



Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar when it comes to the FBI

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A little over a month ago, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released a document on “Preventing Violent Extremism in Schools” by way of its Office of Partner Engagement. The 28–page document does a good job of discussing how terrorist groups like ISIS are targeting recruitment efforts at high school kids. More importantly, the document proposes solutions to prevent such recruitment and to help kids on the radicalization pathway off–ramps back to society. You can read the [document yourself here](http://www.mcsheriffs.com/pdf/news/cve_schools_final_jan2016.pdf) (http://www.mcsheriffs.com/pdf/news/cve_schools_final_jan2016.pdf).



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Washington_DC_FBI_J_Edgar_Hoover_Building_Brunswyk_2012_Edgar_Hoover_Building_Brunswyk_2012_retouched-e1457707486824.jpg)

FBI, Washington DC. Open Source.

It is a known fact that teenagers [have headed](http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/22/us/colorado-teens-syria-odyssey/) (<http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/22/us/colorado-teens-syria-odyssey/>) or [tried to head](http://abcnews.go.com/International/feds-american-teens-join-jihad-words/story?id=26663882) (<http://abcnews.go.com/International/feds-american-teens-join-jihad-words/story?id=26663882>) back to the Middle East and Africa after being radicalized via the Internet. Unfortunately, some people have selectively quoted the document to scare people into believing that the [“FBI has quietly starting spying on US school children to quash dissent at an early age.](http://thefreethoughtproject.com/fbis-program-quash-dissent-starting-high-school/) (<http://thefreethoughtproject.com/fbis-program-quash-dissent-starting-high-school/>)” Needless to say, these false claims have caught fire on talk radio. The FBI is most certainly not spying on high school kids, nor is it trying to trample the First Amendment. It is merely trying to prevent vulnerable kids from getting caught up in radical and violent extremism before it is too late.

As the FBI notes:

Youth are embracing many forms of violent extremism; those perpetrated by terrorist organizations or other domestic violent extremist movements, to those maintaining biases towards others due to their race, religion, or sexual orientation. Youth aged 13 – 18 are actively engaged in extremist

activities including online communication with known extremists, traveling to conflict zones, conducting recruitment activities, or supporting plotting against US targets. These factors signify the potential for increased risk within our schools and local communities. ...

As this threat evolves and more youth embrace extremist ideologies, it places a growing burden on our educational system to provide appropriate services to students who view hatred or targeted violence as acceptable outlets for their grievances. To complicate matters, youth possess inherent risk factors making them susceptible to violent extremist ideologies or possible recruitment. A current body of research on developmental behaviors, which is discussed later in this guide, suggests that a youth's risk factors and stressors, if not properly addressed through personal actions or third-party intervention, can lead to negative outcomes in the form of suicide or violence against others.

The document “serves as a guide to educate school personnel about at-risk behaviors and activities that assist students with reducing social and psychological commitment to violence as a method of resolving a grievance” as “educators are in a unique position to affect change, impart affirmative messaging, or facilitate intervention activities due to their daily interactions with students. These interactions allow for observing and assessing concerning behaviors and communications—students embracing extremist ideologies and progressing on a trajectory toward violence.”

The FBI even expressly acknowledges that “[l]aw enforcement cannot arrest its way out of violent extremism. Countering violent extremism is a shared responsibility between law enforcement, civic leaders, and their communities.” As a result:

The FBI encourages schools and their local communities to lead interventions of at-risk youth, unless the subject is mobilizing to violence. Interventions and corresponding action plans may consist of threat assessments, safety plans, progress updates, and re-assessments of the student. For a comprehensive intervention for an at-risk youth, schools should consider utilizing school administrators, faculty, counselors, and representatives from state/local law enforcement or school resource officers to staff your intervention teams.

Schools may be reluctant to contact law enforcement on a student exhibiting concerning behaviors or communications. In these instances, schools should leverage community resources to alert them to these behaviors and communications, commencing the disengagement process. (emphasis added).

The FBI doesn't want to be inundated by high schools “reporting” on America's kids; rather, it wants to help communities learn how to identify the pathways to radicalization so those communities can reach out to kids caught up in the process and get them the help they need to turn away from radicalism. As a conservative, I am as weary of government programs as the next guy, but sometimes our tendency to suspect every government action is nefarious undermines smart programs created with the best intentions. As Sigmund Freud might say, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/sometimes-a-cigar-is-just-a-cigar-when-it-comes-to-the-fbi/>