't need to know everything about what happens online. But showing an interest in your child's online life and in what they're thinking about can help you understand them better. For example, you might ask your child some questions about their gaming. How does this game work? Who do you play with?

Find out more about **Digitala trygghetsvärdar** – the Digital Safety Ambassadors initiative run by Save the Children Sweden, in partnership with **Länsförsäkringar**, to create safer digital gaming environments for children.



Further reading on what children encounter online can be found in the **Sverok** report **Extremister i gamingvärlden** ('Extremists in the Gaming World', currently available in Swedish only).



Scan to access the **Sverok** report.



ON INTERACTION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Worrying about your child is a sign that you care and are involved. As a parent or legal guardian, you don't need to have all the answers – the most important thing is that you're there. Supportive interaction is about being present, listening and showing that you care, even when the conversation is difficult.

Children need adults who stick around, listen without judging, and treat them with warmth and respect. Of course this is not always easy, especially if your child expresses views that frighten or provoke you.



Not all conversations are easy, but it's important that they happen.

When a child shows an interest in a violence-glorifying movement or its ideas and the adults feel concerned, it is common for the adults to react very strongly and distance themselves from the child's views. When this happens, the risk is that the child may feel questioned, attacked or made to feel stupid.

The early stages of being in a new environment – whether it's a new hobby or a violent extremist movement – can feel very intense and appealing to a child. Things often feel positive and meaningful, making it harder to highlight the less positive aspects. If the conversation with the child focuses only on the negative, it can be difficult to get the message across, and sometimes it can even have the opposite effect. One result could be that the child focuses more on the new movement, defending and reinforcing their views.

Also try to show some curiosity, even if it feels hard. Have the courage to look for and ask about the positive aspects. What do you get out of this new context? How does it make you feel? What does it feel like to be with these new friends?



The more you build a secure and trusting relationship with your child, the easier it will be to set boundaries, challenge them and talk about difficult issues. A good relationship is where you can do both things: show warmth, yet also be clear.

Remember that your conversations don't have to be perfect. The important thing is that it happens. By listening, asking the right amount of questions, and showing curiosity and interest, you create a safe space and clearly signal to your child that they can come to you, whatever the topic.

A few things to bear in mind:

- Choose a good time – when you're calm, relaxed and have plenty of time.
- Be curious – ask open-ended questions and listen without interrupting.
- Show that you're there – sometimes the conversation will be brief, sometimes longer.
- End with positive warmth – as an adult, it's your responsibility to ensure a safe, positive close.

It's important to keep showing an interest and doing fun things together, even if the situation still feels tough. It is precisely at times like these that the child needs reassurance that the relationship remains. Reassurance and clarity can go hand in hand.

It's not about finding a solution to everything, but about showing that you're still there.



Building relationships – you don't need to be an expert. Just being there goes a long way.

A strong relationship isn't built on a single conversation, but on many small moments of being there and listening. Curiosity is a valuable tool: by asking questions and showing an interest, you build trust, even when you don't have all the answers. It's okay to not always know what to say. The important thing is to not give up.

Even though it can be challenging at times, every time you show patience, ask a question or simply make yourself available, you're laying the foundations for a safe, trusting relationship. Having the courage to stay engaged in the conversation, even when it's tough, makes a huge difference to a child.





ON FACTORS THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN

When a child express hate, it's a sign that something is up in their lives. Having said that, there are things that help children to feel good and cope with the challenges of everyday life. This might include, for example, secure relationships, feeling included, receiving support from adults, getting exercise, eating well, sleeping well and having time to rest and recuperate. It could also be a hobby or an activity that the child finds enjoyable and meaningful. The important thing is that the child themselves enjoys it and feels good doing it.

When a child has these factors in their lives, it's generally easier for them to grow, develop and cope with life's difficulties.

As a parent or legal guardian, you do a great deal for your child simply by being there and helping them find the things that bring them comfort and joy in everyday life. You probably do a lot of that already. Here are some more examples of what might help your child in areas that are important to them:

You make a difference!

Talking about difficult things is often easier when there's a solid, trusting relationship in place. If you find yourselves often coming into conflict, it might be helpful to start by strengthening your relationship. Why not do something fun together and take a break from whatever it is that's causing concern at the moment? And even though it might feel hard to talk right now, there's plenty you can do that will mean a lot to your child. For example, you can encourage things your child enjoys and finds beneficial, such as hobbies or spending time with friends. Showing appreciation in everyday life – when your child helps out around the house, for example – can also make a big difference.



Build on what works! It's important to feel appreciated.

It's also important to show your appreciation for the time you get to spend with your child: "It was great to watch a movie with you." Most of us tend to focus more on what isn't working than on what we're happy with. Might this apply to you too? If your child doesn't want to talk, ask again at another time. Avoid threatening or punishing a child when they speak their truth. This might cause them to shut down, and stop talking about or sharing difficult and challenging experiences with adults.

The network around your child

Growing up in a safe environment has a major impact on a child's well-being. A child feels safe and secure when they feel seen, heard and supported by various adults in their lives. When a child develops a stable, responsive relationship with an adult, it can help them to feel trust, boost their self-esteem and support them in their daily life. In addition to you as a parent or legal guardian, other adults can also play an important part in your child's life, especially at times when you yourself may be finding things difficult.

The importance of school

A positive school experience has a significant impact on a child's well-being. When a child feels happy, is treated with respect and is given opportunities to succeed, school provides a sense of security and support in their everyday life. The way the school works to promote positive interactions and resolve problems is also key to a child's well-being and development.

Leisure activities

If your child has a keen interest that might sometimes concern you – for instance related to violence or weapons – it may be helpful to encourage other interests that your child enjoys, at the same time. Sometimes it works better to add something new and positive, rather than trying to eliminate something straight away. It's important that leisure activities take place in a safe environment, with adults who are present and responsible. As a parent or legal guardian, you can also make a big difference by getting involved in a way that suits you – perhaps by watching sports matches with them, asking how their training went, or helping your child get to their activity venues.

Leisure activities can have many positive benefits: they provide structure and a sense of community, improve self-esteem, and they're also an opportunity for your child to grow and express themselves.

Involving your child

Children often feel better when they have a say in matters that affect their everyday lives. It helps them to feel heard, able to express their views, and have those views taken seriously, for example. Focusing on your child's particular interests and experiences – at school, at home and in their free time – makes it easier to understand what matters most to them. When your child is given the chance to share their own thoughts and suggestions, it strengthens your relationship, as well as your child's sense of influence and involvement.



A protective factor can therefore lead to many positive outcomes: a secure parent-child relationship can, in turn, contribute to good health, strong academic performance and an improved ability to manage one's emotions.



Remember!

- **You don't need to always get it 'right'; you just need to be there.** Your child doesn't need a flawless adult, they need someone who cares. Showing that you want to understand and be there for them goes a long way, even if you don't always know what to say.
- **A few words are better than none at all.** You don't need to wait for the 'perfect time'. A question asked in the car or at bedtime, or an invitation to join you for coffee – these simple things can lead to more than you might think.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions; listen more than you speak.** Be curious without being pushy. Open-ended questions and listening calmly and attentively show that you care, even when the answers are brief or evasive.
- **Acknowledge feelings, even if you don't agree.** Your child needs to know that it's okay to have their feelings. That feelings aren't dangerous. Acknowledge their feelings and their experience, even if you see things differently.
- **Remind yourself: you're doing something important, you're trying – that can go a long way!** It takes courage to stay engaged in difficult conversations. Every attempt to understand and connect with your child is a step towards a closer, more trusting relationship.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Our guide *Växa upp utan hat - att samtala med barn och unga om extremism* ('Growing Up Without Hate – Talking to Children and Young People About Extremism') offers more depth on the subject.

Scan to access the guide, currently available in Swedish only.



NEED SUPPORT?

Exit, part of Fryshuset, provides free support for relatives concerned about radicalisation and violent extremism in family members. You can remain anonymous if you wish. Exit also helps people who want to leave violent extremist groups.

Agera Värmland provides free advice and support to people wanting to leave an extremist environment, and to friends and family members who need help when someone close to them becomes involved in violent extremism.

Save the Children Sweden's digital conversation training tool: friends and relatives can have a 'practice' conversation with a fictional young person who expresses hate and extreme views. There is also advice and support from a coach within the tool.



Scan to access the conversation training tool.



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Navigera hat provides tools that strengthen children and young people's democratic rights, improve the way we engage with and talk to children and young people who express extreme views, and create the conditions needed to protect children from the consequences of radicalisation.

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