

EX POST PAPER

Police, families and family workers

How to foster closer engagement with families and family workers, and why

Cooperating with families and family workers can help police lower the level of radicalisation and recruitment. It is crime prevention work reducing the growth of extremist milieus and encouraging more people to exit extremist groups.

Establishing this interaction is not always easy, but it is doable. In October 2017, several affected family members and a large group of excellent family workers met with police experts to see how the cooperation can work.

The results are presented in this document, with the aim of inspiring police to invest in their relationship with families and family workers.

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The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the RAN Centre of Excellence, the European Commission or any other institution, or of participants of the RAN POL working group.

Introduction

Families and family workers or other social workers are natural partners in crime prevention. This also applies to the prevention of the illegal acts of radicalisation and recruitment for terrorism and violent extremism. Families, family workers and police all want a safe society, and all want to prevent our sons and daughters from ending up in serious trouble.

This document is intended for police looking to benefit from better cooperation with families and family workers. It presents aspects and characteristics of family work that are of particular relevance to a police audience: the quintessence of cooperation with a partner lies in mutual understanding.

The paper is divided into the following sections:

1. Families
2. Family work
3. What family workers can offer police
4. The police perspective
5. Room for improvement: crucial don'ts
6. Room for improvement: crucial do's
7. An opportunity to be seized

It is based on information gathered at the RAN Police and Law Enforcement (POL) working group meeting in Lisbon on 11-12 October 2017. RAN POL would like to express its gratitude to the affected family members and family workers who shared their personal experience and professional insight at this event.

Families

Families feature prominently in many policy documents and RAN papers. The reason why is set out in an ex post paper of the RAN working group on Youth, Families and Communities (YF&C):

“many believe that one of the keys to stop (...) radicalisation processes at an early stage lies behind the front doors of family homes”¹

RAN uses the term ‘family’ in a broad sense, to include not only parents and their children, but also be *other significant relatives*, such as an uncle or aunt.

Some families are a source of radicalisation, with parents raising their children by indoctrinating them with an extremist ideology. Other families, in contrast, are victims of radicalisation, confronted with the fact that it is taking hold a child or a sibling..

Families in the latter situation are potential partners in prevention. They are likely to welcome help in ‘safeguarding’ the radicalised family member from further radicalisation, or to possibly even support the deradicalisation.

Prevention, traumatic events, the return and hopefully resocialisation of a son or a daughter – some families are able to deal with these challenges on their own. Others need support from family workers. Convincing families to cooperate with police and authorities and getting them to do the right thing can, however, be a challenge.

¹ See the two papers on the RAN website: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf)

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/an-papers/docs/ran_ex-post_paper_family_support_29-30_september_manchester_en.pdf, p 1.

Family members may be the ones alerting the authorities about clear and present danger. However, several cases detailed in Lisbon showed that it can be difficult for family members to grasp what is going on.

One potential reason to engage with a family could be a person of interest, or even someone on the path of radicalisation, before the criminal phase or beyond.

Another possible reason could be that there are siblings or others in the family system who are vulnerable and run the risk of being radicalised.

Key words

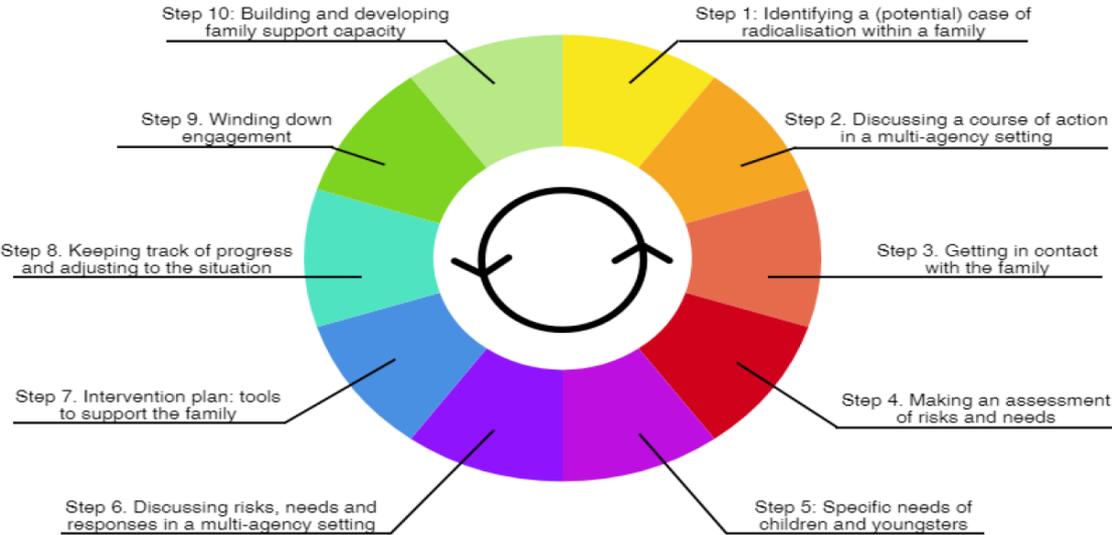
- *Family*: a group of people affiliated either by consanguinity (by recognised birth),

affinity (by marriage or another relationship), co-residence, or some combination of these

- *Sibling*: a brother or sister who should be safeguarded from the risk of being radicalised or recruited
- *Family worker*: a professional, sometimes volunteer, who supports the family or some of the family members to strengthen their resilience and deal with the risks of radicalisation
- *Resilience*: the capability of individuals, families, groups and communities to understand and creatively draw upon their internal and external strengths, resulting in effective coping with challenges and significant adversity in ways that promote health, wellness and an increased ability to respond constructively to future adversity²

Family work

The vast experience of the family workers involved in the RAN YF&C and the RAN Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC) working groups enabled the RAN Centre of Excellence to produce a step-by-step guidance paper for practitioners and policy-makers entitled ‘Working with families and safeguarding children from radicalisation’.³



² <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we->

[do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf)

Key principles forming the foundations of the step-by-step approach

In the YF&C guidance paper, the family support experts set out the key principles listed below. These paragraphs provide police with insights into family work *from a family worker perspective*.

Families

- Families are at the core of any individual's resilience. There is ample research showing the influence of the family environment, upbringing and the amount of love, care and attention received on someone's resilience to negative temptations, such as joining extremist groups.
- Family members should be seen as partners in signalling, preventing and protecting individuals at risk of radicalisation, and contributing to the safety and security of society.

Family support

- The objective of family work should be to engage, build trust and form relationships over a longer period of time. This might not only influence the direct family situation in a positive way, it can also open the door to the person at risk as well as the wider community.
- It is important to take a systemic approach to the family, to look at families as a whole and the dynamics between family members. Solely focussing on the individual at risk or one of the family members is often not enough to understand the influences and pressures that exist and form one's behaviour. The social environment or community of the family also affect attitudes and behaviour. Even though the aim of counselling is to support an individual at risk, understanding the wider family and community context is crucial to do so.

- To deliver effective family support, a cooperative attitude from at least part of the family is crucial. If a family does not want to cooperate or receive support, it will be very challenging to work on the often sensitive and challenging issues of radicalisation. Forcing support on a family is very challenging and sometimes even counter-productive. For this reason, there are some cases in which the family will not be the connecting factor, and other network connections should be used to reach the individual at risk.
- Use an acceptance-based approach, at the least to start engagement. The core of the acceptance-based approach is that a family worker does not denounce or reject the perspective and attitude of a family and/or individual at risk, but uses this as a starting point for engagement. By building a trust-based relationship, it is possible to slowly help the family and individual at risk to change their attitudes and beliefs. The focus therefore is more on building relationships.
- Take the responses of family members seriously, if only because of prevention reasons. This can include family members stating that their daughter is converting, or saying they have news that their child has already died (even if there is no physical evidence, such as a body or death certificate).

Security

- An emphasis on security, in combination with general distrust among certain families and communities towards the authorities, may create a negative spiral of distrust. From the safeguarding perspective, there must be an emphasis on understanding problems, but also on the needs families have to

overcome these problems. The objective should be to help the family develop long-term resilience to radicalisation, not just to defuse the situation at hand.

- In addition, there is an emphasis on transparency towards the family instead of secrecy and working with the family instead of working on the case without their involvement.
- It should be underlined that the involvement of police and intelligence service is necessary and important. However, the coordination and cooperation between them and organisations or professionals focused on prevention and the family's well-being is equally important.

The insights above were put forward by excellent family work experts assembled in the RAN YF&C working group. However, it would make sense for police to start a conversation with family workers in their specific context and area to explore how local practitioners see family work.

What family workers can offer police

Every coordination or cooperation initiative requires energy and effort. So, why cooperate with family workers and families?

Here's what police can gain.

- Another professional perspective on the subject and the family, adding to a holistic approach.
- Understanding of how the specific family works – or doesn't.

- Access to a professional close to the family and the current situation.
- A spokesperson for the family — or, conversely, the police". A shoulder to cry on. Many family workers are highly empathetic team players.
- Someone who can handle damage control and help the family build resilience to overcome adversity and traumatic events.
- A champion for dialogue. Family workers can coach families willing to build relations with police and other actors.

The police perspective

Family workers have a main task in boosting resilience. These results are relevant for crime prevention and for the preventative priorities of the police. This prevention work ties in with a key objective pursued by the police, which does, however, have a wider role. Police and other law enforcement have a responsibility to protect society. In line with this responsibility, they may need to investigate and pursue individuals, which could lead to house searches and the arrest of family members. These potentially traumatic events, which are often unavoidable, can 'wound' a family.

The security responsibility implies a need for secrecy and pressure on multi-agency partners to provide crucial intelligence that can be obtained through contacts with the family.

An earlier RAN POL meeting had explored ways for police to overcome potential pitfalls in their cooperation with other partners. The findings were presented in the ex post paper 'The role for police officers in multi-agency working and information sharing'⁴

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we->

[do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-)

RAN POL formulated 10 tips for multi-agency work. This advice might help to enhance the cooperation with family workers.

1. Work on trust; it takes time.
2. Take note of information-sharing legislation, try to get it improved, arrange a proper privacy protocol and make sure everyone understands the legislation.
3. Define what you are doing: make sure everyone understands the steps, work processes, responsibilities and contributions.
4. Get support from all levels and arrange for sufficient resources and manpower.
5. Start at local level, between professionals.
6. Start with a small cooperation: professionals from the key organisations.
7. Organise joint training programmes.
8. Organise additional expertise that can help the multi-agency cooperation fill in the expertise gaps.
9. Make the effort to explain why you need the information or cooperation.
10. Be humble as police; all partners are equal. If you want something from partners, approach them for their qualities and contribution and give them credit for these.

Room for improvement: crucial don'ts

Don't be rough on traumatised parents

As we know, many parents of radicalised children don't support extremist ideologies, and they may feel bereft of a loved one. The RAN POL expert working group heard how communication by police officers can create a secondary trauma on top of the existing trauma of a child joining a terrorist group or being arrested or convicted.

Don't alienate families when conducting house searches

The experiences shared at the Lisbon meeting included details of house searches where mothers with young children were not properly looked after. In addition to the fact that these innocent citizens were entitled to better treatment, this type of handling could also lead to a growing disaffection with the police and the authorities, or even cause strong feelings of grievances and hostility. Traumatic events such as these could produce potential long-term effects on children.

Don't compromise the family worker

Family workers interact on a trust basis with families that may not have much faith in the system. Lack of protocols and acting in a way that jeopardises the vulnerable position of family workers backfires in the cooperation.

Room for improvement: crucial do's

Raise the awareness of family workers and call upon their professional capacities

Sometimes family workers and social workers underestimate the urgency of the need to work on prevention of radicalisation and countering violent extremism. This phenomenon has to do with framing and language, and with a lack of expertise. In both domains, police can improve the situation. Organise awareness raising activities and invite 'white ravens', family workers who understand the risks and responsibilities of radicalisation and recruitment in and can present them in terms that resonate with family workers and are relevant to their professional interests.

Make prevention a police business

If, within the police, prevention of radicalisation is not seen as important and even necessary, this lack of awareness erodes the support and culture that are needed for teaming up with family workers.

Invite a parent who 'lost' a child to radicalisation

For police it might help to invite a parent who lost a child to extremist recruiters. Or to show videos of parents who are crying for help and offering assistance with prevention, as a way to spare other parents the grief of losing a child. These touching stories will help viewers to recognise parents as victims and potential partners.

Allow police to be human too

One of the most heartfelt pieces of advice from the family workers to the police was: "Be human. Show that you care." Police officers who engage with families and family workers will help the police the most if they, by selection and training, are better in showing empathy and building a personal connection. Parents who have lost a son or daughter are in pain. Witnessing an arrest and house search at 5 in the morning is a traumatic experience for brothers, sisters and parents. Police engaging with these family members should understand this and act accordingly to avoid secondary trauma.

In doing so, they improve the chance of establishing a relation with the family that could facilitate investigations and help to build individual and family resilience that might protect vulnerable family members from radicalisation and recruitment.

Consider the family as a whole

There are more people of interest than the suspect. This is the expertise of the family workers.

Try to separate investigation from family support

Police could work with dedicated family officers who are not part of the investigation team. This approach creates safe opportunities for conversation about non-criminal information.

Show that you are trying to help the family

Police with the ambition to be seen as a partner for families and family workers should communicate in words and actions that they care about the wellbeing of the family, and show that they recognise the family's needs. Family experts stressed the importance of police not simply saying 'no' to requests, but attempting to pull some strings to improve the situation of the family. Show that you tried, and that you looked for help outside the police.

Encourage benchmarking, standardisation and protocols

Pointers on the best way to organise the cooperation between police and family workers would be helpful. At the moment, the success of their cooperation on specific cases is often far too reliant on the individuals involved, and on their interpretation of the best way to interact and communicate. Of course all cases are unique, with their own dynamics and context, but the cooperation between family workers and police is a professional one and should be backed by suitable methodology.

Share information – failure to do so is failure to help a colleague

Many police officers and many family workers complain about the lack of information sharing between police and family workers. This might improve if the other is seen as a colleague you are cooperating with. This was one of the lessons from the close-knit multi-agency cooperation within the Mental Health Hubs in the UK. And in the end, by not sharing information with colleagues, you are not

helping the family. Working in the same room could help.

Establish clear protocols and points of contact within the police

Family workers who want to cooperate and coordinate with the police are sometimes left in the dark about procedures, protocols and the right police officers to communicate with. This hampers the family workers willing to cooperate with police.

Invest in multicultural craftsmanship for police

Police engaging with families from minority backgrounds should receive at least basic training on cultures, personal biases and communication styles.

Invest in joint training

Training programmes offer excellent opportunities to invest in mutual understanding and foster trust between police and family workers. Exercises such as swapping roles and working together on fictional cases are beneficial, as are facilitated discussions where police and family workers express why they operate in a specific way. The training should be fun and inspiring to release positive energy for cooperation.

An opportunity to be seized, by police

If the cooperation and the culture of cooperation with family workers are not good enough....

or the responsibilities, possibilities and limitations of the police are not sufficiently clear to the family worker...

... then the police should strive to improve the situation.

This can be done by the management, or by tasking officers to invest in the cooperation from the ground up. Inviting a neutral, well-accepted third party to facilitate could help. The local mayor might, for example, be able to encourage closer cooperation. What you need is a narrative, a perspective on the situation that resonates with the professional interests of both police and family workers.