

A Guide to Deradicalisation & Disengagement Programming: Designing and Implementing Interventions through the Lens of the ABC Model

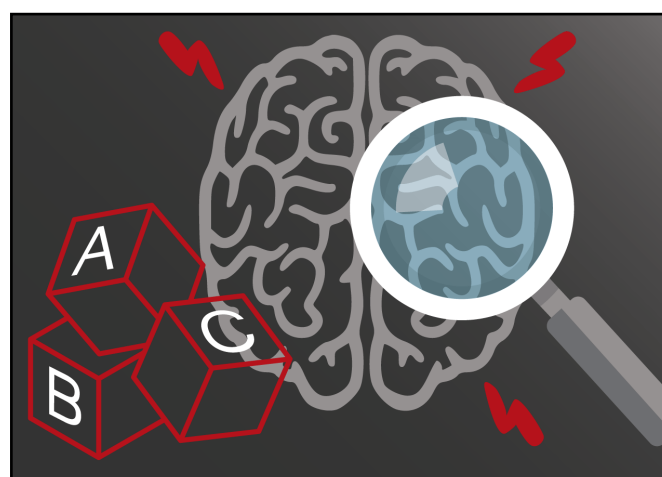
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OVERVIEW

This report focuses on **interventions designed to promote and facilitate exits from ideologically justified violence – often referred to as ‘tertiary’ interventions.** The beneficiaries of these programmes include individuals convicted of terrorism charges, as well as those who voluntarily disengaged. Relying on the authors’ *Attitudes-Behaviours Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism* (Khalil et al., 2022), and drawing from their extensive professional experiences of providing technical support to such interventions, **this report presents a novel framework to help practitioners develop and implement these programmes.**

There is considerable disagreement among thematic experts as to whether these interventions should treat disengagement or deradicalisation as their overarching objective. While the former refers to voluntary exits from violence, the latter is widely (although not universally) interpreted in relation to attitudinal change. We incorporate both of these concepts into our framework of change (our ‘results chain’ using Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) language), treating disengagement as the uppermost objective (our desired ‘impact’), and deradicalisation as a subordinate aim (an ‘intermediate impact’). Viewed in this manner, **attitudinal change provides only one of several avenues through which disengagement may be achieved.** Below these uppermost objectives, our framework also incorporates the following mid-level aims (‘outcomes’):

- **Outcome 1 - Networks:** Reduced ties to malign influencers and enhanced ties to prosocial alternatives



- **Outcome 2 - Identity:** Diminished salience of social identities associated with violence
- **Outcome 3 - Ideology:** Enhanced willingness to question beliefs that legitimise and justify violence
- **Outcome 4 - Needs:** Enhanced ability to achieve personal needs through nonviolent means
- **Outcome 5 - Wellbeing:** Improved psychological wellbeing

As shall become apparent, many different initiatives (‘activities’) can contribute to these desired outcomes, including basic education, vocational training, religious guidance, family support, psychological support, and so on. We make no *a priori* assumptions about which of these are most likely to help achieve any particular outcome, with this varying substantially between contexts and clients. Indeed, it is for this reason we argue that **these programmes should reflect local contexts, and be tailored to the needs of each beneficiary.**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our key recommendations are as follows:

- **Treat deradicalisation as one avenue through which to achieve disengagement:** As already observed, there is considerable disagreement among experts as to whether tertiary interventions should treat disengagement or deradicalisation as their overarching aim. Departing from these interpretations, we instead argue that attitudinal change provides one of several avenues through which disengagement may be achieved. As such, all programmes should incorporate interventions that promote deradicalisation, and these should be available to beneficiaries at suitable junctures and in appropriate ‘doses’ during their rehabilitation. This applies even in locations (most often in the Global North) where it may be considered expedient to avoid framing tertiary interventions in terms of deradicalisation.
- **Promote change in relation to the social networks, identity, ideology, needs, and psychological wellbeing of clients:** Research has identified the five outcomes in our results chain as key leverage points through which individuals can be supported or incentivised to move away from violence. These outcomes often operate as collaborators in pursuit of sustained disengagement, particularly where they generate mutually reinforcing effects. For instance, the establishment of prosocial networks (Outcome 1) may provoke identity change (Outcome 2), which may then further strengthen these new social connections (Outcome 1), and so on. However, there are also contexts in which they are better interpreted as alternative avenues through which disengagement may be pursued.
- **Ensure programmes reflect local requirements, conditions, and cultures:** A core underpinning premise of the approach presented in this paper is that programmes must be context specific. Perhaps most obviously, while prison programmes should place a heavy emphasis on addressing identity and ideology (Outcomes 2 and 3), these factors are often less critical for interventions with 'low risk' individuals involved in this violence who were never actually sympathetic to its objectives or identified with those involved. It is also important to recognise that many programmes are constrained by resource restrictions and capacity issues, limiting the extent to which they can provide comprehensive services under each of the outcomes listed above.
- **Ensure interventions are tailored to individual clients:** For instance, educational and vocational provisions should reflect the existing skillsets of each beneficiary, their personal preferences, and the labour market in the community where they will return. For clients motivated by religious ideologies, the timing and extent of religious engagements should also be carefully considered, and only gradually introduced in certain contexts. Perhaps most obviously, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) provisions must also be tailored to personal needs. To help personalize these services, interventions should be delivered through an integrated case management system that includes a means of assessing client needs; develops tailored case management plans; coordinates information from all stakeholders involved in programme delivery; and supports exit processes.
- **Ensure that intervention providers are suitably qualified and experienced, and that they maintain supportive relationships with their clients:** While this report primarily focuses on what needs to be achieved, rather than how these interventions should be undertaken, it is difficult to understate the importance of the relationship between intervention providers and their clients. Indeed, trust and rapport are routinely identified as a critical determinant of programme success. These providers must also be suitably qualified and experienced in their specialist areas (as psychologists, social workers, mentors, and so on), and have a sufficient understanding of the causes and manifestations of ideologically justified violence.

- **Invest in measuring programmatic success as a matter of urgency:** Unfortunately, there remains limited empirical evidence demonstrating the extent to which tertiary interventions actually achieve their desired objectives (however stated), and the mechanisms through which any successes are achieved. This represents a critical concern that must be addressed. Those tasked with implementing tertiary programmes should be aware that there are many different methods through which these interventions may be evaluated, all with prominent strengths and weaknesses.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Executive Summary comes from part of an independent report that is not directly funded by CREST. Its findings are relevant to the Countering Violent Extremism: Methods, Processes and Outcomes project. You can see more outputs from this project at: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/countering-violent-extremism