

Speak Safely NY



# TALKING ABOUT EXTREMIST VIOLENCE

# SPEAK SAFELY

Extremist groups use social media and propaganda to spread false narratives. They prey on the anxiety, fear, and loneliness that so many of us face. They offer a false sense of security to gain trust and then use their influence to turn their hateful rhetoric into real-world violence.

This guide is for all those worried about a friend or loved one's path toward extremist violence. By recognizing and responding to the signs of extremism, you can help them move away from hate and violence.

# WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

Violent Extremism actively condones violence as a way to achieve political, religious, or other ideological goals. People who hold these views often express hatred toward others who don't share the same racial, ethnic, religious, or political identity and wish harm upon them.

Most people who participate in extremist violence show signs of escalation long before they act. The following indicators are some behaviors that may signal your loved one is moving toward violence:

## MOVING TOWARD VIOLENCE

Believing in conspiracy theories, such as the "Great Replacement"

Isolating self from family & friends who disagree with extremist views

Using religious, political or other beliefs to justify the use of violence

Believing nonviolent options are ineffective in achieving goals

Creating, sharing, or extensively consuming violent extremist content

**ESCALATING TO VIOLENCE IS NOT A STRAIGHT PATH. YOUR LOVED ONE MAY ONLY SHOW SOME OF THESE BEHAVIORS**

Praising a previous violent event or attacker

Expressing grievances or resentment toward a specific person or group

Traveling or planning to travel to participate in violent extremism

Buying weapons, ammunition, body armor, or explosive materials

Secrecy online (i.e. using private browsers or deleting search history)

Increased secrecy in real life (i.e. using disposable "burner" phones)

Talking to known extremists in person or online

Attempting to radicalize friends or family to violence

Posing with weapons or using hate group imagery

Threatening a specific group, individual, or physical target

If you know your friend or loved one is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, please call 911 immediately

Visit [www.speaksafelyny.com](http://www.speaksafelyny.com)

# EXTREMIST GROUPS ARE PREDATORY

**THEY USE COMMON STRUGGLES TO APPEAL TO THE MOST VULNERABLE**

## **DIFFICULTY WITH CHANGE**

**01.**

Unexpected changes, big or small, can make people feel powerless or insignificant. These feelings are uncomfortable and often lead people to look for reasons for their misfortune. Extremist groups use this to their advantage. They place blame on an opposing group for life's uncertainties, creating anger and animosity.

## **FEELING ALONE**

**02.**

Many people are drawn to extremist groups because they often offer friendship, support, and acceptance they may not find elsewhere. Making friends on the internet or through gaming platforms can feel safe for someone who finds real-life stressful or overwhelming. Violent extremist groups can offer that sense of belonging.

## **POOR**

**CRITICAL THINKING 03.**

Violent extremist groups provide dangerously misinformed, yet easily digestible answers to highly complex social issues. Tweets, memes, and TikTok reels can be very appealing. They're often simple, fun, or witty ways to share information, but rarely do they show the whole story. Violent extremist groups use social media and gaming platforms to quickly spread false narratives targeting individuals or groups they blame for society's problems.

# START THE CONVERSATION



Talking to a friend or loved one who has taken the path of hate and extremism is difficult. Chances are you disagree with many of their viewpoints and may feel hurt or angered by their behavior. This is understandable, but approaching them with empathy will help them open up.

Helping a person move away from violent extremism begins with creating a safe space where they feel they can speak freely. Start the conversation when both of you are calm and relaxed.

Begin by asking open-ended questions about their beliefs and how they came to believe them. Getting your friend or loved one to think about how their beliefs have evolved can open a door for change. Listen carefully and show genuine curiosity in what they have to say. You can let them know you don't approve of their hateful view, but still love and care about them.

Try your best not to judge, criticize, or argue. This can lead to your loved one shutting down and ending the conversation. If tempers flare, respectfully end the conversation for the time being.

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

## DO

Create a space where they can speak freely. A little empathy goes a long way when trying to get a loved one to open up about sensitive topics.

Ask open-ended questions about their beliefs and how they came to believe such things.

Be patient and listen carefully to their answers, without judgment.

Remind them they are loved and not alone.

Take care of your own well-being. Know your limits, and ask for help when you need it.

## DONT

Argue or tell them they're wrong. Anger will only make your loved one shut down and stop talking.

Criticize them for believing in a conspiracy theory, or any other thoughts they share.

Interrupt them because you don't agree or feel comfortable with their opinions.

Give up! Change takes time.

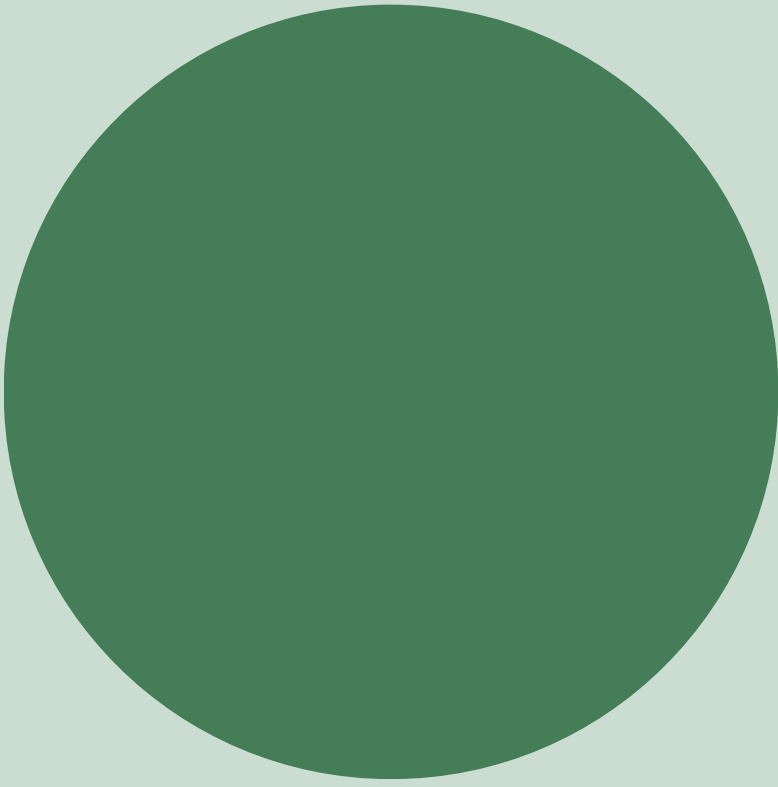
Allow anger to control the conversation. If things get heated, take a break and continue when tempers have calmed.

# MAKING CONNECTIONS



You can help your friend or loved one through [speaksafelyny.com](https://www.speaksafelyny.com). Speak Safely NY is a non-profit violence prevention organization. When you reach out, a trained specialist can encourage your loved one to seek help through our highly-specialized intervention program. The program aims to help people who may be at risk of moving toward extremist violence by connecting them to mental health and community services. We work with individuals from all backgrounds with a variety of beliefs and ideologies. Prevention starts with building resilience against the sway of hateful messaging.





Text us at (646)389-8789  
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