

PARENT ADVICE BRIEFING I

Rebuilding The Divide
Individual Engagement Explained



Email us at:
Info@exithate.org

For information please visit:
www.exithate.com/familysupport



Parent Advice Briefing I

Rebuilding The Divide - Individual Engagement Explained

- 4 Engagement**
- 5 Opening the conversation**
- 8 Topics of conversation**
- 9 Remember to have quality time**
- 11 Activities to avoid**
- 13 A note of encouragement**

Engagement

Rebuilding the divide

Engagement with a loved one involved with a far-right group or ideologies can be incredibly hard. Any attempt to engage can often be met with anger or aggression and the conversation may quickly spiral into an unwanted direction.

I've learnt - as a mother whose son was involved with extremism - how effective these organisations are at creating a divide between families and saw my son change from an inclusive and much-loved member of our family to almost a stranger.

Our communication completely broke down and finding ways to rebuild this divide was an up-hill struggle. This handbook has been put together to offer some tried and tested tips that might help you re-engage with your loved one and advice on what to avoid during this process.

Opening the conversation

Continued engagement and communication with your loved one are crucial, as without this they will continue to slip further into their journey into the far-right.

It is essential the lines of communication with your loved one remain open regardless of how limited or awkward this is. By letting them know you are and continue to be there you are reminding them of the world they are losing outside of the far-right.

We know at Exit Hate how difficult this can be as emotions can go from 0-100 in a matter of seconds. Watching our loved ones go from isolation and silence to angry outbursts is very common, the most important thing you can do is stay as calm as possible.

Below are some tips to keep communication open:

Don't take it personally!

Yes, that easier said than done, but try to remember that often things are said in the heat of the moment that cannot be taken back and words said in anger will justify the narrative that they are being fed by the extremists' groups they belong to. That narrative is that YOU do not know or understand your loved one, that you do not care about YOUR loved one, and that the only place in which YOUR loved one is understood, listened to and belongs is the same groups and organisations that are ultimately destroying all of your lives.

Listen

One of the most important things that you can do is listen to them. I understand how difficult this can be as what they are saying will often be difficult to hear but if you don't listen to them then the organisations that they have aligned themselves with will!! One of the reasons that people become involved in extremism is because they feel like their voice isn't being heard and that is how many of them find themselves involved in these groups and organisations.

Stay calm

Create a calm, quiet and safe environment to have these conversations, avoid having them in public places or around others. This will only add to both of your anxiety. If the situation does become heated, then quickly try to diffuse it, or shut the conversation down and take a break, take some time out, it's ok to stop and revisit things later. If they are shouting at you do not shout back, if they call you names or mock you then avoid retaliating. Simply tell them that you love them and that you want to continue this conversation later.

No name calling

Some of what you hear may have an extreme reaction and you may be tempted to use words to describe what your loved one sounds like. Words like: racist, nazi, bigot or a fascist - this will not help, it also not affective to tell them that their views and/or opinions are ridiculous or wrong. You have no way of knowing what stage of radicalisation your loved is at, and by shutting their opinions down or using negative words to describe these opinions, may push your them further into the arms of the far-right. Remember, the far-right will make your loved one feel heard and will continue to validate their opinions offering no counter arguments, their agenda is to recruit! Keeping a compassionate dialogue open is the only way to bring them back.

Don't agree

It may be tempting when things get heated or intense to agree to connect with or pacify your loved one, this will just justify their actions and opinions. Instead, you can ask them to explain their opinions to you and tell them you are trying to understand why they feel this way. You can acknowledge their emotion and your own and let them know you don't like to see them in pain, hurting or angry. Remember to reiterate that you will always be there to listen to them, and you love them. This very real connection is what you have over the far-right groups or pull, and by reminding them of that you are pulling them back to the real world.

Don't run before you can walk

The far-right will have convinced your loved one they cannot trust you or anyone, so remember your main goal at the start of this journey is to get them to open up, reconnect and remember they can trust you. As tempting as it maybe to offer counter arguments during those first conversations, don't! When bridges have been rebuilt and the time is right, you can begin to offer your loved one some alternative viewpoints and counter narratives. Exit UK can help to guide you through these conversations but for now try to focus on building up trust and strengthening your relationship.

Topics of conversation

- **Keep it light** - When starting conversations avoid topics that may cause tension such as world news and politics. Stick with safe topics such as pop culture, tv shows, hobbies and interests, shared memories of events or holidays.
- **Keep it brief** - Start with keeping conversations short and simple and avoid asking too many personal questions. Many individuals involved in extremism have an almost militant mindset and see personal questions as interrogation.
- **Try to avoid accusations** - Be mindful of how you ask questions. Rather than ask “What have you been doing today?” and “What are your plans this week/end” try “How has your day been?” or “have you any plans this week/end”.
- **Be positive** - Extremism is all about negativity, in order to get your loved one out of that world it's really important that we help them see all the positivity in this world. When you converse with your loved one, always remember to counteract any negatives with a positive. An example of this would be if you are talking about a negative act they may have done in the past, remind them of a positive act that they have done prior or since their involvement.
- **Tell them they are valued** - Ensure that your loved one knows that their opinion within the family counts. If you ask other family members their opinion on everyday things then don't forget to ask that individual too, ask them their opinion on what to have for the evening meal that night, ask them if they want anything picking up what you are out shopping, ask their opinion on décor or even on the next family holiday.

Remember to have quality time

Parenting is hard, it is easy to get bogged down, and sometimes the easiest option to just disengage and let things slide. Sadly, that only feeds that narrative being fed to your loved ones and allows those organisations to tighten their grip. It is important to remind them they are very much a member of the family and that their opinion does matter, it's ok to lighten the mood, it doesn't have to be all talk to talk, try to find some fun again. It's always good to get outside and pull your loved one away from their screen, begin by keeping these interactions relatively short, approximately 1 hour is good and you can look to extend that as time goes on. In the spirit of engagement, it might be good to look at activities that offer some kind of interaction. You could try.

- Cooking
- Shared gym experience
- Other sports
- Bowling
- Bike rides
- Tennis
- Theme parks
- Board games
- Working on a project together within the home
- Cinema, (make sure you do your research on what you plan to watch to avoid triggers)
- Meal out (let them pick if necessary)
- Gardening
- DIY
- The list goes on.....

Active activities such as the ones above will be a great distraction from the controversial environment that you that you are both used to, leaving very little room for the topics that have been causing you so much misery to crop up, and these activities will simply allow you to have fun and to reconnect.



Try to avoid anything that could create tension, or which could lead to controversial topics being brought up followed by anger, disagreements and tension.

Activities to be careful doing

Walking

Can be great, but it can also lead to awkward silences/small talk, so think about this before you try this activity and think about what you would say/talk about.

TV

Long days in front of the TV can be great, but choose the movie or TV show wisely; avoid anything with any type of controversial content. If you watch a movie or show together, keep it light-hearted.

Limit time

Do not immediately choose an activity that requires you to spend a full day together. That will put a lot of pressure on both of you and can be overwhelming. Take things slowly. One hour ever week is not a huge ask, however, make that one hour count and make it as fun and as stress-free as possible.

Don't give up, the first couple of attempts at this may not be an amazing success, if that happens don't get disheartened, try again the following week, and try a different activity. Once you have been able to spend a little time together with success then you can look build on that, the following week choose a longer activity.

BE REALISTIC

The journey out of extremism is not easy; however, it is possible. It will be a bumpy road with lots of ups and downs. You will need to be strong and determined to keep fighting.

Exit Hate will be here to support you, and our advice, as parents who have shared your experience, is to concentrate on the positives and little wins. Once you start seeing glimpses of the loved one that you know, and love, keep that in mind, and I can assure you change will happen. Reward your loved one for those glimpses, tell them how much you enjoyed spending time with them, and how much fun you had. A thank you can go a long way.

The thought of a day out may at this point fill you with dread, we know that feeling from our own personal experiences. Remember when you hit a rocky patch if you have a difficult day and things get volatile.

A Note of Encouragement

Some of you reading this may think that this is just pandering to their behaviours, however it is much more complex than that, what you are doing is reminding your loved one that they are a much loved, valued, and integral part of the family and you are giving your loved one a safe space to express themselves away from danger and harm.

As we have discussed previously the organisations that they have aligned themselves with may have manipulated your loved one into believing that you are the enemy, that you cannot be trusted. They have convinced them that you, the person that loves and nurtures them simply does not care about them anymore.

That is why we do this. We need to ensure that our loved ones always know that although we don't agree with their opinions, that we still love them and that we are always here for them.

All of this takes time, effort and determination to knock down those walls that your loved one has put up, but just start with one brick at a time, if I can do this, then so can you.

I can assure you wholeheartedly the fight is worth it, although it wasn't easy, I am so glad that I never gave up because today I have my precious son back and you can get YOUR precious loved ones back too.

Sarah
Exit Support Worker & mom of a son who left the far-right.

PARENT ADVICE BRIEFING I

Rebuilding The Divide
Individual Engagement Explained

