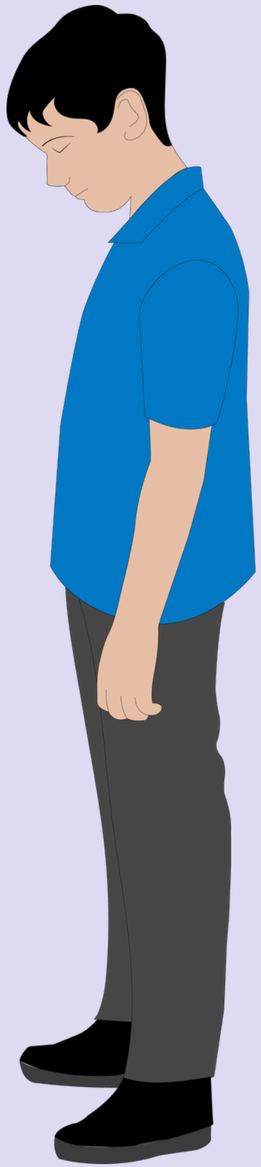
Safeguarding Scenario 22 - He says they're the enemy.

🚨 “He says they're the enemy. Please don't tell anyone I told you”.

During a Year 5 lesson, a teaching assistant notices that 10-year-old Oliver has become increasingly withdrawn and reluctant to work with certain classmates.

Over recent weeks, Oliver has started making comments about people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. On one occasion, he refuses to sit next to another pupil, saying: *“My brother says people like them don't belong here.”*

Initially, staff assume Oliver is repeating things he has heard at home. However, during lunchtime, another pupil, Adam, approaches the teaching assistant and appears worried.



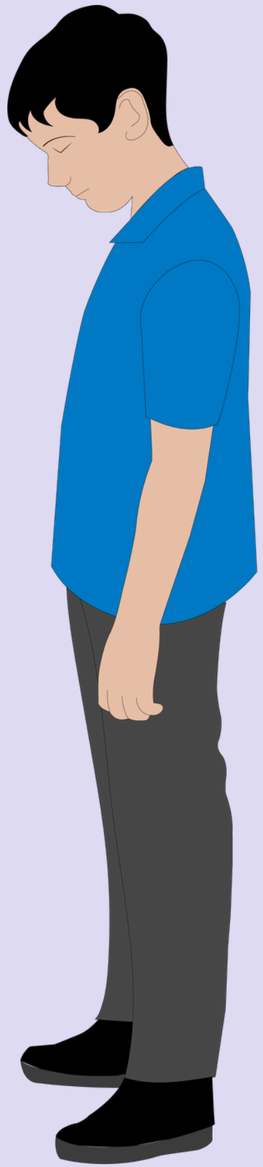
He explains that Oliver has been watching videos online with an older teenager who regularly visits his home. Adam says: “Oliver keeps showing us videos about people taking over our country. He says they're the enemy and we need to fight back. He told me that some people deserve to get hurt because of what they believe.”

Adam explains that Oliver has recently joined an online group where members share videos, messages and images encouraging hatred towards particular groups of people. He adds:
“Oliver says the people in the group understand him better than anyone at school. He told me they're teaching him the truth and that one day he'll do something to make them proud.”

Adam then becomes anxious and says: *“Please don't tell Oliver I told you. He said people who tell teachers are traitors.”*

The teaching assistant remembers that Oliver has recently become more isolated, has argued with classmates about religion and has been overheard talking about a secret online group.

Would your team know what to do?



Radicalisation is the process by which someone comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups. Children can be vulnerable to radicalisation, including through online content, gaming platforms, social media, personal relationships and contact with individuals who promote extremist beliefs.

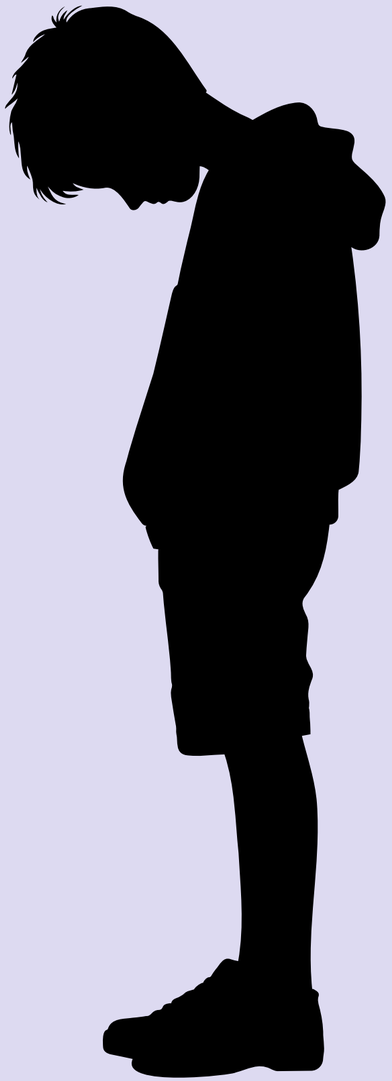
KCSIE 2026 identifies preventing radicalisation as part of schools' wider safeguarding responsibilities. Importantly, there is no single profile of a child who may be vulnerable to radicalisation, and there is no definitive checklist of behaviours that proves radicalisation is taking place.

So this is not simply:

- “He's only repeating something he's heard at home.”
- “He's too young to understand what he's saying.”
- “It's just political opinions or freedom of speech.”
- “Children say things online that they don't really mean.”
- “It's a behaviour issue rather than safeguarding.”
- “We should wait until he makes a direct threat.”

🔍 The Safeguarding Question

“Is Oliver being influenced, manipulated or groomed by someone promoting extremist beliefs, and could he or other children be at risk of harm?”



❌ DON'T DISMISS THE CONCERNS OR PROMISE CONFIDENTIALITY

The teaching assistant should take Adam's disclosure seriously and respond calmly, without judgement or alarm. They should not promise to keep the information secret.

A suitable response might be: “Thank you for telling me, Adam. You've done the right thing by speaking to someone. I can see this has worried you. I can't promise to keep it a secret because I need to help keep everyone safe, but I will only share it with the people who need to know.”

Do not suggest Adam is exaggerating or that Oliver is simply going through a phase. Equally, do not immediately label Oliver as a terrorist, extremist or dangerous child. A child who may be experiencing radicalisation is first and foremost a child who may need safeguarding support.

✅ LISTEN – DON'T INVESTIGATE

Allow Adam to explain what he knows without interrupting, challenging or asking leading questions.

Staff may need to establish enough information to identify any immediate risk, for example:

- Has Oliver made any specific threats towards another pupil or group?
- Has anyone encouraged Oliver to hurt himself or others?
- Has Oliver been asked to meet someone, share personal information or carry out a particular task?
- Is Adam frightened that Oliver or someone else may retaliate?
- Are other children receiving or viewing similar material?
- Is there any indication of an immediate risk of serious harm?

Do not ask Adam to access the online group again, collect evidence, take screenshots or investigate Oliver's activities. Do not search Oliver's personal accounts or devices independently. Any action involving devices or digital evidence must follow school procedures and appropriate safeguarding advice.

Where there is an immediate threat to life or serious harm, follow emergency procedures and contact the police.

🔍 THINK SAFEGUARDING – NOT SIMPLY BEHAVIOUR OR POLITICAL VIEWS

Under the Prevent duty, schools must have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. However, holding strong political or religious beliefs, expressing unpopular opinions or questioning authority does not automatically indicate radicalisation.

Schools must distinguish between legitimate expression of beliefs and concerns that a child may be experiencing extremist influence, coercion, grooming or encouragement towards violence.

In Oliver's case, the concerns arise from a combination of factors:

- Repeated exposure to online material promoting hatred and violence.
- Possible influence from an older teenager.
- Involvement in a secretive online group.
- Statements suggesting that violence towards particular groups is justified.
- Increasing isolation from peers.
- A growing sense of belonging to individuals outside school who may be manipulating him.
- Language suggesting loyalty, secrecy and a need to prove himself.

None of these factors alone proves radicalisation. However, when considered together, they warrant a prompt, proportionate safeguarding response. The DSL should also consider whether Oliver may be experiencing bullying, discrimination, social isolation, exploitation, unmet emotional needs or other vulnerabilities.

Radicalisation can involve grooming and manipulation, with individuals exploiting a child's desire for friendship, identity, purpose or belonging.

✅ SHARE THE CONCERN WITHOUT DELAY

KCSIE 2026 makes clear that safeguarding concerns should be acted upon immediately. The teaching assistant must report Adam's disclosure to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy without delay, following the school's child protection procedures.

Do not wait for Oliver to make a direct threat. Do not attempt to challenge the online group, contact the older teenager or independently establish whether Oliver has committed an offence.

The DSL should consider:

- Oliver's immediate safety and wellbeing.
- Any risk to Adam or other pupils.
- Whether there is evidence of online grooming, coercion or exploitation.
- Whether the concern meets the threshold for consultation with local Prevent partners or a referral.
- Whether children's social care or police involvement is required.
- What additional support Oliver may need.
- Whether the school's existing safeguarding records identify a developing pattern.

Where appropriate, the DSL should seek advice from the local authority Prevent lead or police Prevent team and consider a Prevent referral. A referral may result in consideration for Channel, the multi-agency process that provides voluntary, tailored support to people assessed as vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

Channel is a safeguarding intervention, not a criminal sanction. Not every Prevent concern will meet the threshold for Channel support. Equally, staff do not need proof that radicalisation has occurred before sharing a genuine safeguarding concern.

Where a child is at risk of significant harm, normal children's social care referral procedures must also be followed. Prevent arrangements do not replace wider safeguarding responsibilities.

🔐 BE CAREFUL ABOUT CONTACTING PARENTS

Parents and carers will ordinarily have an important role in supporting children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation. However, the DSL must carefully consider the timing and manner of any communication.

In this scenario, the potential involvement of an older teenager connected to Oliver's home requires particular consideration.

The DSL should ask:

- Could contacting home increase the risk to Oliver?
- Is the person potentially influencing Oliver a family member or someone known to the family?
- Could information shared with parents compromise a safeguarding or police assessment?
- Is advice needed from Prevent partners, children's social care or the police before contacting the family?
- How can Adam's identity and confidentiality be protected?

Do not automatically assume that Oliver's parents are responsible for the concerns or share the same beliefs. Any decision to delay parental involvement should be based on an identified safeguarding risk or relevant professional advice, rather than assumptions about the family.

📝 RECORD ACCURATELY

The teaching assistant should make a factual safeguarding record as soon as possible.

Include:

- Adam's disclosure, using his exact words wherever possible.
- The date, time and location of the conversation.
- The comments reportedly made by Oliver.
- Any references to online groups, individuals or threats.
- Relevant observations about Oliver's behaviour and presentation.
- Adam's concerns about possible retaliation.
- Any immediate protective action taken.
- Who the information was shared with and when.
- Subsequent decisions, actions and the rationale for them.

Clearly distinguish between what Adam has reported, what staff have directly observed and any professional concerns or interpretations.

Do not record Oliver as having been radicalised simply because concerns have been raised.

The role of staff is to recognise, record and report concerns, not determine whether radicalisation or a terrorism-related offence has occurred.

🔍 LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

When the DSL reviews Oliver's safeguarding chronology, they identify:

- **A previous incident where Oliver refused to work with a pupil because of their religion.**
- **Several comments about certain groups of people being dangerous or unwelcome.**
- **A noticeable withdrawal from friendships and extracurricular activities.**
- **A teacher's observation that Oliver had become increasingly defensive when challenged about discriminatory language.**
- **A recent online safety lesson where Oliver said that teachers were hiding the truth about what was happening in the world.**
- **A previous conversation in which Oliver mentioned an older teenager who had introduced him to new online communities.**

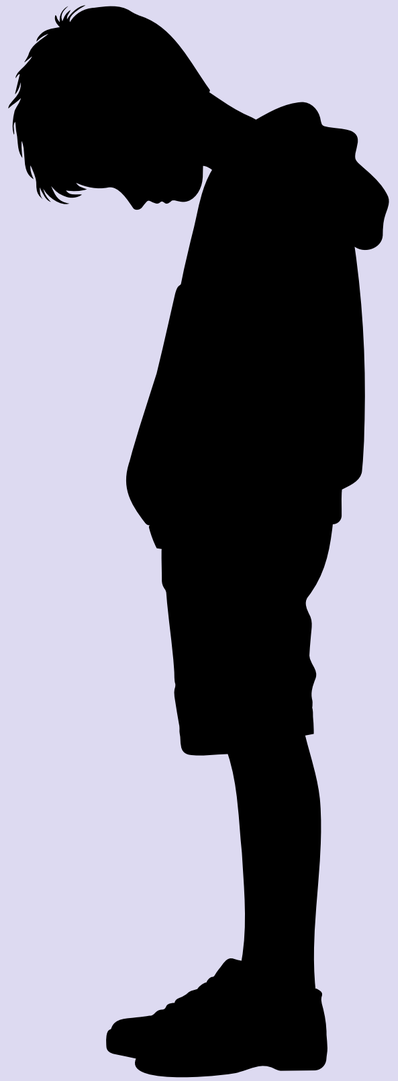
Individually, these observations may have appeared to be isolated incidents involving behaviour, relationships or online safety. However, alongside Adam's disclosure, they suggest a possible pattern of influence, isolation and exposure to material promoting hatred and violence.

This does not establish that Oliver has been radicalised, but it highlights why safeguarding records must be reviewed collectively rather than treating each concern in isolation. The DSL must consider both the potential risk Oliver may present to others and the possibility that Oliver himself is being exploited or harmed.

🔍 The Safeguarding Question

Later, another member of staff says:

“Oliver is only ten. Surely he's too young to be radicalised? Isn't this just something we should address through PSHE and a conversation about respecting other people's beliefs?”



❌ No.

Age does not remove a child's vulnerability to radicalisation, grooming or exploitation. Primary-aged children may encounter harmful extremist material online or be influenced by older children, adults or groups who seek to manipulate their beliefs and behaviour.

PSHE, online safety education, respectful discussion and teaching about fundamental British values all contribute to a school's preventative safeguarding culture. However, education alone is not an adequate response when there are specific concerns that a child may be being drawn towards terrorism or is experiencing harmful extremist influence.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces the importance of schools recognising potential indicators of radicalisation, responding appropriately to concerns and understanding how to access support through local Prevent arrangements. The school must also avoid stereotyping children or families on the basis of religion, ethnicity, nationality or political beliefs.

Safeguarding decisions should be based on the child's circumstances, behaviours, experiences and evidence of potential harm. The purpose of Prevent is to safeguard people from being drawn into terrorism, not to police legitimate beliefs or prevent respectful debate.

Sometimes the most important question isn't: “Is Oliver old enough to understand these extremist views?” It is: “Who may be influencing Oliver, what is he being exposed to, how is it affecting his behaviour and safety, and what support or intervention is needed before the risk escalates?”

Listen. Don't dismiss. Protect. Record. Share. Assess the risk. Seek advice. Act.

S4S