

Three steps to talking to a loved one at risk of being radicalized into rioting

August 15 2024, by Anthony English



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

For some, the shocking scenes of violence which have erupted across

dozens of locations in England and Northern Ireland will evoke an all-too-real concern—could someone close to me get involved in the violence?

Alongside those directly affected by the act of rioting itself, there are another set of people who will suffer the consequences—the families of those arrested and imprisoned. It's becoming clear that whatever "call to arms" was sent out in recent weeks, it was picked up not just by hardcore far-right agitators but by people of [all ages](#) who got pulled into the idea that rioting is a principled act with the highest of stakes.

So what can you do if you are concerned someone close to you (of any age) may be vulnerable to participating in future riots?

A starting point might be to recognize that we all have the capacity to engage with narratives that could be considered to be politically extreme, particularly when they are expertly targeted. This is the premise of [research](#) I'm conducting with colleagues which aims to track, attune and limit the spread of extremism. To do so, we've had to articulate the concept of "[everyday extremism](#)" to acknowledge that extreme narratives derived from non-mainstream sources can become a part of [mainstream political discourse](#) via social media. Such discourse typically involves symbolic violence against a person or group which has the potential to escalate into real-world harm, if encouraged.

In the case of the Southport knife attack that became the trigger for the unrest, the initial legal restrictions around publicly releasing the identity of the suspect (due to his age) created a void which was swiftly filled with a wildfire of far-right disinformation. Before it was made clear that the person in custody was a British citizen, anti-immigrant and racist accusations, and a false name that implied he was Muslim, were already on social media. This disinformation spread quickly, moving from online to offline, mobilizing people's anger.

One approach to adopt when engaging with someone expressing [extreme views](#) is to focus on three steps, asking three questions: why do they feel this way? Where are they getting their information? What do they plan to do next?

Framing your interactions around these three elements could help sustain a dialogue and foster understanding with someone holding political views that contrast with your own. This approach may be useful in times of civil unrest, when tensions are high and mutual understanding is in short supply.

Step 1: Why do they feel this way?

In attempting to create a dialogue with someone who feels they need to "make a stand" based on disinformation, the first task is a seemingly simple one—you have to listen to the reasons why.

Does their "why" involve an "us vs. them" narrative regarding migrants or refugees? Are they, as is typical in far-right circles, evoking a "protection" narrative in which they must defend women and children?

Whatever the reasons, the purpose of asking and listening is to create a space in which both parties know that oppositional thinking is not a reason to stop the dialogue, but the starting point. You might not like any of the answers you receive during this stage of the discussion, but that isn't the point. Here, the whole goal is to open the conversation.

2. Where are they getting their information?

Given what we know so far about how the riots started, there seems to be disinformation at play from far-right online sources which spread to [mainstream social media](#). Therefore, exploring where the information is

from and how the events are being framed may be insightful.

Does the information promote the idea that "Englishness" is under threat? Does the content encourage the reader that this source is the only trustworthy information? Online narratives which focus on highlighting the threat and emphasizing the reliability of the source are often prevalent with this type of disinformation.

Consider with your loved one what someone has to gain by encouraging them to take to the streets or inciting violence online—who is doing it and to what ends?

3. What do they plan to do next?

Finally, play forward the next steps with your loved one. Engage them in a conversation about the possible outcomes that might arise from their participation in a given event, such as what they might describe as a protest. Base this exchange on the information you found in the first two steps about their reasoning and the source of their information.

Ask how far they'd be prepared to go for the cause they are passionate about. Talk about the potential costs of attending an event which turns violent—be that damage to the local community or even the loss of freedom.

So far, more than 1,000 people have been arrested over the recent riots, and nearly 600 have been charged. Although not universal, there are now examples of [remorse](#) and [regret](#) from those involved. This offers the opportunity to show them the potential costs and consequences of becoming involved.

Of course, there are no easy solutions, but the key with these steps (why, where and what next?) is to listen and explore whether someone might

be open to the potential for dialogue and understanding to emerge.

We can't control other people's actions, but we can create the space for someone with intentions to participate in events that have the potential to turn into riots to move away from the maelstrom of online propaganda just long enough to allow the flame to burn out.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Three steps to talking to a loved one at risk of being radicalized into rioting (2024, August 15) retrieved 15 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-radicalized-rioting.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--