



Bundesamt  
für Migration  
und Flüchtlinge

# Faith or extremism?

Help for relatives:

The Advice Centre on Radicalisation





Has your son started calling  
his old friends unbelievers?

Has your child suddenly begun to curse his  
or her former lifestyle, hobbies and music?

Does your child now spend all their  
time surfing Salafist web sites on the Internet?



Your friend says that dissenters  
will go to hell?

Is your child withdrawing into him- or herself and are  
you worried about losing contact?

Does your girl friend hold radical religious views?

Does your pupil tolerate no other opinions  
alongside his religion?

## We are here to help if ...

- ... you are uncertain if the new religious fervour of your child or friend is an expression of deep faith or extremism.
- ... you are worried that your child, pupil or friend may have joined an Islamist group.
- ... you are worried about losing contact with your child.
- ... you have the feeling that there is no-one you can talk to about these problems.

You may start to feel insecure if our own child, a pupil or a friend adopts an extremist attitude and quotes religious reasons. You feel helpless in the face of someone who suddenly rejects common views and turns down joint adventures. This can leave you at a loss and sometimes helpless. Especially if you get the feeling that you can no longer get through to your child, friend or pupil.

If you are stumped or simply have a few questions about the sudden change in your child, friend or pupil, give us a call. The Advice Centre on Radicalisation can help you. Our aim is to help you judge the situation correctly and – if there is a risk of radicalisation – to help your child, friend or pupil break out of the radicalisation spiral and find their way back into the family, class and group of friends.

## You can reach us on:



(0911) 943 43 43\*



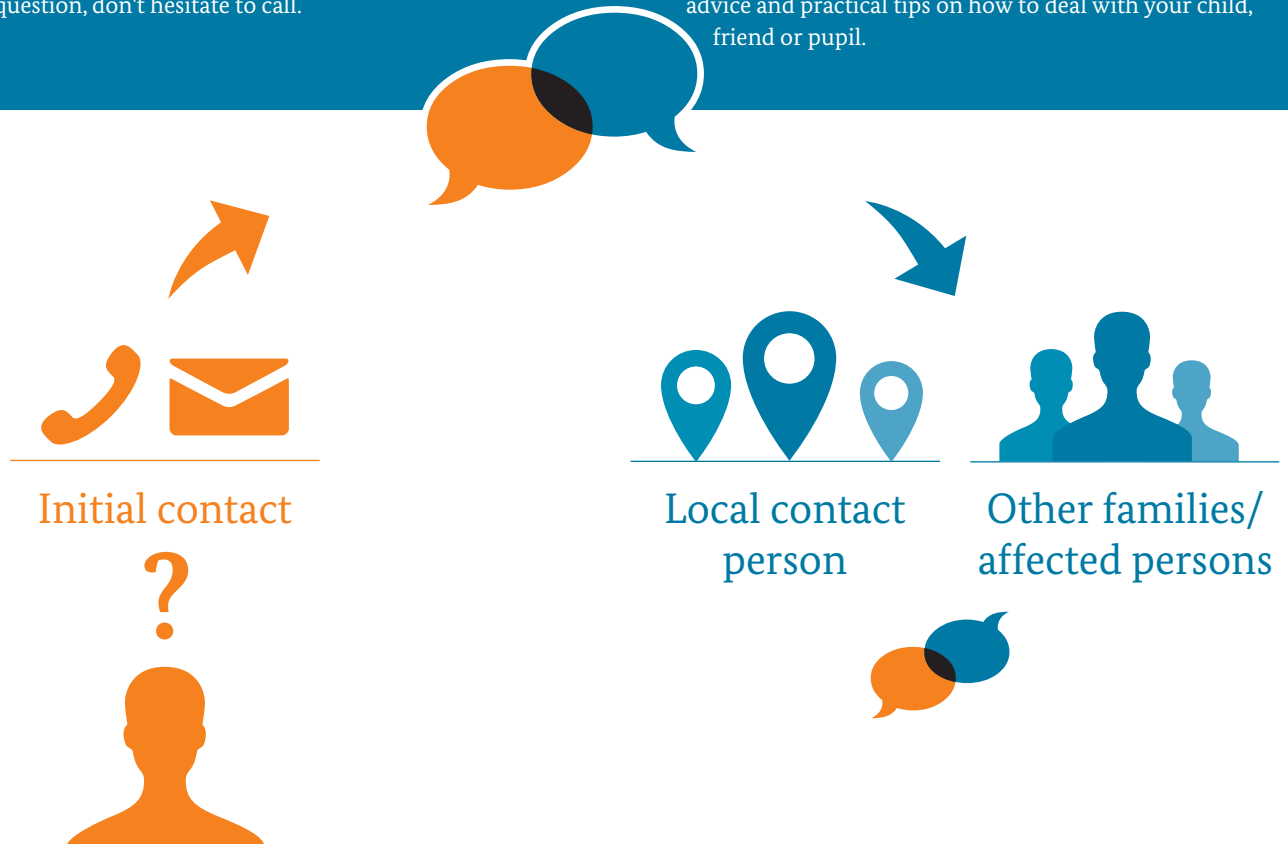
[beratung@bamf.bund.de](mailto:beratung@bamf.bund.de)



\* Monday–Friday, 9.00–15.00 hours in person, otherwise we will call you back as soon as possible.

The team at the **Advice Centre on Radicalisation** is your **first point of contact** if you get the impression that your child, pupil or friend may have been radicalised by Islamists. Whatever your question, don't hesitate to call.

We will listen, answer your questions and decide on what to do next together with you. If you want, we will also put you into contact with someone local who can provide individual advice and practical tips on how to deal with your child, friend or pupil.





## Your initial contact with us

The first time you call you should explain your situation and tell us your fears and worries. Our consultants will go through various points with you which experience has shown play a role in Islamist radicalisation. It may turn out that your child, pupil or friend has discovered a new religion but that you don't have to fear any kind of extremism.

We can then provide you with information on his or her religion. If a number of points apply, these are at first only hints that he or she may be on their way towards radicalisation. However, there are only a very few aspects that are a clear indication that your son, friend or pupil is at risk. It's always a combination of many different factors, not all of which can be clearly analysed in an initial talk.

Our advice is free and confidential. You only have to provide your contact data so that we can pass you on to a local counsellor or so that we can send you more information.

## Arranging contact to someone local

If our talks indicate that your child, friend or pupil is becoming radicalised we will discuss the next steps with you. If you wish, we can put you into contact with a counsellor in your region. With your consent we will send them your contact data and he or she will call you back to arrange a meeting as soon as possible. All of the counsellors who we cooperate with locally already have experience with such cases and know the best way to help you. The results of our initial talks will help the counsellor to prepare for the first meeting with you. You decide where the meeting is to take place. This can be at your home, in the counselling office or outside, for example in a café.



## Support from the counsellor

You can discuss your personal situation with the counsellor. He or she will explain the further procedure and the different options that are open to you. The counselling takes place in a personal meeting and/or over the phone. You will be given practical tips on how to restore a better contact with your child, pupil or friend: What topics can you bring up and how? What should you best steer clear of? How should you behave? Depending on the situation and progress made, third persons can also be involved in the counselling process, for example relatives, friends, teachers or Imams.

The common goal is to strengthen your bond of trust with the affected person so that you can gradually bring them back from radicalisation or prevent a possible radicalisation. Even if this process takes time, your counsellor will always be there to help. There is no guarantee that this will be successful, but it's not impossible. The key here is to win back the trust of your child, friend or pupil.

## Dialogue with other affected persons

At your wish, we will also try and put you into contact with relatives of other persons in your region who are in the same situation as you. It helps to talk: people in the same situation can understand your fears, doubts and experience. Everyone profits from the experiences gained in dealing with children, pupils or friends. The meetings are arranged in small groups of a maximum of five people, usually at weekends.



## Local partners

Our counsellors are there when you need them throughout Germany. The team shown here is representative of a network of four non-profit-making organisations that have been involved in counselling relatives of radicalised persons for many years.



Bremen



Berlin



NRW



Bavaria,  
Baden-Württemberg  
and Hesse



Questions



Answers



### Is the decision to embrace the Islamic faith a sign of radicalisation ?

No, Islam is not synonymous with extremism. Just like any other religion, Islam too has its moderate and radical factions. Even if someone joins a fundamentalist community, he or she does not necessarily become extremist. Nor does the strength of the religious feeling say anything about a possible radicalisation.

### I get the impression that my child, friend or a pupil is adopting increasingly radical views – when should I start getting worried? How can I recognise when he or she is heading towards radicalisation or has joined an Islamist group?

There's no fixed check list of signs from which you can conclude that someone is a radical. The individual facts in the following list do not have to give cause for alarm on their own. However, if a number of them hold true this may be something that you should follow up. Please feel free to contact us if your child, pupil or friend has recently

- drastically changed their way of life (e.g. eating and sleeping habits, hobbies) and decries their former habits as objectionable.
- cut back on or even completely abandoned any contact with their former friends and instead has turned to new friends, Internet websites or preachers with clearly extremist views.

- started to forbid any criticism of their own religious conviction and increasingly thinks in terms of only black and white («all those who see things differently are in the wrong/are evil/unbelievers«).
- started using increasingly aggressive words and phrases when defending his or her religion.
- started dreaming of fighting and dying for his or her Islamist goals.

### How confidential is the counselling? Will the Advice Centre inform the security or intelligence services if I contact them?

All calls are treated confidentially. No-one will learn anything about your concerns and the counselling except yourself and us. We will only pass your contact data on to the local counsellors with your consent. The security or intelligence services will not be informed. However, should it emerge in the course of the counselling process that your child, friend or pupil poses a risk to others, we are obliged to inform the security or intelligence services – if you have not already done so yourself. This is the exception and only takes place after all of the signs have been checked very carefully.

### Does the Advice Centre also talk to my child, friend or pupil?

No. Our counsellors are there to help you, the parents, relatives, friends or teachers, not to lose contact with your child, friend or pupil. They show you ways how you can save him or her from the threat of radicalisation. The reason is simple: you already

have a bond of trust with the person. The trust of your child, friend or pupil is the key to bringing them back into the family, group of friends and class community. Even if the contact is not so good at present, or even if it has been broken off completely, it's worthwhile to try and slowly rebuild and strengthen this bridge. The counsellors will support and accompany you in this difficult situation with professional help. But they will not talk to your child, friend or pupil.

#### **Do I have to pay anything for the counselling?**

No, the counselling is free. It doesn't matter how long the counselling process takes or if you want to make use of the support, it will not cost you a thing.

#### **What will happen if I have second thoughts and want to break off the counselling?**

You can break off the counselling at any time. You can also break off and contact the Advice Centre again at a later point in time if you wish.

#### **How long does the counselling take?**

There is no set length of time for counselling. This differs from case to case because every counselling case is different. Sometimes the very first talk can help clear up some important questions and settle any uncertainties. On the other hand, the counselling may last several months.

#### **When can I expect to see the first positive changes in my child, pupil or friend?**

The actual time and kind of change differs from person to person. You will be the first to notice any change as the person of trust. One initial success may be that your child, friend or pupil starts to talk more about him- or herself again, is more outgoing, gets back into contact with old friends. There won't be a sudden change, it is more of a gradual process.

#### **Is the counselling offered in any other language apart from German?**

Yes, we also offer counselling in English, French, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Uzbek and Persian.

#### **Who are the local counsellors?**

The men and women in the local counselling teams have very different training and come from very different backgrounds. They include scholars of Islam, politics and religion as well as social education workers. Irrespective of their individual qualification - all of them have extensive experience in counselling the relatives of radicalised persons. What's more, there are also Muslim counsellors with and without a background of migration at all of the locations.

#### **I am worried that my child, friend or pupil may harm others in the name of his or her religion – what should I do?**

Call us as quickly as possible! Our experts will quickly clarify whether there is an actual risk for others after talking to you.

Markus and Yasemin

Two stories of successful  
counselling

## Looking for support in Salafism

**Markus (19)**, was an outgoing teenager with good grades in school until his parents separated. He takes it badly when his father moves out. Things start to go downhill at school and he has to change from a grammar to a secondary modern school. Religion is an important aspect here for some of his schoolmates. A couple of them persuade him to join them in the mosque as an experiment. Up to then Markus hadn't really thought about faith, but he is impressed by his visit to the mosque. He begins to take an interest in Islam, gathers information on the Internet and starts attending the mosque regularly with his new friends.



When he converts to Islam his mother does not initially suspect anything, until her son's daily habits start to change. Everything now revolves about observing religious rules and studying the Koran. Markus starts talking more and more about the »war« that is being waged against Muslims and about the »unbelievers who want to destroy Islam«. He tries to convince his mother to convert to Islam so that she won't go to hell. She should wear a veil or at least a headscarf. He breaks off all contact with his former childhood friends, preferring to meet only his new »brothers«. After attending a number of seminars under notorious Salafist preachers, Markus says that he wants to break off his almost-completed apprenticeship and start studying the Koran in Egypt.

His mother is becoming increasingly desperate. She can't get through to her son any more in talks. The situation then escalates in May 2012: Markus is amongst the Salafists willing to resort to violence when the right-wing populist splitter party Pro NRW provokes them with anti-Islamic cartoons during a demonstration in Solingen. Following attacks on the police by Salafists, Markus too is taken into custody and his details are taken down.

His mother is shocked. She remembers seeing a TV program about young people becoming radicalised in which the Advice Centre on Radicalisation was mentioned. It costs his mother

a huge effort to make the call. She fears that her son could attract the attention of the authorities even more. In the end she picks up the receiver and tells the person on the other end about the problems at home and in school, about the demo and her fear that her son could harm himself and others. The expert in the Advice Centre on Radicalisation puts her into contact with a local counsellor. A few days later she meets the counsellor for the first time. He and the mother draw up a strategy to keep the conflicts in the family as low-profile as possible and thus strengthen the bond to Markus. They decide to involve one of Markus' old football friends from the neighbourhood who has nothing to do with the Salafist scene.

Whilst the mother tells the boy from the neighbourhood their plan, the counsellor contacts a known Imam. All of the persons involved meet in the local counselling centre. Together with the counsellor they talk about how to convince Markus that he should seek a different path.

Thanks to repeated talks with the counsellor, the mother gradually succeeds in stabilising the situation in the family and establishes a new basis of trust with her son. She asks other families that are affected for tips on the best way to deal with her son. In the meantime, the childhood friend has managed to gradually re-integrate Markus in his old clique that meet

to play football. The counsellor now brings in the Imam who introduces Markus to a tolerant and moderate side of Islam. He manages to convince him to come to his mosque to pray and organises Markus' first pilgrimage to Mecca.

Markus has now broken off contacts to the Salafist scene.





## Embracing radical Islam for one's partner

**Yasemin (19)** comes from a moderate Islam family and wants to study medicine. Her parents came to Germany from Turkey more than 20 years ago and religion is of secondary importance. Yasemin attends a grammar school and her friends think she is liberal and cosmopolitan. But unlike many other girls of her age, she has never had a steady boyfriend up to now and suffers greatly because of this. She has had one or two brief affairs, but all of them fell through.

One of her friends thus advises her to register with an Internet dating agency that is only for Muslims. In her opinion, German boys and men are very superficial and unfaithful and she would only find suitably reliable partners on this website. Yasemin is hesitant at first, but then decides to give it a try. After only a few days she makes contact with a man she finds interesting. They chat regularly via Facebook and a first meeting is arranged.

Her new friend is from West Africa and spends most of the day in an Arabian mosque. Yasemin too starts attending this mosque and finds new friends there. Her new friend soon begins to exercise an influence over Yasemin. He tells her that she should wear a veil and live according to his understanding of Islam.

Yasemin decides in favour of her friend and against her old life. She starts to wear a headscarf at home and a niqab, a veil covering her face, in the mosque. She also plans to marry and move to Egypt with her future husband because he wants to train as an Imam there. Yasemin repeatedly tries to convince her family to practice Islam the way she does so that they do not end up in hell. She meets with a lack of understanding. Her mother in particular cannot understand why her daughter has turned to an, in her opinion, backwards-looking interpretation of Islam.

By chance, Yasemin's mother sees her friend distributing the Koran to passers-by in town. According to reports in the media, this project stems from the Salafist scene. She overhears her daughter's friend arguing that the Sharia is best for Germany and at the same time sanctifying corporal punishment. She decides to contact the Advice Centre on Radicalisation.

The counsellors advise the parents to attend the marriage in Egypt and accompany their daughter. Despite the problems with their new son-in-law, the mother and father do in fact travel to North Africa with their daughter. This contact is good for the daughter. She returns to Germany after the marriage because she can't imagine living in Egypt permanently.



## Further information

### THE INTERNET ADDRESSES OF THE LOCAL COUNSELLING CENTRES

www.exit-deutschland.de → Beratungsstelle Hayat  
 www.vaja-bremen.de → Beratungsnetzwerk kitab  
 www.ifak-bochum.de → Beratungsnetzwerk für Toleranz und Miteinander  
 www.violence-prevention-network.de → Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung

### INFORMATION ON THE TOPIC OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

www.bamf.de/beratungsstelle  
 www.bpb.de  
 www.bmi.bund.de  
 www.initiative-sicherheitspartnerschaft.de  
 www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de  
 www.qantara.de

### RECOMMENDED READING

Aslan, Reza: Kein Gott außer Gott. Der Glaube der Muslime von Muhammad bis zur Gegenwart, München, 2006.

Dantschke, Claudia; Mansour, Ahmad; Müller, Jochen; Serbest, Jasemin:  
 »Ich lebe nur für Allah«, Argumente und Anziehungskraft des Salafismus; Schriftenreihe Zentrum Demokratische Kultur, Berlin, 2011.

Schaap, Fritz: Nur der Satan isst mit links: Ich war undercover in einer Islamistenschule, Freiburg, 2012.

Schmidt, Wolf: Jung, deutsch, Taliban, Berlin, 2012.

### DVD

»Islam, Islamismus & Demokratie«, available from: Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, Alexanderstr. 1, 20099 Hamburg

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