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UNDERSTANDING to better RESPOND

Radicalization Leading to Violence Among Youth

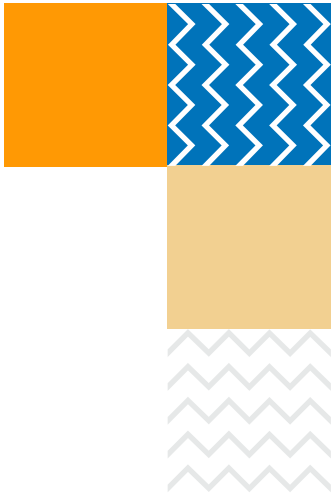
Guide for School Staff



To cite this guide:

Audet, G., Fleury, R., Miconi, D., Santavicca, T., Rousseau, C. & Plante Thibodeau, S. (2024). *Understanding to Better Respond. Radicalization Leading to Violence Among Youth. Guide for School Staff*. RAPS, CREDEF and SHERPA.





FOREWORD

For better or for worse, our world is changing at an accelerating pace, requiring us to continually review our knowledge and adapt our educational and civic practices. The speed of this movement destabilizes our traditional reflexes: change often anticipates the production of evidence-based data, and yesterday's tried-and-tested methods may prove ineffective, or even harmful.

Violence among young people and in our schools is one of the fields where the upheavals at work can be perceived as the most worrying. In autumn 2023, as the Middle East conflict divided the world, the media publicized the concerns, fears, and exhaustion of Quebec school staff in the face of increasing aggressive behavior in educational establishments: hate crimes and incidents, gun violence, bullying targeting forms of minority identity, growing misogyny.

Without claiming to provide exhaustive answers, this guide is intended as a reflective milestone to help us begin to think together about these phenomena, without dramatizing or minimizing the situation, but by resolutely joining forces to overcome powerlessness. It is intended as a means of presenting recent data on these issues, as well as practices, guides and tools that could be useful to the education community. It by no means claims to be exhaustive and can and should be supplemented to reflect the wealth of experiences and insights gained in the field.

CÉCILE ROUSSEAU





WHY SUCH A GUIDE AND WHY SHOULD IT BE UPDATED?

In 2015, the Government Action Plan 2015-2018 - Radicalization in Quebec: Act, Prevent, Detect, and Live Together called on the education, health and social services and public safety communities. In particular, it called upon the education community in its role of promoting living together and prevention.

The school community was invited to address the prevention of radicalization leading to violence by means of an anti-bullying and anti-violence plan as well as its annual update which includes prevention and reporting measures, whose purpose is “to prevent and counter any form of bullying and violence directed at a student, a teacher or any other member of the school staff” (Education Act, section 75.1.).

As part of this Action Plan, SHERPA, the research centre affiliated with the University Institute in relation to ethnocultural communities of CIUSSS West Central Montreal, had developed in 2016, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, a training course on violent radicalization among young people in Quebec. The first version of this guide sought to link this training with the intercultural education orientations put forward by the Ministry, to support school staff.

This updated version has a dual objective. Firstly, the *Understanding* section of the guide has been updated. It presents the catalytic role of the pandemic and the Internet on social polarization and violence. In addition, results from Quebec research conducted since 2016 have been added.

Particular attention has also been paid to reporting on the evolution of radicalization and various forms of violence in recent years. In this sense, the Act section, which presents courses of action and tools, has also been enhanced to consider the profusion of initiatives developed in recent years, notably by the [Research and Action on Social Polarizations \(RAPS\)](#) team.


This guide is divided into three sections. First, it provides information on radicalization leading to violence. It then presents the various levers that exist in the school environment to promote living together and suggests courses of action and tools. A final section offers resources for further action.





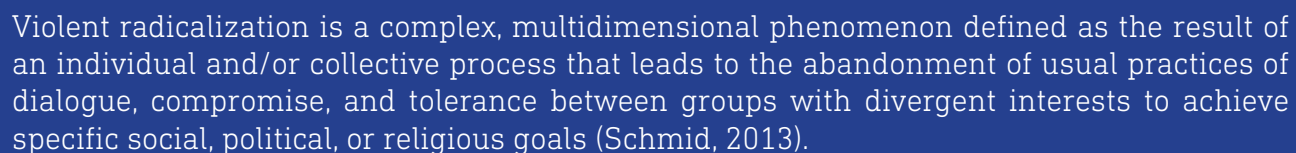
UNDERSTANDING RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE IN QUEBEC

NOT ONE, BUT MANY RADICALISATIONS



In 2015, the 2015-2018 Government Action Plan - *Radicalization in Quebec: Act, Prevent, Detect, and Live Together* specified that radicalization “can refer to a set of gestures described as ‘extreme’ or that stem from a literal (...) interpretation of the principles of a system, whether political, religious, cultural or economic” (p. 9).

A COMPLEX AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON



Violent radicalization is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon defined as the result of an individual and/or collective process that leads to the abandonment of usual practices of dialogue, compromise, and tolerance between groups with divergent interests to achieve specific social, political, or religious goals (Schmid, 2013).



TO BE RADICAL, IS IT **GOOD** OR **NOT**?

Radicalization is not a problem in itself, as it can provoke or even precipitate necessary social change. Being radical generally implies a shift from moderate to extreme or inflexible views that reject the status quo, but not necessarily in a violent way. In the history of ideas and political movements, there are many examples of non-violent radical tendencies that have contributed significantly to the rights of women, racialized minorities, Aboriginals, or sexual minorities. Simply think of Louis Riel, Léa Roback, Viola Desmond, Henry Morgentaler or the Femen, to name but a few. In our own time, we can think of Greta Thunberg and her radical environmental movement.

RADICALIZATION

- depends on what is considered normal and extreme in a society at a given time;
- does not represent a threat to society if it is not linked to violence or other illegal acts, such as incitement to hate; it can even be a positive form of change;
- generally, occurs within a social group but can also be the work of institutions.

The radicalization of opinions does not equate to the radicalization of behavior or violence, i.e., one can oppose another group and speak very negatively about it, but without making hateful gestures or remarks.

Radical ideas can be very appealing and are widespread among young people. Indeed, adolescence is a crucial period of identity and ideology formation, and a time when many young people feel the need to make their voices and opinions heard.

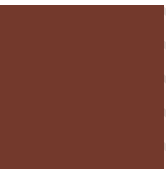
In itself, and especially among youth, radical ideas can represent the engine of social transformation and a pathway through which young people can make their voices heard and find forms of agency that confirm that they represent the future and have an important role to play. That's why it's important not to condemn all forms of radicalization, but to better understand the determinants that can lead adolescents from a non-violent path to a violent one in the name of their beliefs and ideologies.



AND VIOLENCE?

Radicalization leading to violence is a process by which an individual or group manifests a willingness to resort to the use of violence or non-democratic means, or to support or facilitate such use, to bring about change in society. Unlike violent extremism, it does not necessarily imply adherence to an ideology.

In Quebec, both in society and in our schools, there are manifestations of misogyny, homophobia/transphobia, xenophobia, racism, religious intolerance, as well as political positions that discredit democracy by praising totalitarianism. Ideologies often change and mix rapidly, contributing to the emergence of new “hybrid” ideologies, influenced by young people’s online and offline life experiences. We’re also seeing an increase in the glorification of violence, fueled by a dystopian culture where evil seems to prevail over good among young people. This so-called nihilistic violence can be accompanied by admiration for mass murderers and controversial identity figures. Social media and the Internet play an accelerating role in this respect, contributing to what is described as a “disruptive convergence with significant impacts on reflective and socializing capacities for young people at large.



A TYPICAL PROFILE?

There is no typical profile of a person likely to resort to violence. There are many different paths to violent radicalization.

Radicalization is not necessarily detectable by observation, since the behavioral changes that may characterize it are often associated with forms of protest or demands for attention. During adolescence, young people undergo a process of identity development that involves numerous physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and social changes. They question and search for themselves, trying to assert their individuality while desiring affiliation, recognition and belonging to a peer group.

Although people who become radicalized may go through characteristic stages, research does not allow us to establish a typical profile of young people who become radicalized, nor any observable warning signs. Moreover, certain signs reported in the literature as being characteristics or behaviours observed in people undergoing the radicalization process are not predictive of the risk of these individuals taking violent action.

Acting on suspicions based on characteristics and behaviours is likely to exacerbate the problems of exclusion and the anger associated with them, and thereby significantly increase the risk of propelling young people into increased and violent radicalization. It should also be noted that young people who are radicalized or who advocate nihilistic violence come from a variety of socio-economic and family backgrounds.

Although it has traditionally been assumed that young people attracted to radicalization have no more mental health problems than others, recent evidence suggests that psychological distress among young people can play a role in the legitimization of violence and the attraction of extremist discourse. This is also true for attraction by glorification of violence itself.



RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The literature defines vulnerability factors that increase the risk of violent radicalization among young people. School staff should consider these different factors as avenues for developing initiatives to promote living together and inclusion, and to maintain and support dialogue, rather than as clues for detecting radicalization leading to violence. These factors are grouped into three clusters.

Macrosocial Factors
concern the various facets of social exclusion.

- Systemic discrimination, intimidation, and ostracism
- Lack of future prospects for young people
- Unemployment, underemployment, professional disqualification
- Political/armed conflicts and their repercussions
- Social polarization around sensitive issues (war, sexuality, and gender identity, etc.)

Mesosocial Factors
relate to the direct environment.

- Real and virtual social networks
- Local community and political leaders with whom they may come into contact
- Unsafe climate at their school
- Identification with “polarizing” groups

Microsocial Factors
include family and personal factors.

- Feelings of social disaffiliation (isolation), injustice or rejection
- Feelings of non-recognition and deprivation
- Uncertainty of identity
- Social, economic and cultural marginalization
- Victimization, frustration (online and offline)
- Poor self-control and impulsivity



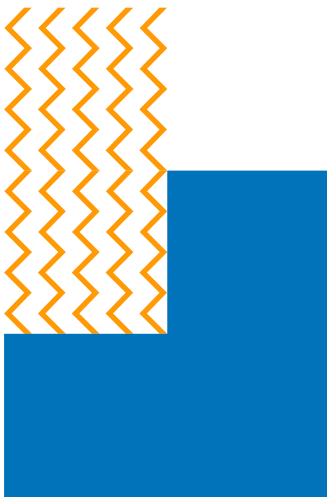
The literature also identifies protective factors. For instance, it is possible to say that the majority of people who do not become radicalized share certain characteristics.

These individuals:

- have a stable social network and good family support;
- have good relations with teachers at school and perceive a democratic school climate;
- perform well in school;
- are capable of opening up to difference and tolerating diversity;
- do not believe in the effectiveness of violence to achieve their goals, and have non-violent alternatives for expressing their frustration;
- are morally repugnant to the use of violence to bring about change;
- can rely on multiple, non-polarizing identities and are involved in sports/artistic activities;
- have a sense of belonging to a community;
- are spiritually and/or religiously committed;
- have a positive vision of the future;
- are resilient and critical thinkers

AND WHAT ABOUT SUPPORT FOR VIOLENT RADICALIZATION?

An environment where many people support violence or hate speech increases social polarization and the legitimization of violence. In such contexts, the most vulnerable young people, who present other risk factors, may be at greater risk of committing violent acts. From this perspective, recognizing and condemning the legitimization of violence while leaving room for disagreement is essential to fostering social cohesion and reducing the risk of violence in our schools and society.





THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL STAFF

Without lumping together all the polarizing positions in our society or minimizing the crucial importance of critical positions taken by young people, it is necessary to recognize the contribution of the current socio-political context to radical positions, which can in turn mobilize solidarity and sometimes legitimize violence. Profiling is not an adequate response to fear. Schools and school staff must take care to avoid stigmatizing young people and their families. Indeed, the risk of doing more harm than good by stigmatizing individuals and communities is real. So, in the school environment, preventing radicalization leading to violence means promoting social cohesion and “living together”. It also means working to mitigate vulnerability factors and consolidate protective factors, to help students strengthen their ability to resist radical indoctrination, as well as the normalization of violence as a solution to life’s adversities.



TOOLS AVAILABLE

Schools must be just as careful to maintain their fundamentally unifying and protective character for all students, their families, and their communities, as they must to remain vigilant in the face of the phenomenon of radicalization leading to violence. In this respect, various tools already exist to help schools promote living together.

The Educational Project and the school’s Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is based on the school’s values, as defined in the Educational Project. It is the means by which the school regulates and supervises student behavior to foster a better way of “living together”. It must therefore be explicit in terms of the behavior expected of students and, ideally, staff members.



The Anti-Violence and Anti-Bullying Plan

Planning for the promotion of living together and the prevention of radicalization leading to violence must be part of a local intervention strategy, a structured and concerted approach by the entire school team. Every school must adopt, implement, and update an anti-violence and anti-bullying plan. Everyone - students and adults alike - must be involved in and aware of these efforts to maintain a positive school climate, as caring and safe as possible.

School Integration and Intercultural Education Policy

In 1998, the Ministry of Education adopted the School Integration and Intercultural Education Policy (MEQ, 1998). Although it has now been in effect for 25 years, it continues to provide a framework for the Ministry's interventions and to guide the actions of school boards, which are based on the principles of equal opportunity, equity, and non-discrimination, and contribute to the acceptance of and respect for otherness, as well as the rejection of intolerance, ethnocentrism and any form of racism or discrimination.

Financial Support from the Ministry of Education

The Ministry offers a variety of forms of support to the school environment to foster an intercultural education that combats the marginalization of groups still stigmatized by collective prejudice, and promotes success and equal opportunity, as well as the full participation of all in the construction of a pluralist and inclusive Quebec. This financial support is offered within the framework of budgetary measures presented on the ministerial website.



DEALING WITH RADICALIZATION LEADING TO **VIOLENCE** AT SCHOOL

The following pages offer suggestions and resources for action. They range from tools developed for use in schools (teaching guides) to activities and initiatives proposed by organizations for high school and college students. These resources are presented according to the themes they address and the educational intentions they pursue.

Opening spaces for dialogue, open to the expression of fears and feelings of injustice

Educational aim: To identify and critically analyze issues related to discrimination, racism, and exclusion, and to promote a school climate that is inclusive, positive, and as safe as possible, while recognizing the inevitable discomfort caused by differences and disagreements in the social sphere.





Ensemble pour le respect de la diversité – Together for Respect of Diversity – is an organization that offers schools multiple activities aimed at fighting discrimination:

- Anti-Oppression 101 (Secondary 2 to 5) [↗](#)
- Anti-Racism 101 (Secondary 2 to 5) [↗](#)

Educational aim: Offering friendly discussion forums in which young people are invited to exchange views in a respectful manner, on themes that engage them.

- The *Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism from UNESCO* [↗](#) supports teaching staff in preventing violent extremism through human rights-based global citizenship education programs, while taking into account national contexts. (Secondary)





- The teaching guide [*Discussing Sensitive Topics with Students*](#)  aims to present a few elements to guide the reflection on whether or not it is appropriate to address a sensitive theme with students, and to provide guidelines for addressing a sensitive theme in the classroom. (Secondary)
- The guide [*Leading Discussion Groups in a School Context \(French\)*](#)  is intended for teaching and professional staff who want to encourage the development of students' well-being and sense of belonging to the group, by creating a space in the classroom where everyone can express themselves freely on a particular theme. The guide proposes a framework for intervention and activities that specifically address themes related to the migratory experience and mixed identities. (Primary and Secondary)
- The teaching guide [*Studying Genocide*](#)  offers a comparative, socio-historical and ethical approach to these tragedies in order to understand this complex phenomenon and prevent future genocides. (Secondary)
- The [*SOMEONE \(Social Media EducatiON Every day\)*](#)  initiative is a web portal that brings together multimedia documents aimed at preventing hate speech and guarding against radicalization leading to extremist violence. Numerous resources provide food for thought for school staff interested in tackling topics related to radicalization leading to violence in the classroom. (Secondary and College)











Valuing **anti-discriminatory and supportive attitudes** for a **school climate that is as safe and inclusive as possible**

- [Intervening after a Violent Incident in the School Setting](#)  is a brief, practical guide to dealing with situations of social polarization that can lead to violence in educational establishments.
- *Ensemble pour le respect de la diversité* – Together for Respect of Diversity – offers the school environment [The Imprints Project](#) , a coaching program for high school student committees aimed at promoting respect for diversity and combating intolerance and its manifestations, discrimination and bullying. (Secondary)

Encourage initiatives that reflect and enhance the diversity of students' **cultural heritages**

Educational aim: To integrate into educational activities the contribution of different communities to the construction of Quebec society.

- [Amarrages sans frontières \(French\)](#)  – Docking without Borders – is a company that organizes conferences on cultural communities, as well as visits to these communities for primary, secondary or staff. (All)
- [L'Autre Montréal](#)  – The Other Montreal – is an organization that offers guided historical tours of Montreal on the theme of immigration history for high school students and staff.
- [Qc History X](#)  is a guided tour of Quebec City that revisits the history of Quebec and Canada through the lens of slavery and the Black presence on this territory since the beginnings of New France in the 17th century, in the company of historian and rapper Webster. (All)
- Heritage Canada's digital toolkit invites citizens and teachers to take part in celebrations and activities that highlight the [heritage of Black Canadians](#) , past and present. (All)
- The guides [Teaching the History of Quebec's Jewish Community](#) (French)  et [Teaching the History of Blacks in Quebec](#) (French)  aim to provide teachers with pedagogical guidelines and historical reference points for integrating these communities into the content explored in the classroom.



- The month of May is [Asian Heritage Month](#). The Canadian population is invited to discover and celebrate the many achievements and contributions of Asian Canadians who, throughout history, have done so much to help Canada become the multicultural country we know today.
- The [The Wapikoni teaching guide](#). Based on twelve short films produced by Wapikoni and directed by Aboriginal people from across the country, the guide is designed to encourage high school teachers to talk to their students about topics related to Canada's Aboriginal cultures. (All)

Train young people to **critically analyze the media**, especially **social media**

Educational Aim: Equip students to recognize elements contributing to social polarization or indoctrination.

- Le [The Québec Center for Media and Information Literacy \(CQÉMI; French\)](#), offers training courses, workshops, and content to help citizens of all ages become better informed and combat misinformation. Its activities are offered to schools, libraries, and community organizations.

Bringing **families and schools** closer together by proposing various ways of **collaborating**

Educational Aim: Encourage the participation of immigrant families in educational activities, in particular by focusing on their migratory histories.

- [Family Stories for Learning to Write \(French\)](#)

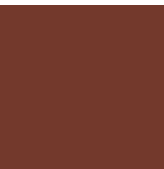




Training school staff to **prevent radicalization** leading to violence and the emergence of new forms of violence

Educational Aim: Enhance ongoing training for school staff by adding new courses on the prevention of radicalization leading to violence and on classroom intervention following events of a violent nature.


- *The formation Violent Radicalization Among Young People: Understanding for Better Prevention* (French) [🔗](#), by SHERPA, developed for psychosocial workers in the health, social services and education networks, and for staff in community organizations, includes four modules.
- The trainings offered by the Centre for the [Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence](#) (CPRMV) [🔗](#), are addressed to school staff and aim to help them to understand, recognize and prevent radicalization leading to violence, and to take on the role of bridge-builder in their environment.



TO GO FURTHER...

Several teams and research centers are working on the prevention of radicalization leading to violence. If you would like to find out more, we invite you to consult their websites and research reports.

- *Recherche and Action on Social Polarisations (RAPS; French)* [↗](#) was established by the SHERPA research center to better understand why and how radicalization, a form of challenge to the social status quo, can lead to violence, and what preventive measures can be taken to preserve social cohesion. Its [website](#) [↗](#) and [Facebook](#) [↗](#) page present publications essential to understanding current polarization issues. These include the Resource Directory Appendix to training modules *Understanding for better prevention: violent radicalization among young people* (French) [↗](#) which lists a wide range of national and international resources published since 2000, aimed at young people (from toddlers to young adults) and adults (parents, practitioners, teachers, students), mainly in French but occasionally in English.

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- The research report [*Social Polarization in High Schools: How to Promote Well-Being and Reduce Violence Among Adolescents*](#)  presents the preliminary results of a research project designed to study the risk and protective factors associated with support for violent radicalization among adolescents in Quebec. These results indicate that a caring school environment where students feel they can express their opinions, are empowered to succeed, and are listened to is essential to preventing violent radicalization among adolescents, fostering their non-violent contribution to school and society, and promoting their mental health.
 - SHERPA's research report [*The challenge of living together. The individual and social determinants of support for violent radicalization among college students in Quebec.*](#) (French) (Rousseau *et al.*, 2016)  presents the results of a survey carried out in eight Quebec CEGEPs on the determinants of support for violent radicalization among Quebec's college population. It describes not only which groups of young people are most affected by a context conducive to social polarization and how they are weakened, but also the protective factors that could support prevention and intervention programs.
 - Maisonneuve's College Research Institute for the Professional Integration of Immigrants (IRIPI) published the action-research report [*Students and religious radicalization leading to violence*](#) (French) . The report highlights the "fragile zones" that provide fertile ground for the process of religious radicalization leading to violence, and which are easily exploited by recruiters. The report's recommendations are set out in the [*A Guide to best practice for INCLUSION, BETTER LIVING TOGETHER and PREVENTION of RADICALIZATION leading to VIOLENCE*](#) (French) . More recently, IRIPI published the Activity Report for the Living Together pilot project, which took place at the College.
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- The *Canadian Practitioners Network for the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism* [↗](#) develops best-practice guidelines based on evidence, assessment, prevention and intervention approaches. It identifies and maps existing teams, practices and initiatives and their level of collaboration across Canada. It facilitates and improves access to training and resources in assessment, prevention, and intervention.
- The *Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence* (CPRMV) [↗](#) among other objectives, aims to implement concrete prevention strategies to act upstream of radicalization phenomena leading to violence. It also aims to counter hate speech and acts of hatred. Its website features a wide range of resources, many of them aimed at schools.



IN CONCLUSION

The aim of this guide is to provide information and suggestions for action to prevent radicalization leading to violence in schools. It is not exhaustive, and the rapid transformations in our society force us to be vigilant and attentive to the changing and sometimes urgent needs of school staff and youth in our schools. It's up to each and every one of us, as well as our leaders, to mobilize and put in place an inclusive framework that values diversity and depolarizes discourse, both at the school level and in the media and society at large. Clearly, any intervention at the local and individual level must be accompanied by efforts at the collective and political level, so that all young people can make a non-violent contribution to building our future.