



# Mentorship programmes and approaches in P/CVE

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe necessary elements to consider when developing mentorship programmes aimed at the rehabilitation and reintegration of (former) violent extremists into European societies, which are based on a liberal democratic order.

Rehabilitation indicates a *process*, after which people are able to lead a self-determined and self-sustaining life in a democratic society, and no longer act in ways that could pose a risk to themselves or society (1).

Approaches defined as ‘mentoring’ have become increasingly prevalent in programmes aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Some mentoring programmes are designed to build community resilience by introducing peer mentoring schemes to prevent young people from joining (violent) extremist organisations by offering guidance on different aspects of stabilisation. Other initiatives address inmates convicted of terrorism-related offences or assessed to be vulnerable to radicalisation, centred on the mentor supporting the inmate’s development of motivation to opt for a lifestyle free of crime in non-criminal and non-extremist environments. And yet other approaches engage former extremists as mentors to support mentees in an exit, rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Mentoring has thus become a common label used across interventions, but often referring to different approaches, aims and target audiences. Moreover, the terms ‘role models’, ‘counselling’ and ‘mentorship’ are often juxtaposed as there is a lack of clear delineation between the terms and the boundaries between these different approaches are often blurred.

Against this backdrop, this paper investigates aspects that are important to consider when developing mentorship programmes for rehabilitative purposes, such as:

- What is mentoring within P/CVE and what are the boundaries between mentorship work and other counselling approaches (such as deradicalisation and exit counselling)?
- Which beneficiaries are suitable for mentorship approaches?
- What are the criteria for selecting mentors and what skills should they possess?
- How to match mentor and mentees? What factors/criteria may lead to positive results?
- What thematic areas should mentors/mentees be involved in?
- How can mentorship programmes be integrated within existing rehabilitation strategies and other counselling work?
- What potential pitfalls and challenges have to be taken into account?

This paper offers some answers on mentorship as an approach within P/CVE. It describes some of the necessary aspects to consider to support practitioners either working within mentoring or aspiring to develop a mentorship-based programme targeting (violent) extremists of various ideological orientations and affiliations. In addition, some key pitfalls and challenges that have to be taken into consideration when developing a programme will be discussed.

The paper presents three case examples aimed at secondary and tertiary levels. The first one is the Danish approach, also called the Aarhus model, which aims at secondary and tertiary levels. It illustrates a model where mentorship is integrated in and benefits from the public welfare system. The second case is the Swedish NGO EXIT aimed at the tertiary level. It illustrates an NGO-driven exit programme using formers as mentors and exemplifying some of the external partners to consider for cooperation when being NGO-based. Finally, the third case is a Kenyan programme aimed at the secondary level. The programme introduces an approach where mentors/mentees meet one-on-one and in groups. The group’s meetings are part of the intervention as it aims to create an alternative network for youngsters to identify with, as a preventive measure in a setting where the presence of and recruitment to gangs and VE groups is widespread. Besides,

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(1) Walkenhorst et al., Rehabilitation Manual – Rehabilitation of radicalised and terrorist offenders for first-line practitioners. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/rehabilitation-manual-rehabilitation-radicalised-and-terrorist-offenders-first-line-practitioners\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/rehabilitation-manual-rehabilitation-radicalised-and-terrorist-offenders-first-line-practitioners_en)

the programme is entirely based on cooperation with local partners. These programmes present different aims and ways of organising a mentorship programme. While the programmes are different in many ways, they also share many similarities regarding perspectives and approaches to mentoring thereby exemplifying important aspects to be included in a programme.

The paper starts by identifying what constitutes mentorship and some of the aspects that set mentorship apart from role models and professional counselling. The following section provides examples of mentorship programmes aimed at secondary and tertiary prevention and rehabilitation of (violent) extremism. The subsequent section identifies some of the key characteristics of mentoring initiatives, which are illustrated in the examples to respond to the questions outlined above.

Practical guidance on how to set up tailored mentorship approaches will also be provided, followed by a conclusive suggestion for some of the risks, challenges and pitfalls to consider when developing mentorship programmes in P/CVE. In addition to this, recommendations on key issues are presented in the last section, which are crucial to consider when initiating a programme in this field.

## What constitutes mentoring approaches in P/CVE

Mentoring in the context of P/CVE aims at supporting individuals *after* they have left the extremist environment. For many people leaving extremist environments, the phase after the exit is the most demanding part of the overarching rehabilitation process. This is because individuals must establish a new social network and develop a new identity that integrates both their new and prior identities and life story. Most importantly, they need to learn how to act in ways alternative to their past behaviour so as to be able to (re-)integrate into a liberal democratic society <sup>(2)</sup>. Therefore, an essential part of rehabilitation support through mentoring work is linked to motivating and supporting the mentees in developing alternative and potentially additional social and professional skills <sup>(3)</sup>.

Mentorship in P/CVE is often introduced as a strategy aimed at encouraging the mentee's personal transformation and empowerment in both reflective and non-reflective ways <sup>(4)</sup>. For mentoring to make sense, it is essential that the mentee's identity, behaviour and perspective are perceived as an outcome of the lifestyle they acquired from being involved in (violent) extremist environments with values at odds with democratic society. From this perspective, a person's identity and their acts and norms need to be understood as conditioned by the environment they are/were engaged in and not as outcomes of them "having a bad personality" or because they are "bad human beings" <sup>(5)</sup>.

The very core of mentoring is therefore based on the assumption that mentees can develop alternative ways of acting in and perceiving the world when they receive support from non-judgemental mentors with whom they have a trustful relationship. In many cases, mentoring therefore aims to challenge the mentees' old perspectives on life and introduces them to new ways of acting and meaningful ways of engaging with society <sup>(6)</sup>.

Mentoring is thus centred around a learning process in which mentors set examples both in dialogue and in actions, which the mentees can be inspired by and learn from. This implies that mentors model behaviour and cognition with the aim of influencing the mentees on their path to a more nuanced perspective on the world and to support their transformation <sup>(7)</sup>.

Mentoring involves guidance based on their individual needs and challenges.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation – Disengagement from the extremist right. A case study from Sweden, p. 16.

<sup>(3)</sup> Marsden, Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance; Maruna, Desistance from Crime and Explanatory Style: A New Direction in the Psychology of Reform.

<sup>(4)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation, p. 65; Christensen, "I had never reached those Nazi guys without their help"; Bertelsen, Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation. LGT: A Systematic Assessment, Intervention and Supervision Tool in Mentoring.

<sup>(5)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(6)</sup> Bertelsen, Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation.

<sup>(7)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation, p. 221.

Mentoring is commonly based on dialogue and the mentors' and mentees' joint engagement in common activities, through the combination of which the mentees learn additional relational, behavioural and cognitive skills <sup>(8)</sup>.

Even though mentors are often referred to as “role models”, they are much more than that, because they have a much clearer aim in mind and strategically work towards fulfilling it, also based on structured training and support by a programme. This is not the case with a pure role model approach, which mainly utilises the personal story or life experience of the role model to inspire others in potentially positive as well as negative ways. Support provided by mentors is thus more formalised as a mentor ought to be supported by an overarching programme and thereby act according to specific, defined aims and a theory of change, which is not usually the case with a mere role model <sup>(9)</sup>.

There are similarities in approaches based on “mentoring” and “counselling” as both terms cover a variety of different approaches. Roughly, it may be possible to differentiate between them in the sense that professional counselling (e.g. psychosocial counselling in rehabilitation) is usually carried out by trained psychosocial practitioners (e.g. pedagogues or social workers) or psychologists and psychological clinicians. The remit of professional counselling is again broader than that of mentors, based on their respective professional training. Counselling can, for example, aim at identifying overarching mental health or social issues and instigate healing and development processes. When counselling is applied in deradicalisation and rehabilitation, the goal is often a comprehensive combination of functional and social reintegration measures (often also through dialogue approaches, in addition to more technical training approaches) as well as, in many instances, work to instigate cognitive distancing away from extremist beliefs and worldviews <sup>(10)</sup>.

## Key Lessons

Rehabilitation support through mentoring aims to motivate and support the mentees develop alternative and additional social and professional skills to be able to navigate and reintegrate into a liberal democratic society by working with a mentor who can act both as a role model and a trained resource to engage in critical dialogue. The following aspects are necessary to keep in mind:

1. Peoples' identity, acts, norms and values are conditioned by the environment they are engaged in, not by them being inherently good or bad.
2. Mentoring aims to challenge the mentees' perspectives on life and introduces them to new, meaningful ways of comprehending and engaging with society.
3. Mentoring is based on mentors and mentees' engagement in common activities, through which the mentees learn — in reflective and non-reflective manners — additional relational, behavioural and cognitive skills, perspectives and thoughts.

<sup>(8)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation; Christensen, Former Right-Wing Extremists' Continued Struggle for Self-transformation After an Exit Program.

<sup>(9)</sup> Christensen, Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship.

<sup>(10)</sup> Walkenhorst et al., Rehabilitation Manual.

## Mentorship and P/CVE

The following section provides three examples of mentoring based on programmes in Denmark, Sweden and Kenya.

### Mentoring within the Aarhus model

#### Context and background

Initially it is important to emphasise that in Denmark different municipalities use different approaches when mentoring is applied to prevent and counter VE. Therefore, the example presented in this section is based on how the municipality of Aarhus, Jutland, shaped and applied a mentoring approach from the onset of 2010 and some years ahead. The Aarhus model as such still exists today although the mentoring approach has changed.

Aarhus Municipality offered mentoring support at secondary and tertiary levels for young people “at risk of radicalisation” and people perceived “as radicalised”. The approach aimed at supporting people to develop a better “grip on life”<sup>(11)</sup> to alter their current life paths<sup>(12)</sup>, but mentoring was not mandatory. The individual could accept or decline the offer of mentoring support<sup>(13)</sup>.

The Aarhus model is linked to the general welfare system and the ordinary approach to crime and crime prevention. VE is approached as ordinary but ideologically motivated crime<sup>(14)</sup>. The approach was informed by the constitutional right to freedom of expression and acknowledges the democratic necessity of political and religious activities. It acknowledges that a legitimate desire for a radical change may grow among individuals, e.g. based on a dissatisfaction with the status quo, legitimate grievances and/or criticisms. Therefore, the Aarhus model only targets individuals who have been identified as “at-risk” of radicalisation or already radicalised as shown by their acceptance, legitimisation and/or promotion of violence to achieve their political or ideological goals<sup>(15)</sup>.

At the secondary level, the programme aimed to prevent further violent radicalisation of at-risk youngsters who did not yet represent any danger or security risk, but who might become dangerous if their radicalisation process continued in a violent direction. In such cases the risk assessment was conducted in cooperation between the police and municipal actors. In contrast, at the tertiary level the approach was directed at the rehabilitation of already radicalised people who had clear intentions and capabilities of committing politically and/or religiously motivated crimes and terrorism. In these cases, risk assessment was carried out by the police, the secret service and the probation service<sup>(16)</sup>.

Risk assessment is an important aspect to ensure safety for both mentor and mentee. Mentees may have sensitive, sometimes even dangerous topics and subjects they wish to address in the process. It is thus crucial for a mentoring process that the mentee feels safe enough to talk about even highly sensitive issues, and that the mentor respects this by, for example, honouring the duty of confidentiality and dealing with these issues in a respectful and caring way<sup>(17)</sup>. Yet, according to Danish law, mentor–mentee confidentiality is overruled by considerations of personal and national security. In case of such security concerns, for example when the mentee spoke about an intent to commit crimes or to their knowledge of planned or committed crimes, the mentor was obliged to report<sup>(18)</sup>. This obligation to report is communicated transparently to the mentees.

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<sup>(11)</sup> Bertelsen, Danish Preventive Measures and De-radicalization Strategies: The Aarhus Model.

<sup>(12)</sup> Aarhus Kommune. (2023). Indsatser for borgere. <https://antiradikalisering.aarhus.dk/indsatser-for-borgere/#5>

<sup>(13)</sup> By a former mentor in Aarhus, Denmark, Mentoring and deradicalisation.

<sup>(14)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(15)</sup> Bertelsen, Danish Preventive Measures.

<sup>(16)</sup> Christensen et al., “Being a Risk” or “Being at Risk”: Factors Shaping Negotiation of Concerns of Radicalization within Multiagency Collaboration in the Nordic Countries.

<sup>(17)</sup> Bertelsen, Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation.

<sup>(18)</sup> Ibid.

## Mentor qualification and selection

Mentors in this approach were employed by the municipality and worked several hours a week as professional mentors even though mentorship was not their main employment. To form a broadly composed group of mentors, who could meet the different profiles and specific individual needs among members of the target group, the mentors were recruited with regard to: Age, gender, ethnic background, formal education and experience. In addition, each of them possessed knowledge of different cultural and social milieus and/or political and religious studies. Some were educated at university, while others had a background as former gang members, but all received training from the programme.

By working with a diverse group of mentors, the model sought to ensure that they were able and qualified to engage in a dialogue and discussions centred on historical, ideological, theological, political and cultural aspects of different ideologies. The mentor and the mentees in this model were a match based on mentors' insight into the specific mentees' ideological affiliations and some degree of shared interests.

## Mentoring approach and aims

The mentoring approach was based on the perception that those at risk of radicalisation and those already radicalised strived to “get a grip” on their own and their common existence — like everybody else. Therefore, the mentor aimed to support the mentees develop their grip on, for example, education, work and life in general by supporting their transformation from an illegal and violent perspective/activity into a legal and non-violent one <sup>(19)</sup>.

Initially, mentors received training developed by professor of psychology Preben Bertelsen from Aarhus University. Bertelsen developed what he calls “life psychology”, which guides mentor training about how to identify risk factors and promote empowerment and resilience according to specific risk factors in each case.

The aim of life psychology was to develop the mentees' agency and grip on their own life to achieve “a life good enough for themselves and each other” <sup>(20)</sup>. The concept of ‘a good enough life’ means that the complexity and level of challenge of the mentees' perspectives, values and acts should be neither too great nor too little in regard to the mentees point of departure <sup>(21)</sup>. This means that any individual needs to *comprehend* and *manage* the challenges life presents in a *meaningful way*, which are divided into further details, as illustrated in the box below <sup>(22)</sup>. The mentors thus needed to work with empowerment and to build general human capabilities for comprehending and managing life challenges in ‘a meaningful way’, which was not illegal, violent, or life-threatening for anyone” <sup>(23)</sup>.

The challenges, or life tasks, fall into three categories, as described in Table 1.

**Table 1: Example of general human life tasks and life skills in the Aarhus model <sup>(24)</sup>**

General human life tasks and life skills	Necessary elements
<p><b>Participation</b> Having a grip on life is about taking a position from which one can participate in one's own and common life.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relations: Participating in maintaining close social relations, i.e. family, close friends and peers.</li> <li>2. Frames: Participating in maintaining the framework of one's own life and interests, i.e. structure and material basis of everyday life in private, at work, in projects.</li> <li>3. Community: Participating in maintaining communities, i.e. contributing in a personal way to the greater good.</li> </ol>

<sup>(19)</sup> Bertelsen, Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation.

<sup>(20)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(21)</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>(22)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(23)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(24)</sup> Ibid, p. 5.



### Realistic attunement

Having a grip on life is about realistic, pragmatic and moral attunement to natural, cultural and societal dimensions of the surrounding world.

### Perspective taking

Having a grip on life is about navigating according to the diversity of personal, cultural and social perspectives on life.

4. **Attentiveness:** Operational attunement in regard to one's activity, engagement, focus and presence according to the opportunities and conditions of the actual situation.
5. **Pragmatics (planning):** Pragmatic attunement in regard to the realism of one's own plans in relation to the surrounding world.
6. **Ethics (norms, values):** Moral attunement in regard to the realism of one's own norms and values relative to the morality of the surrounding world.
7. **Awareness:** Being aware of the here-and-now surroundings, non-verbal communication and felt senses (feelings).
8. **Reflection (understanding oneself):** Taking into perspective one's own thoughts, feelings and motivation regarding life.
9. **Empathy (understanding others):** Taking into perspective other people's perspectives on life.
10. **Navigation (understanding systems):** Taking into perspective the cultural, societal, ideological, religious and scientific perspectives on life.

The mentor aims at supporting the mentee through a reintegration process by:

1. pointing to the pitfalls, the personal and societal dangers, the illegality and the mis-directedness of the particular activism the mentee has been involved in;
2. helping the mentee to find paths of inclusion regarding the activities and tasks in daily life such as family, work, education, leisure time;
3. being a well-informed, interested and empathic sparring partner, with whom the mentee could discuss questions and challenges of daily life and the ultimate concerns of existential, political and religious questions of life;
4. empowering the mentee with fundamental life skills towards a tolerant and mutual inclusion of different forms of life.

## The process

Developing a confident/trustful relation between mentor and mentee is key in any approach to mentoring. In the Aarhus model the mentor and mentee did small talk and homework and went to cafés, cinemas, restaurants, libraries and so on to get to know each other and build trust. Sufficient time was provided for trust to develop as it was regarded as crucial and the foundation for all other aspects of the intervention <sup>(25)</sup>. In addition, these activities also aimed at (re)introducing the mentee to public life to provide the perspective of the public sphere as a safe and inclusive place, as often mentees would have withdrawn from the broader society.

Once trust is established, mentors moved on to the more challenging part of the process. This involves questioning the mentees' point of view on topics like religion, politics, society and life. Mentors were tasked to support the mentee in diverting their political and religious opinions, criticisms and activities into legal pathways and actions within a pluralist and democratic society, by engaging in critical dialogue and challenging the mentees' previous perceptions, ethics and actions.

The backbone of the programme was the dialogue between the mentors and mentees to encourage the mentee to reflect on, rethink and reconsider their own life and surroundings. During the dialogue, the mentors

<sup>(25)</sup> Dalsgaard-Nielsen, Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches; Christensen et al., *Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism – STRIVE II. A Mentorship Manual for Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya*.

can challenge the mentees' points of view and worldviews to give perspectives and promote reflections on and new choices in life.

To guide the mentors in such a conversation they underwent trainings on how to use a "360-degree technique", which looked at issues, topics or concepts from different perspectives to open the mentees' horizons by relating the subject matter both to the mentees and their surroundings. The mentors nuanced the discussions by introducing alternative perspectives and interpretations for the mentees to see things in a new light and challenge one-sided perceptions by asking relevant, explorative, elaborative and clarifying questions. The idea was not to tell the mentees what to do, but to provide new perspectives and offer advice so that the mentees make the decision themselves to redirect their life to a new pathway with the help of the mentor.

**Table 2: Example of dialogue between a mentor and a mentee**

#### How to add nuances into a perspective in dialogue

A mentee wanted to go to Syria and fight. The mentor asked the mentee why this activity was attractive. The mentee told the mentor that going to Syria was the only way to fulfil his obligation as a Muslim and it was the right thing to do if you were a true Muslim. A few weeks later, the mentor returned to this subject matter and asked the mentee about his aspirations for life. He said that he would like to have a university degree, get a job, have a family and be a role model for other Muslims. The mentor replied by saying that it sounded like a good plan and asked if his future plans, which included contributing to society, were compatible with his obligation as a Muslim and also with the identity of a "true" Muslim living in Europe. The mentee agreed that his aims were compatible. The mentor then confronted him with his former statement about going to Syria and compared it with his new aims. The mentee looked surprised. He hesitated and then said that he basically had not thought of it in that way. This exercise of reflection made him realise that there could be alternatives to "only" going to Syria and fighting to fulfil the obligations of contributing to society and thereby being a good Muslim. It contributed to his understanding that the Islamist extremists did not have the monopoly on deciding the obligation as Muslims and what constituted being a good Muslim <sup>(26)</sup>.


Part of the process also included the possibility for the mentor and the mentee to identify and develop specific goals that the mentee aimed to improve or work on. A specific formula was developed to catch this part of the process, as illustrated below:

<sup>(26)</sup> By a former mentor in Aarhus, Denmark, Mentoring and deradicalisation, pp. 24-25.

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# LGT version 2.3

## Life psychological Goal setting Tool




### 1: Set a goal

[Which challenge would you like to work on?]

[Which goal would (partly) be a solution to this challenge?]

**S.M.A.R.T. GOAL?**

- Specific? (1)
- Measurable? (2)
- Attuned? (3)
- Realistic? (4)
- Timed (5)



### 2: Choose a focus on your goal

Skill A:	Skill B:	Skill C:
[ How does this skill already work well?]		
[ How can you empower this skill?]		

↓ ↓ ↓

### 3: The next step towards your goal

[Your next step towards your goal with this focus and skill?]		
[When will you do this next step?]		
[ Which cues will remind you of your next step?]		

IS YOUR NEXT STEP MOTIVATING? <small>yes maybe no</small>	IS YOUR NEXT STEP MOTIVATING? <small>yes maybe no</small>	IS YOUR NEXT STEP MOTIVATING? <small>yes maybe no</small>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you want to? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you capable of? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External possibilities? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you being met? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you act?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you want to? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you capable of? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External possibilities? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you being met? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you act?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you want to? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you capable of? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External possibilities? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you being met? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you act?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Preben Bertelsen, Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Aarhus University  
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 For download of questionnaire go to [psy.au.dk/ps](http://psy.au.dk/ps)

Formula to capture progress. The mentee fills out the form in a dialogue with the mentor (27).

By identifying clear goals, the mentor and the mentee could identify what worked well, what was challenging and where the mentee felt in need of support, until mentoring was assessed to be no longer needed.

## Mentoring in the context of EXIT Sweden

EXIT Sweden aims at supporting exit processes, rehabilitating and reintegration of individuals who have been involved in (V)RWE environments. This is based on a mentorship approach in cooperation with external partners such as psychiatrists, abuse consultants and other relevant professionals. This is meant to cover the potentially wide range of struggles that mentees could be dealing with, including substance abuse and mental health issues. They also cooperate with careers (guidance) officers to facilitate (former) (V)RWEs in a simultaneous process of exit and (re)integration into society, built on the long-standing expertise and networks of the implementing organisation [Fryshuset](#) that dates back to the 1990s.

The theory of change guiding staff at EXIT presumes that individuals do not join (V)RWE groups because they hold extremist views; rather they *acquire* extremist views because they have joined the groups for other reasons <sup>(28)</sup>. Participation in the (V)RWE environments is understood as an outcome of a subjective feeling of exclusion, insecurity and marginalisation and a resulting desire to become a part of a community, also allowing for distraction from potentially challenging life circumstances <sup>(29)</sup>.

The mentoring approach therefore differentiates between the mentee as a human being and their identity and actions as a (V)RWE <sup>(30)</sup>. This means that mentors can condemn the (sometimes violent) actions of the mentees, but not the mentees as such. EXIT addresses the parts of the mentees' identity and experiences, aside from those activated by their engagement in (V)RWE <sup>(31)</sup>.

## Staff and mentor qualification

EXIT compiled a mixed group of social workers, mentors and academics of different genders and with a variety of experiences, including former (V)RWEs. This is to ensure the quality of the approaches used and to offer professional supervision of the mentors to support them in their approach to mentees <sup>(32)</sup>.

EXIT seeks to recruit mentors who are, in one way or another, formerly connected (V)RWEs either by being former mentees themselves or by having relatives who have been involved in (V)RWE. The idea behind this is that these individuals possess emotional, bodily and cognitive experiences from these environments and have a detailed understanding of the culture and social practice involved, which they use in a transformed version in their practice <sup>(33)</sup>. In addition, mentors receive different ongoing education and training such as courses in therapy, 'Criminal Lifestyle programmes' <sup>(34)</sup> and 'Motivational Interviewing', among others.

Mentors at EXIT are either full-time or less. But they are all employed by EXIT and they are also engaged in an ongoing development of the organisation and its methods in cooperation with other staff members.

## The process

Potential mentees either initiate contact with the organisation themselves or are referred by youth workers, police officers, teachers, parents or other family members. A potential mentee will have an initial telephone conversation, followed by a first meeting with two mentors, who will also do a risk assessment of the mentee and their motivation to disengage. The mentors will in cooperation with other staff at EXIT identify the mentee's needs and resources such as a social network outside the (V)RWE group, family relationships,

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<sup>(28)</sup> Bjørgo, Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right.

<sup>(29)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(30)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(31)</sup> For further information on this point, see: Christensen, A question of participation, pp. 225-226.

<sup>(32)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(33)</sup> Christensen, How extremist experiences become valuable knowledge in EXIT programmes; Christensen, "I had never reached those Nazi guys".

<sup>(34)</sup> See: <https://stiftkrim.se/krimprogram#att-bedriva-kriminalitetsprogram>

hobbies, education and work experience in order to gain a feeling of how best to cooperate with the mentee <sup>(35)</sup>.

Mentoring is in most cases not mandatory and if mentees change their minds, they can end the mentoring. Yet, to be accepted as a mentee it is required that the individual has left the (V)WRE environment. This is necessary firstly, because continued involvement will pose a risk for the mentors at EXIT, and secondly, because the mentee would not be showing sufficient motivation for a change if they remain part of the scene.

Motivation is crucial in EXIT's work as is the identification of the mentee's "passion". Passion is understood as the individual's energy/desire, which can lead a person to constructive engagement, but which can also make a person an enthusiastic member of a VE group, street gang or another destructive network, depending on their needs, desires, possibilities and social circumstances. In addition, personal motivation is decisive according to the mentors' experience as this is what makes mentees able to go through the demanding changes constituting the twofold process of disengaging from the extreme right and reintegrating into liberal society <sup>(36)</sup>.

EXIT's methods are based on cooperation between mentor and mentee. The relation is based on equality and is perceived as an intersubjective exchange between two adults <sup>(37)</sup>. Like in the Aarhus model, EXIT also understands trust as the most important part of a successful process <sup>(38)</sup>. Trust, the relationship and interaction between mentors and mentees are crucial as these are what support the mentees to transform their lives and identities. Trust is built through informal conversations and often rather demanding social activities such as weightlifting, Thai boxing or other physical activities, combined with leisure activities, such as going to cafés, cinemas, museums, fishing or anything the mentees express an interest in doing.

In EXIT's view, people who act in violent and intimidating ways do so because they have not learned to handle themselves and certain situations differently <sup>(39)</sup>. EXIT's methods thus aim for the mentees to get involved in alternative activities and spheres of life. Through a dialogue with the mentees, the mentors identify what kind of activities they are *passionate* about and involve them in activities in which they feel interested. Such activities are meant to allow the mentees to experience alternative activities, to identify new interests, and to develop additional social and professional skills. In addition, as many mentees struggle to identify and react to emotions apart from anger and hate when they enter the programme <sup>(40)</sup>, the dialogue is intended to develop the mentee's perspective and additional vocabulary in order to identify and differentiate emotions.

When a mentor happens to be a former, the mentor sets an example for the mentee, who perceives them as a positive role model, due to their personification of positive change and their successful move on to a non-criminal life <sup>(41)</sup>. They have been a (V)RWE and now they are experienced mentors, hereby they introduce "a way of doing things" the mentee can use as an example to follow and get inspired by.

In *this particular context* of exit from (V)RWE, EXIT finds it important *initially* that the mentors are white and often males with a past in the extreme right (at least for the largest part of their mentee base, which are male individuals as mentees). At a later stage in the process, however, it became clear that it would be beneficial for the mentees to be introduced to different kinds of co-mentors without a (V)RWE past and also of different ethnic origins and genders, as it would introduce the mentees to different perspectives and types of people <sup>(42)</sup>. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that mentors in general receive ongoing training and supervision as described initially. This goes to illustrate that it can be important to reflect the mentees initially as it facilitates identification with the mentors.

Additionally, the knowledge and experiences of mentors formerly linked to (V)RWE provide a detailed level of insight to EXIT, strengthening the knowledge of the target group and addressing their needs and feelings as they go through a mentorship process <sup>(43)</sup>. This makes mentors able and willing to discuss aspects of

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<sup>(35)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(36)</sup> Christensen, Former Right-Wing Extremists' Continued Struggle for Self-transformation After an Exit Program.

<sup>(37)</sup> White, Narrativ teori.

<sup>(38)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(39)</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>(40)</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>(41)</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>(42)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(43)</sup> Christensen, "I had never reached those Nazi guys"; Christensen, A question of participation, pp. 162-192.

identification with and participation in (V)RWE and questions about the ideology based on their own insider perspectives. They aim to introduce nuances to the mentees' worldview.

It is important, however, not to confront or oppose the mentees' ideologically informed worldview head-on. Instead, mentors add layers to the mentees' perspectives to help them move towards a more nuanced and complex perspective of the world. New perspectives also help the mentees better contextualise and understand their own involvement in (V)RWE, thus enabling them to reflect on their own roles and identities, often leading to an increased questioning of previously held beliefs <sup>(44)</sup>.

By supporting their self-reflection process and engaging in a wide range of professional and social activities, mentees are enabled to improve or (re-)establish their relationships with positive social contacts, such as old friends or family members, and to form new ones. In addition, they may often start to re-engage in activities they enjoyed prior to their engagement in (V)RWE. Once these activities and relationships start to have a more stable impact on the mentees' social life and emotional well-being, the importance of and need for the relations with the mentors will diminish, marking an important step in their reintegration. However, even if over time contact with the mentors will fade out, the mentees are always welcome to call and stay in touch with the staff at EXIT.

EXIT has developed a five-stage description of the process a person typically goes through when disengaging from the extreme right, and until individuals have (re)integrated and (re)established themselves in society. The five stages are:

1. **Motivation:** individuals are still part of the extremist right but question their involvement and contact EXIT, which provides information and answers to questions and probes the possibilities for disengagement and assistance.
2. **Disengagement:** people make the decision to leave and some have already quit when they get in touch. This may be a chaotic period as they often are without a social network and exposed to threats from former friends. The future is all-important at this stage and they often need help to assess the threat situation in a realistic way and someone to talk to about doubts, fears and problems. The mentor is available by phone around the clock and serves as a guide to social agencies and public institutions.
3. **Establishment:** the break is complete, and individuals have a place to live, some have a job, studies or some other daytime activity. But they are often in a social vacuum, feeling empty and alone. At this stage, the mentor provides support to (re)enter "normal" life through joint activities.
4. **Reflection:** most of the racist thoughts and impulses have disappeared during this process but individuals start realising what they have been involved in: violence, crimes, extreme ideologies of hatred and recruitment of others into similar activities. Some develop anxiety, depression, insomnia or substance abuse and some need help to deal with violent impulses, traumas or lack of confidence.
5. **Stabilisation:** the individuals have achieved a "normal" life, potentially with job, studies and a network. They have turned away from hatred, racism, crime and substance abuse — yet, they still fear that their past will ruin their future and often feel guilt and shame. EXIT no longer works actively with the individual, but many former mentees keep in touch with their mentors. EXIT's involvement can last anywhere from 6 months to several years.

These five steps are general stages in a process, which is rarely a linear development with easily identifiable turning points. Rather, it is a process where the individual moves back and forth between the different phases, interrupted by relapses into old patterns of behaviour and thoughts. This is until the mentee has established a new life and identity <sup>(45)</sup>.

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<sup>(44)</sup> Christensen, *A question of participation*, p. 202.

<sup>(45)</sup> Christensen, *A question of participation*, pp. 81-82.

## Secondary prevention mentorship in the context of the STRIVE II programme in Kenya

The EU-funded programme ‘Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism’ (STRIVE II) aimed at a secondary level of prevention by contributing to the reduction of radicalisation, recruitment and support for VE groups in Kenya and Somalia. This was done by working with young people, who were seen to be at risk of engaging in radicalised, criminal or extreme behaviour from particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Kenya.

The implementing organisation Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) operated in a consortium with Kenya Red Cross Society (KRC) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), both of which delivered separate EU-funded programmes focused on peace, stability and inclusive economic opportunity in marginalised areas of Kenya. This meant that besides mentoring, GIZ would simultaneously support both mentors and mentees in increasing their economic opportunities through establishing a small business or, if possible, gaining employment<sup>(46)</sup>.

Mentors in the programme were part-time, paid employees of the programme.

Programme locations, aim and understanding of radicalisation were based on the perception that recruitment of youth into VE groups was due to experiences of marginalisation and difficult life conditions, including a lack of education and employment possibilities, a search for a sense of belonging, the pursuit of a religious identity, the lure of ideology, and influence from family and/or friends<sup>(47)</sup>.

STRIVE II worked based on a conceptualised theory of change that outlined the issues which lead to radicalisation and recruitment linked to the sort of interventions, which are presupposed to affect change and positive development among stakeholders, mentors and mentees in the programme.

STRIVE II’s interventions conceptualised its desired impact across four connected areas:

1. “tackling **structural factors** such as social exclusion, marginalisation and institutional cultures & political narratives which create the conditions for radicalisation and support for violent extremism;
2. addressing **group-based dynamics** which contribute to and encourage pathways towards radicalisation, such as peer pressure, group norms, radical flank actors, etc.;
3. countering **enabling factors** which stem from contact with those actors who seek to radicalise and recruit to violent extremist groups, and the rhetoric which aims to garner support;
4. reducing **individual incentives** to participation and support which can range from an individual’s feelings of injustice and desire for revenge to perceived financial gain and rewards in the afterlife”<sup>(48)</sup>.

These elements represent the critical recognition of the context in which the programme operates and are indicative of STRIVE II’s philosophy. They demonstrate the notion that interventions in this field require a recognition of not just the power of individual agency — or limits thereof — in young people and those who seek to protect and support them. In addition, it recognises the centrality of societal structures — culture, tradition, policy, institutions, etc. — and the groups and institutions that operate in between, e.g. peer groups, local communities and VE groups. Based on this, STRIVE II’s interventions took place within four connected “result areas”<sup>(49)</sup>.

**Mentorship Result Area:** Aiming to reduce the susceptibility of young people to political and ideological violence. A concurrent dimension of this initiative increases the knowledge base of relevant stakeholders and builds the capacity of mentors to identify and engage with at-risk individuals.

**Law Enforcement Result Area:** Focusing on CVE training for senior and mid-level managers and frontline officers from a range of agencies to strengthen prevention capabilities and response to VE with strategies compatible with international law and human rights standards.

<sup>(46)</sup> Fisher et al., Evaluation of ‘Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE II) in Kenya’, Final Report, p. 19.

<sup>(47)</sup> Christensen et al., Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

<sup>(48)</sup> Fisher et al., Evaluation of ‘Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism’, p. 17.

<sup>(49)</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

**Preventive Communication Result Area:** Focusing on strengthening the voice of marginalised youth by improving their self-expression, sense of participation and representation in key media spaces.

**Research Result Area:** Focusing on improving CVE programming and enhancing the understanding of relationships between conflict dynamics and recruitment patterns.

The change logic connects these interventions with the overarching aim of the programme, which proposes that by working with and by connecting four key audiences, namely: (1) Young people at risk of radicalisation and recruitment; (2) Mentors and community stakeholders; (3) Policymakers and practitioners; and (4) Law enforcement (both senior and mid-ranking officers) as well as media groups, the programme would be able to reduce radicalisation, recruitment and support to VE groups.

As well as outlining the broad interventions made by the programme, there is a range of assumptions proposed, which are summarised here:

1. highlight some potential logistical and motivational hurdles in achieving the desired impact (e.g. a question of whether people will want to be part of the programme or not); and
2. to a lesser extent question the programme's influence and power in the context of structural, political and bureaucratic barriers, for example: Does greater understanding lead to better decision-making in law enforcement or are the institutional barriers to impact immutable?

## Mentor and mentee selection criteria and process

Mentors, in collaboration with other stakeholders, selected the mentees. The stakeholders were active and vocal members of the community, already engaged in youth affairs. They represented a diverse team, including teachers at schools with high dropout rates, social workers, parents, peace committee members and religious leaders from the selected areas. The stakeholders' role was to identify potential mentees, but also to update the Mentorship Programme team on security issues. The stakeholders also helped support the mentors and refer potential mentees for a full assessment.

To become a mentee in STRIVE II, at least one of four of the following primary criteria had to be fulfilled:

- Have a close peer or relative who has been recruited into a VE group or is engaged in VE activities.
- Be associated with violent criminals or gang members.
- Hold radical or extremist views and tendencies.
- Be affiliated with people who hold extremist views and tendencies.

In addition, at least two of the following secondary criteria had to be fulfilled:

- Being a school dropout.
- Having a dysfunctional family background.
- Suddenly becoming socially withdrawn.
- Being a former convict.
- Being a new convert to a religion.
- Being idle.

It is important to emphasise that the second group of criteria was less determining than the first one.

The identification of the primary acceptance criteria tried to reduce the subjectivity of the decision-making in the recruitment process and ensured that the objectives and outcomes of the programme took a priority in the recruitment of mentors and mentees <sup>(50)</sup>.

Once identified, these at-risk young people were matched to a mentor who provided them with support and guidance for a period lasting usually between 18 months and 2 years. The mentoring programme was not

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<sup>(50)</sup> Fisher et al., Evaluation of 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.



based on legislation and the participation was on a voluntary basis, and if an individual became a mentee, they could stop their involvement in the programme at any time they wished to.

The mentors were drawn from the same geographical areas, and often the same communities, as the mentees. Mentors were expected to set standards of behaviour in their way of talking and the attitudes they demonstrated towards other people and opinions. This was the reason why mentors in STRIVE II had to be between 20 and 34 years of age so as to match the age of or be a little older than the mentees. Additionally, being literate and having good interpersonal communication skills were key qualities as STRIVE II mentors were required to write progress reports and read materials. Mentors also needed to be able to communicate with people in very difficult life situations and to discuss complicated choices. In addition, they were expected to attend meetings, training and forums and operate within the boundaries of the law. Being a mentor in a CVE programme such as STRIVE involves being ready and able to work in a hostile environment where situations can change very quickly with people who are potentially willing to use violence.

Besides, they were seen as relatable, figures with shared backgrounds and some commonalities in life experience <sup>(51)</sup>.

Mentors were recruited based on criteria, such as:

- ability to take responsibility and lead change;
- personal initiative and drive;
- reliability and demonstrated values conducive to a life that is supportive to others;
- patience, empathy and good at listening to people;
- strength to help others.

The mentors recruited had often already been involved in community work within their communities. Besides, it was required that potential mentors were critical of certain ideological narratives and black-and-white worldviews. A mentor also needed to have the personal strength to withstand potential stigmatisation from their community as a potential consequence of supporting people who were viewed with suspicion within the community, because of their association with criminal gangs or with others who sympathise with a VE group. Such considerations seemed especially relevant in a setting with very integrated social networks <sup>(52)</sup>.

The described qualities required of a mentor for the programme focused more on expected characteristics and desired conduct of mentors, rather than being fixed selection criteria. This flexibility was intended to widen the scope of a programme to attract a diverse range of mentors. It also intended to attract less educated people as mentors-to-be and help them develop through training and education and support from the programme, thereby attempting to match the mentees in a number of ways <sup>(53)</sup>.

The mentors had diverse backgrounds and profiles and included male and female mentors as the target group included both men and women too. These mentors, similarly to those participating in the Danish and Swedish programmes, aimed to support the members of the target group in their reflection process, while trying to ensure the improvement or development of different skills and perspectives as well as to facilitate access to different social networks. To have both men and women as mentors seems particularly important in societies where men and women have very different roles, and/or they are recruited based on their different needs and struggles.

Becoming a mentor also involved becoming part of a formal reporting structure as the programme was organised by a team based in Nairobi. Moreover, the programme invested heavily in a structured and mandatory in-service training, which aimed to build the skills and capacities of mentors to provide support to mentees and to become effective CVE community actors. Training topics were relevant to the programme's aims and included studying pathways to VE, critical thinking skills and building self-confidence.

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<sup>(51)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(52)</sup> Christensen et al., Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

<sup>(53)</sup> Fisher et al., Evaluation of 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

To support the mentors in developing their skills, a manual was developed for them<sup>(54)</sup>. It reflected their specific tasks, the environment they would work in, their economic ability and many of the issues they might face while working as mentors — both in pictures, scope, text and suggested activities.

The aim of the mentors was to act as positive role models and influencers to increase the mentees' awareness of the consequences of becoming engaged in VE groups and radicalisation by supporting the mentees to develop positive change in their wider attitudes, behaviours and life trajectories.

The mentoring approach was based on meetings between mentors and mentees where common activities (such as sports) and discussions about different experiences and difficult issues were used to establish a trust-based relationship. In addition, the mentors took turns to organise bi-weekly meetings, which involved all the mentees and mentors in a specific location. The idea behind these structured but informal meetings was to enable the mentors and mentees to get to know each other and to build an alternative support network to the gangs and/or extremist groups for mentors and mentees. Moreover, these meetings offered a sense of group identity and belonging to promoted values, norms and relationships that served to counter VE narratives and criminal ways of life. The meetings provided a platform for mentors and mentees to share information, experiences, challenges and opportunities, thus contributing to a new, joint network aimed at strengthening all involved parties. To ensure that meetings entailed relevant discussions as suggested in the manual and that both males and females got sufficient speaking time, the lead mentor and mentorship advisor from Nairobi participated from time to time.

By coupling mentor and mentee support with regular group activities, the mentorship programme offered a membership opportunity that provided young people with a clear sense of belonging to a group, and a positive group identity that was able to compete with and challenge negative affiliations in the mentees' day-to-day lives. This mechanism also addressed key factors that contribute to the vulnerability of young people to VE and radicalisation. Mentors and mentees felt that their involvement in the programme gave them a positive form of exclusive identity and the networks and contacts facilitated through their participation helped build resilience against pull factors towards VE<sup>(55)</sup>.

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*The STRIVE II programme demonstrates that to counter effectively the inherently multi-faceted and dynamic recruitment approaches of extremists, most young people at risk need more than one-to-one mentoring. STRIVE II offers knowledge, support, connection and alternative, positive identity in its pursuit of individual and community resilience. Moreover, because of the interaction of the mentees, mentors and other stakeholders involved, the impact of the work must be judged not just in terms of its effects on the mentees but also on the mentors, stakeholders and the wider communities in which they live.*

*Conclusive remarks from the evaluation of STRIVE II<sup>(56)</sup>*

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<sup>(54)</sup> Christensen et al., Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

<sup>(55)</sup> Fisher et al., Evaluation of 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

<sup>(56)</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

## Key lessons based on the three case studies:

Successful mentoring programmes should include:

1. A clear theory of change.
  - A clear conceptualisation of the target group and factors assessed to be leading to radicalisation and recruitment.
  - A clear suggestion of what change is.
  - A clear suggestion of how change comes about.
  - A clear theory of change is necessary for the programmes to be evaluated.
2. A clear understanding of the culture and social practices of the VE environment.
3. Clearly defined criteria and/or qualities that guide mentor recruitment and training.
4. A programme supporting the mentors through training and supervision.
5. Supervision of the mentors.
6. Clear structures of responsibility to know who to contact in situations of urgency.
7. Cooperation with external actors such as psychologists and addiction therapists to offer professional support to address mental health issues and addiction. Employment consultants are important to help mentees move on with their lives. If radicalisation was linked to religion, the involvement of religious leaders may be important as they can give qualified input to religious questions and offer guidance.

## Practical guidance and recommendations for practitioners

Rehabilitation in the context of P/CVE often involves developing additional social and professional skills for a mentee to aim for a non-criminal life beyond VE and their reintegration into a liberal democratic society. In addition, a mentorship programme ought to include approaches that target the mentees' ideological and potentially violent practices established as an outcome of participation in VE groups. It should support the mentees' capability to handle general and everyday life tasks in ways that provide the basis for a better life.

Based on the examples of mentoring approaches aimed at supporting rehabilitation and reintegration for former (V)RWEs presented above, this section derives the main lessons to be learned for other practitioners who want to establish their own programme.

The core aspects for which mentees need varying degrees of support can be divided as follows:

1. **Social reintegration:** fostering positive social connections (facilitating relations with healthy social networks, such as family and community, offering skill development trainings to improve social and conflict management skills).
2. **Cognition:** assessing and supporting deradicalisation (e.g. providing faith-based counselling, programmes that enhance critical thinking, cognitive behavioural programmes).
3. **Mental health:** assessing and improving mental health (e.g. providing psychosocial support, psychological counselling, addiction treatment).
4. **Functional reintegration:** providing educational/vocational training to help future employment <sup>(57)</sup>.

Mentoring approaches usually aim to support mentees regarding the areas of social integration and cognition. With this in mind the following aspects need to be considered or present when setting up a mentorship programme:

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<sup>(57)</sup> Papp et al., The role of civil society organisations in exit work.

1. A clear vision of who the target group is: what the mentees' (main) problems may be and what kind of approaches are considered necessary to support the mentees to rehabilitate and develop skills to establish an alternative and non-criminal life.
2. A clear understanding of radicalisation and the paths towards radicalisation. Many interventions are based on a weak understanding of what radicalisation means and implies<sup>(58)</sup>. Additionally, it is important to define what is understood by terms such as "marginalisation" and "social exclusion", which are often used in the field, but often without any clear or commonly shared definition across staff members in a programme.
3. A well-developed theory of change. A simplified theory of change could look like this: "The more an individual moves into prosocial contexts and activities connected to a society's regular institution, such as working life, education, family, sports and prosocial networks, the less attractive it becomes for them to continue participation in VE activities and environments, and the more the person's extreme attitudes will become nuanced and fall apart." This should be supplemented by clear concepts of how the programme aims to achieve the objectives stated in this theory of change. A clearly developed theory of change and set goals for the mentees also enables the evaluation of the programme. A wide range of evaluation approaches exists, some of which are based on peer and self-review processes, for which RAN has developed a tool. Other approaches are based on quantitative and qualitative approaches.
4. A formal structure of the programme. It should include a clear line of authority and responsibility, especially for sensitive situations: Who is in charge of what? Whom should mentors report to (and under which circumstances) and/or address when difficult or potentially dangerous situations arise? Ideally, this should lead to the development of clear structural guidelines that all mentors can adhere to.
5. A clear strategy for the recruitment of mentors, mentees and potentially other stakeholders. Knowing the target group and the issues they may struggle with indicates which criteria to look for when selecting mentors and the relevant skills they should possess. The desired profile of a mentor ought to reflect whether a programme is aimed at rehabilitation or prevention.
6. Mentors who act based on training and education in tertiary prevention. It is important to have staff members who are non-judgemental, empathic and tolerant and who already possess or have the potential to develop specific qualifications such as the capability to apply "situated learning" and "milieu therapy" as a method, when interacting with the mentees, in addition to applying "motivational interviewing" in dialogues and similar approaches that aim at facilitating personal development and change. Moreover, mentors need to either know or learn aspects of the culture and social practice of the specific target group and the basic principles of what radicalisation is about.
7. Mentors who act based on positive personal qualities in secondary prevention. Social and personal qualities such as empathy, trustworthiness, tolerance, reflectiveness and good listening capabilities are important personal assets. Mentors-to-be ought to receive additional training on the above-mentioned subjects. Recruiting mentors based on personal qualities permits programmes to widen their scope and to attract a diverse range of future mentors who should receive training after their employment and be supported by a programme.
8. Is risk assessment necessary and if so, who has the capacity, training and insight to conduct it? Risk assessment is especially relevant for tertiary prevention mentoring approaches with (former) violent offenders.
9. A training programme for mentors should be established to ensure a certain quality standard and a defined level of shared understanding and common ethics when interacting with the mentees. Additionally, it is important to consider if, how and how often mentors should receive supervision. Mentors can be strongly influenced by the mentees' often difficult issues, struggles and potentially violent experiences and may require support to deal with these experiences. Besides, they can be subject to manipulation and radicalisation by mentees, which is why standardised supervision and collegial case counselling structures are highly recommended.

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<sup>(58)</sup> Lid & Christensen, Risikovurderinger og reintegrering av radikaliserede individer i Norden.

10. Matching mentors and mentees depends on the aim of the programme and the available possibilities. No programme can offer an infinite number of mentors to be matched with mentees. Yet, the match is informed by the goal of the programme and the theory of change. Matching depends also to a large extent on the target group. As illustrated by the example of EXIT Sweden, in some instances it may be important to have mentors reflecting the lived experiences of the target group, which here consisted mainly of young white males, in the sense that the more a mentor reflects the mentee *initially* the easier it is to develop a trustful relation <sup>(59)</sup> (in other cases a female mentor may be more reflective of a specific target group). However, as mentees progress and broaden their perspectives to become more open to interact with a more diverse set of people, it became important to introduce them also to female staff and staff of varied ethnic origins. In Kenya, the target groups consisted of both males and females, and as a result, so did the mentors. Criteria for matching therefore depends on the setting and the profiles of the mentees, which mentors must match to an extent that needs to be defined in advance.
11. If formers are involved as mentors it is crucial that their deviant experience as former VEs is connected to a deliberate practice for their experience to become useful knowledge and a resource for mentorship programmes. One way of generating such a practice is to combine formers' insights into social and cultural practice with social workers' reflective tools and to offer training and supervision to condition their experiences <sup>(60)</sup>.
12. The goal of mentoring is to support the mentee's path to life improvement beyond VE, which makes it important to have a method for or approach to goal setting. Defining how mentors ask questions, listen, unpack the mentees' life stories and identify what the mentees have experienced helps to develop realistic goals for their future <sup>(61)</sup>. Although it is most appropriate and motivating for mentees to formulate their own goals, it may be challenging as mentees may not know what they need in order to move on and have only vague ideas about which kind of life they aim for. Besides, they may not be able to realistically assess what may be achievable and may lack the capability to express their wishes, needs and ideas. This makes it important for mentors to learn to conduct a dialogue that encourages the mentees and which prevents the mentors providing "all" the answers. Mentees thus need time and support to develop an independent feeling of what they are aiming to achieve <sup>(62)</sup>. The goals can, for example, follow the SMART goal model. S stands for the importance for goals to be specific and simple. M is for Measurable. By setting goals that are measurable it is possible to track progress, or make sure the mentee is incentivised to do more. A stands for Achievable. It is important that the goal is something the mentee can attain given their personal circumstances, resources and skills. R stands for Relevant. Personal growth and development can capture a wide variety of areas including simple things. T stands for Time. In what timeframe can a mentee expect to achieve their goal(s)? Establishing a timeframe and some milestones will help the mentees reach their goals (for further reading on this particular issue see Christensen et al. 2020).
13. Cooperation with other public and civil society actors who have the capability to assess and handle issues regarding mental health and functional reintegration is beneficial. Accompanying problem areas, such as substance abuse and mental health issues, may need to be addressed alongside a mentoring process. It is of equal importance to cooperate with employment consultants, career advisers and/or partners who offer vocational training to support the mentee to move forward in due time to uphold the their motivation and thus the success of the overall intervention <sup>(63)</sup>. Moreover, it is important to either link a mentorship approach to specific communities or to identify potentially relevant communities into which the mentee could potentially be integrated with the support of the mentor <sup>(64)</sup>. Some research indicates that mentees in tertiary prevention in addition to poor self-knowledge also have limited insight into societal, political and cultural issues in general <sup>(65)</sup>. This makes it crucial to support mentees to gain

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<sup>(59)</sup> Dalsgaard-Nielsen, Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism.

<sup>(60)</sup> Christensen, "I had never reached those Nazi guys".

<sup>(61)</sup> Christensen et al., Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

<sup>(62)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

<sup>(63)</sup> Marsden, Reintegrating Extremists; Fisher et al., Evaluation of 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism'; Christensen et al., Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism; Papp et al., The role of civil society organisations in exit work.

<sup>(64)</sup> Marsden, Reintegrating Extremists.

<sup>(65)</sup> Christensen, A question of participation.

a better insight into themselves and into other people’s situations by, for instance, working and/or doing everyday activities if necessary supported by their mentors <sup>(66)</sup>.

## Main challenges and risks to good mentorship programmes

- Vague formulation or even lack of the theory of change.
- Vague understandings of pathways into VE groups, radicalisation and lack of definition of the programme target group(s).
- Vague understanding of the specific characteristics of the target group and the social and cultural practices at work within the VE environment they represent. In recent years, for example, mental health issues have resurfaced as a potential contributing factor to radicalisation processes. Sometimes, however, the assumption of mental health issues in potential mentees, without properly qualified diagnosis, leads to simplified explanations of radicalisation, which in turn will negatively impact mentorship and rehabilitation work. Mental health diagnoses should only be carried out by properly trained professionals.
- Vaguely defined strategies for approaching the target group and unclear referral processes. State and municipal actors have been in charge of initiatives aimed at supporting former VEs’ reintegration into society. They might have a high risk of having setbacks approaching the target group as their trust in them may be low or non-existent <sup>(67)</sup>.
- Unclear goals for mentoring approaches, their aims and what success may look like.
- Lack of training, supervision and shared ethos, logics and understanding among staff in the programme.
- Lack of funds and thus lack of continuity of programmes leading to loss of staff, knowledge and know-how.
- Unclear structures of responsibility and authority, also regarding the relation of the mentors and other potential aspects of an overarching rehabilitation programme.

### Recap of DOs and DON'Ts

DOs	DON'Ts
Have a clear vision and knowledge of the target group and their corresponding radicalisation pathways.	Do not act based on a gut feeling and weak presumptions about VE cultures, dynamics, practices and processes of radicalisation.
Have a well-developed theory of change.	Do not omit risk assessment.
Establish a formal structure for your programme.	Do not let the level of education and insight in the field depend on the mentors’ own interests.
Have a clear strategy for the recruitment of mentors, mentees and potentially stakeholders.	Do not engage formers as mentors without ensuring appropriate training, vetting, and sufficient distance between their engagement and their exit and rehabilitation process.
Establish good relationships and cooperation mechanisms with relevant external stakeholders.	

<sup>(66)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(67)</sup> Koehler, D. (2017). Understanding Deradicalization. Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism. Routledge; Christensen, T. W. (2019). Civil actors’ role in deradicalisation and disengagement initiatives: When trust is essential. In S. J. Hansen & S. Lid (Eds), Routledge Handbook of Deradicalisation and Disengagement (pp. 143-155). Routledge.

Ensure that mentors are empathic and tolerant and that they receive adequate training before they are allowed to work with mentees (also to reduce risk of manipulation).

Develop a clear understanding of success.

Do not match mentors and mentees based on gut feelings but based on the mentors' qualifications and the mentees' needs.

## Further reading

How to set up a mentorship programme initiates multiple questions. The suggested reading gives insight into different reintegration approaches and examples of different programmes. Especially the evaluation report from STRIVE II touches upon all these aspects, which are crucial to consider when starting a mentorship programme.

1. Fisher, T., Range, D., & Cuddihy, J. (2020). *Evaluation of 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE II) in Kenya', Final Report*. European Union, CT-MORSE. <https://ct-morse.eu/resource/evaluation-of-strive-ii-in-kenya/>
2. Christensen, T. W., Freear, M., & Suleiman, H. (2020). *Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism – STRIVE II. A mentorship manual for countering violent extremism in Kenya*. Royal United Services Institute. [https://static.rusi.org/strive\\_ii\\_manual\\_final\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://static.rusi.org/strive_ii_manual_final_web_version.pdf)
3. Marsden, S. V. (2017). *Reintegrating extremists: Deradicalisation and desistance*. Palgrave Pivot.
4. Spalek, B., & Davies, L. (2012). Mentoring in relation to violent extremism: A study of role, purpose, and outcomes. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35(5), 354-368.
5. Christensen, T. W. (2023). "I had never reached those Nazi guys without their help" Being a former becoming a mentor - and the value of using formers in exit work. In G. Clubb, R. Scrivens, & M. D. Islam (Eds), *Former extremists: Roles in preventing and countering violence*. Oxford University Press (in press).
6. Christensen, T. W. (2015). When good intentions are not enough - A successful mentor-mentee relation requires a deliberated practice. *Psyke & Logos*, 36(1), 242-265.

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