

## Violent Extremism and American Youth

Violent extremists of all kinds from around the world are actively attempting to radicalize and mobilize the youth of America.

It's an increasingly serious threat. Many violent extremists today are specifically targeting American teens, especially those who feel isolated or are looking for attention, adventure, or meaning in life. The recruiting pitches are misleading and manipulative, often making radical causes sound glamorous and honorable. Some violent extremists even falsely promise teens romance and a better life. Much of the communication takes place secretly over the Internet, via social media, and on mobile apps—far from the eyes of parents and other adults.

An alarming number of teens are falling prey to these messages and leaving their families, usually without warning. Some are helping to plot or carry out attacks on U.S. interests. Many young people are being lured overseas, where they often are abused, injured, or even killed.

## How This Website Can Help

The FBI plays a leading role in working to prevent terrorist attacks on our homeland and in educating local communities on the impact of violent extremism. As part of these efforts, the FBI developed the **Don't Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism** website to help keep teens from being radicalized and recruited.

This site does not refute violent extremist philosophies point by point or explore matters of faith. Instead, it exposes the destructive reality of violent extremism—its various fringe ideologies, deceptive recruiting strategies, and devastating impacts—so teens are more aware and better informed.

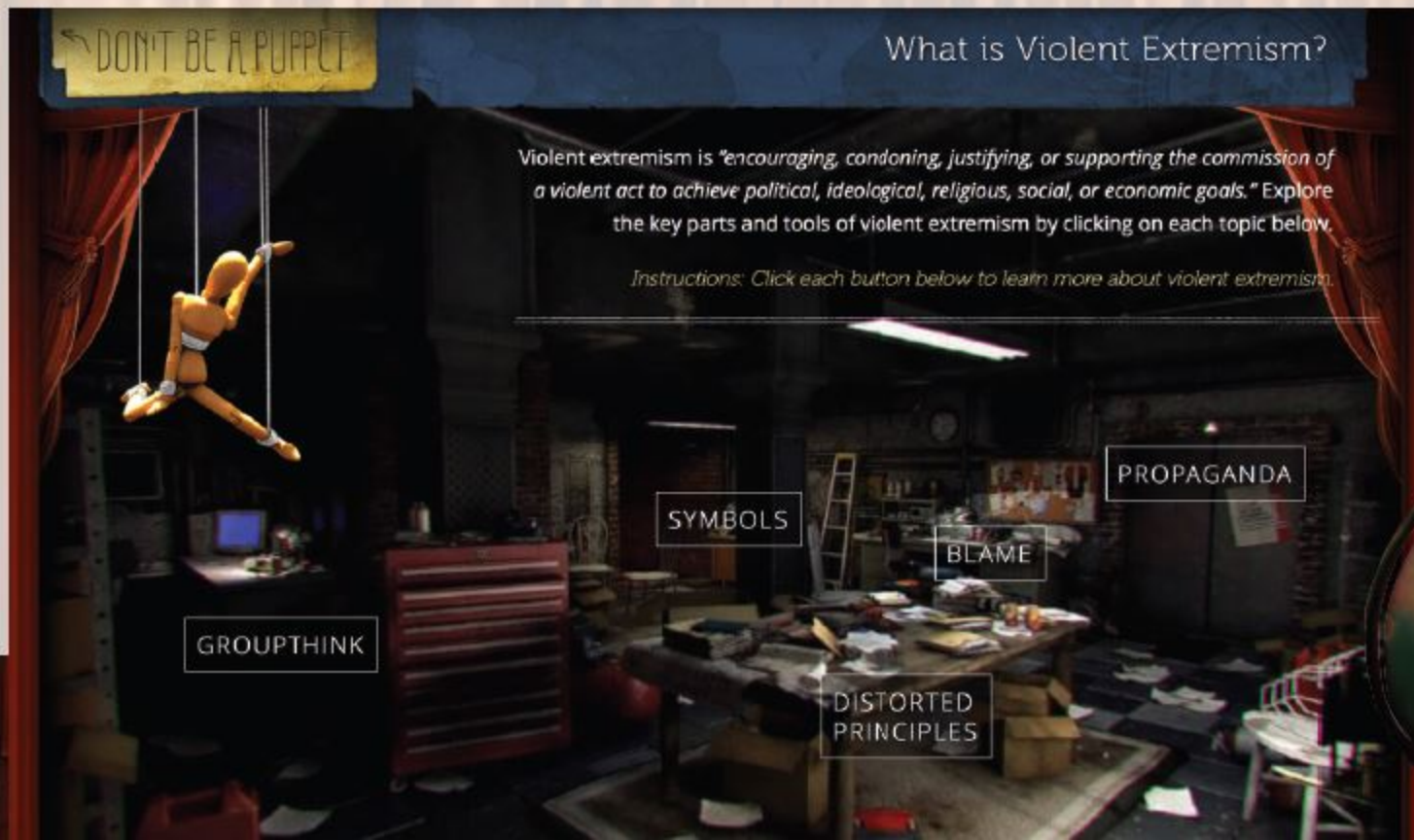
### Why Do People Become Violent Extremists?

No single reason explains why people become violent extremists, but it often happens when someone is trying to fill a deep personal need. For example, a person may feel alone or lack meaning and purpose in life. Those who are emotionally upset after a stressful event, also may be vulnerable to recruitment. Some people also become violent extremists because they disagree with government policy, hate certain types of people, don't feel valued or appreciated by society, or think they have limited chances to succeed.



The site's theme—**Don't Be a Puppet**—encourages teens not to blindly accept the views of violent extremists but to think for themselves, ask hard questions, and critically evaluate the extremist messaging

they come across on the Internet and elsewhere. The site emphasizes that by buying into such radical beliefs, young people are essentially becoming the "puppets" of those who simply want them to carry out their orders, which often includes killing innocent people.





## How the Site Works

The website is divided into five main sections, each with several activities and elements:

- 1) What is Violent Extremism?
- 2) Why Do People Become Violent Extremists?
- 3) What are Known Violent Extremists Groups?
- 4) How Do Violent Extremists Make Contact?
- 5) Who Do Violent Extremists Affect?

A sixth section—Where to Get Help—explains when to report suspicious behavior and offers conflict resolution tips.

The **Don't Be a Puppet** website uses interactive elements such as quizzes and videos to encourage learning. It automatically shows when each area or section has been completed. The site enables each participant to print a certificate of completion after finishing the program.

Built by the FBI in consultation with community leaders and other partners, this standalone program can be used as a resource by civic groups, parents, teachers, and others to raise awareness of violent extremism and its growing impact on our country.



Violent extremism is defined by the FBI as *"encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals."*

The **Don't Be a Puppet** website was developed by the FBI Office of Public Affairs and the Countering Violent Extremism Program in the FBI Office of Partner Engagement as part of their continuing efforts to educate and inform the public and to prevent crime and terrorism. A number of community leaders, law enforcement officials, and other public and private partners from across the U.S. evaluated the site and provided valuable feedback. The site was also reviewed by a focus group of high school teens.

No registration is required to use this website. The site does not accept or store any names or other personally identifiable information.



Scan this QR code with your smartphone app or visit <https://cve.fbi.gov>.

For additional information on violent extremism or on how to strengthen resistance to it in your community, contact your local FBI field office.



**FBI Office of Public Affairs**  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20535

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# Don't Be a Puppet

Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism



A free, Internet-based educational program for teens

<https://cve.fbi.gov>



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