



RESPONDING TO THE RADICALISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Mosaic Practice Note and response skills

August 2025

MIHI

Firstly, we acknowledge those whose lives were taken under the mantle of white supremacy in the Christchurch Mosque attacks on 15 March 2019. We acknowledge the lives who were impacted on that day either directly or through connection. We stand with you as you continue to navigate with that in your story. This resource hopes to be one response to those actions and decisions that lead to that day.

Acknowledgements are then extended to the youth workers and young people who have used Mosaic to see transformative conversations towards social cohesion. Their voices have identified that youth workers need further upskilling to engage with young people being pushed and pulled into radicalisation. This resource hopes to be a response to that.

Finally, we honour the voices, stories and perspectives of those that have woven through all iterations of Mosaic, including this new resource as it hopes to offer some understanding of radicalisation and help to bring responses grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Mana Taiohi Principles and ethical practice.

PURPOSE

The Mosaic resource has been developed by the youth development sector to have courageous conversations with young people around racism and discrimination. Mosaic has evolved to have a set of reflective question cards, an interactive website and a series of pathway resources to address specific issues.

This practice note is designed to equip youth workers to understand the signs of radicalisation through different phases and recommend appropriate youth development responses that will prevent escalation and ensure the safety of all.

PRACTICE RESPONSES ARE GROUNDED IN:

1 Te Tiriti o Waitangi

In Aotearoa New Zealand, understanding racism and white supremacy requires grounding our response in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Preventing radicalisation involves upholding tino rangatiratanga and recognising how colonisation, racism, and systemic inequality intersect.

2 Mana Taiohi Principles of Youth Development

The Mana Taiohi principles inform the way we work with young people in Aotearoa. At each stage of the radicalisation funnel, we have provided reflective questions for youth workers based on Mana Taiohi.

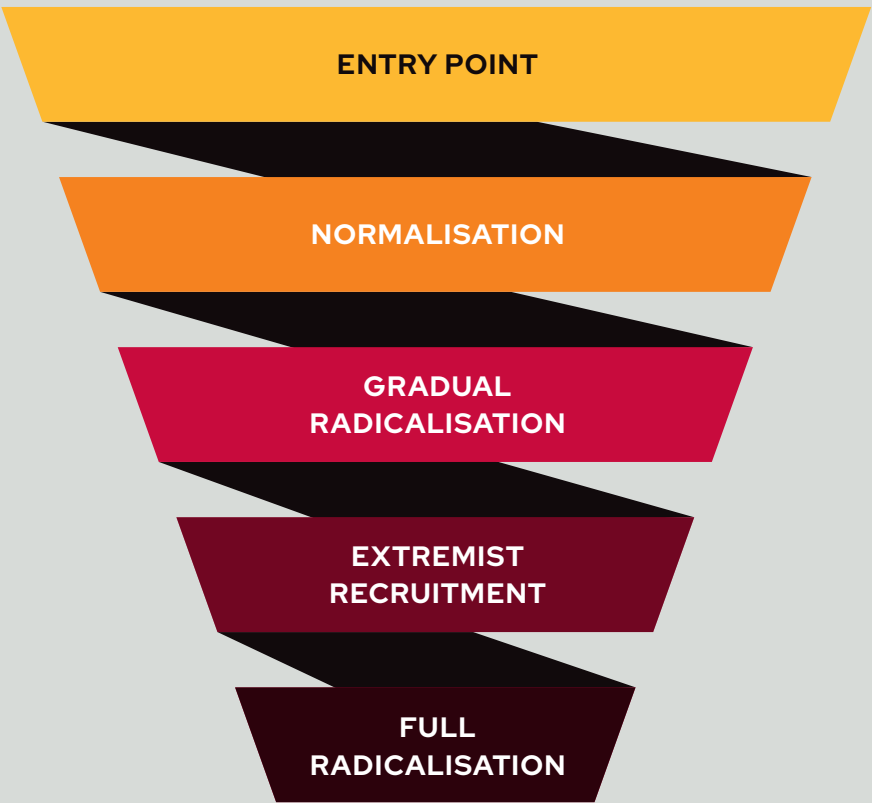
3 Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa

Youth work practice is grounded in our Code of Ethics, which applies to all our relationships with young people. At each stage of the radicalisation funnel, we have identified a key clause for youth workers to reflect on. We note this is not exhaustive and when applying ethics to a particular situation all clauses should be considered.

DISCLAIMERS

- The signs listed in this model are not definitive indicators on their own. It is the **patterns of behaviour**, their frequency, intensity, and context, that reveal a trajectory toward radicalisation. Isolated behaviours may be exploratory or reflective of broader social influences, but consistent patterns over time warrant concern and early intervention
- White supremacy is often misunderstood as being upheld only by white individuals. In reality, it functions as a global power structure that can be internalised and perpetuated by people of all backgrounds. Recognising this complexity helps dismantle the myth that only visibly white actors are complicit in racist systems. Instead, we must look at how behaviours, institutions, and ideologies uphold racial hierarchies, even when maintained by non-white individuals.
- This practice note might be confronting. You might have said or hold some of the views mentioned (as is the experience of every author of this practice note). It's a hard thing to realise, but also a useful moment to reflect and grow as we develop our skills to work more effectively and compassionately with young people.
- Consistently approach situations with empathy for the young people involved. It is important to recognise their humanity and dignity, and showing care and compassion is the most effective method to dismantle white supremacist language.
- The language of radicalisation is constantly evolving. Rather than define every term (which may quickly become outdated) we encourage you to research terms or phrases that are unfamiliar.
- It is important to remember that these views are not illegal, no matter how confronting you find them, but they can lead to illegal activity. Our purpose though is to intervene before it gets to a stage where violence is a risk.

Radicalisation Funnel



The radicalisation funnel is adapted from the pyramid structure developed by McCauley, C., & and Moskalenko, S as a tool to help identify where on the radicalisation journey a young person may be.

There are many factors that both push young people down the funnel and pull them towards the bottom. Therefore, young people can move through the funnel quickly, so taking the signs seriously is important. Youth development relationships are an essential ingredient that operate to stall the young person on their progression, and often, especially in the early tiers, reverse that pull.

The Faces of White Supremacy

This list includes a few of the more obvious expressions of white supremacy, but it is not exhaustive. White supremacy can have many different faces, so staying informed and aware will help you identify it when you see it.

CLASSISM

- ⚡ **How it manifests:** “Wealth = whiteness” stereotypes, hustle culture glorifying exploitation, and framing poor people as “burdens”
- ⚡ **Why it manifests:** White supremacy says the wealthy just work harder for their wealth. Elites sustain inequality by blaming poverty on laziness (ignoring systemic barriers like racism).

ANTI-LGBTQIA+

- ⚡ **How it manifests:** Violence against queer communities, “groomer” conspiracy theories, and erasure of indigenous gender diversity (e.g. takatāpui)
- ⚡ **Why it manifests:** extremist groups frame LGBTQIA+ rights as threats to “traditional values.” Playing on the insecurities of men, equating queerness with weakness, and using it to recruit for extremism.

ABLEISM

- ⚡ **How it manifests:** Discrimination against disabled people (e.g., lack of accessibility, forced institutionalisation, employment bias). Stereotypes of disabled people as “burdens” or “inspirational.” Eugenics rhetoric (e.g., targeting disabled communities in immigration policies or healthcare cuts)
- ⚡ **Why it manifests:** Capitalism values “productivity,” framing disability as a flaw. White supremacy ties “fitness” to racial purity (historically: Nazi eugenics, forced sterilisations). Fear of dependency fuels dehumanisation.

SEXISM

- ⚡ **How it manifests:** Exclusion of women from power structures, fetishisation of minority women, and promotion of “Trad Wife” ideals. Online spaces (e.g., incel forums) spread violent misogyny
- ⚡ **Why it manifests:** Patriarchal systems uphold male dominance. White supremacy preys on the insecurities of men, blaming women for societal changes, and white supremacists weaponise gender roles to recruit disillusioned young people.

RACISM

- ⚡ **How it manifests:** Casual racism (“jokes,” microaggressions), anti-Māori rhetoric, and anti-immigrant scapegoating. Far-right groups rebrand hate as “anti-woke” rebellion. It is often opposed to “foreign” religions, particularly Islam, taking the form of Christian Nationalism.
- ⚡ **Why it manifests:** Colonial hierarchies persist. Fear of losing white privilege fuels backlash against racial justice movements. Economic anxiety is redirected toward minorities.



FUNNEL TIER ONE:

Entry Point – Exploratory Phase

SIGNS

- Expressing vague anger about “the system”, “fairness”, or identity groups without specifics
- Sudden interest in contrarian figures (e.g., “anti-woke” commentators)
- Sharing memes that unknowingly contain extremist dog whistles (e.g. “13/50” crime stats)
- Sudden obsession with “red pill” or “based” content
- Frequently complaining about “censorship” when called out for offensive remarks
- Adopting new jargon (e.g., “soyboy,” “NPC”) without understanding origins
- Blaming personal failures on vague “cultural decay.

EXAMPLES

- “Why does everything have to be rainbow now?”
- Shares TikTok content romanticising housewives or traditional roles for women
- “I’m not racist, but Māori get heaps handed to them”
- Starts idolising rich influencers, crypto bros, or hustle culture
- Jokes about ADHD, autism, or learning needs — “everyone’s ‘neurodivergent’ now.”

CAUSES

- Psychological need: Craving explanations for personal struggles (loneliness, failure, rejection)
- Material need: Desire for purpose and belonging not being met by their scenario
- Manipulation: Far-right content offers simple villains (immigrants, feminists) instead of complex systemic issues
- Example: A boy who failed to get a job blames “diversity hires” after seeing anti-affirmative action videos.

RESPONSES

At this stage, non-confrontational intervention is the best approach. It is very unlikely that you need to be talking about white supremacy with young people, or that they are aware this is what they are engaging with. Some solutions might include:

- Engage in “**positive counterspeech**”, reaffirming group and community commitments to inclusion and care for all. Address the belief without directly talking about the belief.

An example might be where anti LGBTIQ+ statements are made by some young people, the youth worker would reaffirm that we are a welcoming, accepting place for all, including LGBTIQ+ youth, and they are an important part of our community.
- Engaging with empathy and care for the young person. Responses such as: ‘I heard you say this, help me understand that’ can give you some insight into what’s going on for them
- Remember not to assume, plenty of small things can be just that, small things. Or some comments might point to something completely different from what we expect
- If you’re feeling out of your depth, it can be useful to talk with your supervisor, manager or other professionals.

▲ Mana Taiohi reflective question for youth workers:

Hononga – what positive hononga or connections exist and what can be developed to support the young person? Consider personal relationships with peers, whānau, community and school/work, as well as connection to cultural identity, the whenua (land and environment) and online connections.

▲ Mosaic resources:

The physical or online cards are excellent at this stage, both for groups and one on one. Helpful pathways to guide conversations in your space include ‘Allyship’ or ‘When Humour Hurts’.

▲ CoE key clause: Clause 19, Āu ake whāinga | Personal agendas -

19.2 While we will disagree with their opinions and statements, we must show empathy and care. This allows the door to stay open for more input.

FUNNEL TIER TWO:

Normalisation – Adopting Viewpoints

SIGNS

- Testing boundaries with offensive humour (“it’s just a joke!”)
- Defending extremist figures as “just speaking facts”
- Dismissing counter-evidence as “biased”
- Defending extremist views as “just asking questions”
- Dismissing real-world consequences of hate speech (“it’s just online”)
- Increasing use of coded language (e.g., “globalists,” “cultural Marxists”)
- Mocking social justice as “virtue signaling”
- Spending excessive time engaged on forums or with right-wing content creators.

EXAMPLES

- “Males are the ones struggling now, aye — everything’s about women”
- Defends racist content creators by saying “they’re just being real”
- Says things like “if you’re still broke by 30, that’s your own fault”
- Claims schools are “pushing the gay agenda”
- Repeats stories about people “faking it for money or sympathy.”

CAUSES

- Psychological need: Desire for rebellion + social acceptance in niche online spaces
- Material need: Desire for safe outlets for adventure and fun not being met
- Manipulation: Algorithms reward engagement with increasingly extreme content
- Example: A girl laughs at sexist memes in a Discord server to fit in, then starts believing them.



RESPONSES

Once again, it is unlikely you will need to talk directly about white supremacy at this stage, but there will likely be a need for healthy discussions challenging understanding, mixed in with expansive engagement in other support. This may look like:

- Engaging in the wider community, providing a counter to the increasing isolation, helping the young person to maintain a connection to their community and spaces
- Once again, what is actually fueling this for them? Finding out what’s going on underneath
- Engaging in radical empathy for both the young person and the community they are targeting
- Helping them build critical thinking skills.

▲ Mana Taiohi reflective question for youth workers:

Mātauranga – What ways can you broaden the mātauranga and information the young person is engaging with? Arguing about ‘facts’ or information won’t help, so help them engage with new ideas and find opportunities to gently challenge as the young person leads.

▲ Mosaic resources:

The physical or online cards are excellent at this stage, both for groups and one on one. Helpful pathways to guide conversations in your space include ‘Racism’ or ‘Know Better’. Educate yourself on the community that is the target of the young person’s viewpoints.

▲ CoE key clause: Clause 22, Kaitiakitanga | Supervision -

22.1 Youth workers actively participate in regular supervision (such as individual, group, peer, or team supervision) with skilled supervisors.

Do not be isolated in your decision making. Engage your supervisor, management and other appropriate experts in determining how to best respond to this situation. Make sure that the people who support you also challenge your reflections and keep you accountable – this is a positive parallel process to the work you’re doing with the young people involved.

FUNNEL TIER THREE:

Gradual Radicalisation – Identity Encompassing

SIGNS

- Using dehumanising language (e.g., “parasites,” “degenerates”) unironically
- Cutting off friends who criticise their new views
- Consuming conspiracy theories (e.g., “white genocide”)
- Claiming oppressed groups are “the real racists”
- Obsessively sharing “crime stats” to justify racism
- Cutting ties with family/friends over political disagreements
- Believing in “great replacement” or other conspiracy theories
- Justifying historical atrocities (e.g., colonialism, slavery).

EXAMPLES

- Claims kids are being “indoctrinated” by queer content
- Starts using words like “ferals” or “low class” to describe whānau in hardship
- Cuts off friends or whānau who challenge their views, calling them “woke sheep”
- Claims wāhine lie about abuse to ruin men’s lives.

CAUSES

- Psychological need: Fear and a need for certainty. Extremism provides rigid worldviews
- Material need: No answers or spaces provided where they can engage with effective empathy
- Manipulation: Isolated in echo chambers, they lose reality checks
- Example: A trans teen rejected by family falls into “gender critical” TERF rhetoric that validates their self-loathing.

RESPONSES

At this stage, the beliefs are becoming their identity. Anything which you can do as a youth worker to keep them engaged and communicating will greatly reduce their risk of going further down the funnel. They are still a person and deserve respect and empathy, even when their beliefs are abrasive. Some ideas for responding are:

- Engaging in their day-to-day life. Finding things which give them joy or purpose and connecting them into safe community spaces to maintain a grounding in reality and their community.
- **Reparative counterspeech** is the process of repairing damaged beliefs by addressing and shifting the underlying perceptions of the world. It involves holding a non-judgmental space and offering counter narratives without pressure.

An example might be that a young person claims Māori are all unemployed, you would engage in conversation to understand why they believe this and respond with compassion, challenging the underlying facts of the belief, pointing to employed Māori in their world as well as wider understandings. This technique is particularly effective in the form of “Why” questions and “What if” questions. Some examples may be “Why do you think that?”, “Why would that be the case?” or “What if it was you in their situation?”.

▲ Mana Taiohi reflective question for youth workers:

Maanakitanga – Continuing to manaaki and show care for the young person can be challenging as their views become more entrenched, but it is key to keeping them engaged. It can be hard to deal with the abrasiveness but remember to persevere with relationship as many youth workers have seen young people re-engage positively because they did not give up. Hold on to hope. Role modelling a more optimistic and healing future is a direct alternative to extremist and radical views.

▲ CoE key clause: Clause 15, Matatapu | Confidentiality -

15.1 The young person’s ability to trust the youth worker is key to the Youth Work relationship.

15.3 Limits to confidentiality, which may lead to disclosure, apply when:

- There is concern for the safety of the young person or someone else
- There is an emergency situation
- It is required by legislation or the courts
- The young person is unable to consent.

15.4 When youth workers need to pass on confidential information, they will provide only the information necessary to the appropriate people.

While it is always a consideration at this stage the youth worker must ask are the young person and others safe.

If the answer to this is no, some form of disclosure will be needed. In making this determination:

- Working with wider networks of support (including supervision) and pulling on resources such as Mosaic pathways and Netsafe
- Consider the role of family/ caregivers - noting standard ethical considerations such as age etc., and that the family/caregivers might hold the same views as the young person
- If there are threats of violence, engage Police and/or Oranga Tamariki. You should not be managing on your own at this stage.



FUNNEL TIER FOUR:

Extremist Recruitment – Activation in Extremist Community

SIGNS

- Joining encrypted groups (Telegram, private forums)
- Parroting extremist slogans (“blood and soil!”)
- Viewing violence as “defensive”
- Adopting extremist symbols (e.g., runes, Pepe memes) unironically
- Attending rallies or meetups with far-right groups
- Expressing a willingness to “fight” for their beliefs
- Glorifying past extremists (e.g., Hitler, Mussolini) as “misunderstood”
- Parroting far-right figures’ talking points verbatim.

EXAMPLES

- Begins studying acts of violence and talking about those who have committed acts of terror.
- Starts talking about “white genocide” and “securing a future for white people.”
- Supports extremist political voices who demonise the poor. Saying the poor need to be ‘dealt’ with and removed
- Uses extreme language like “purge this sickness” in reference to LGBTQIA+, talking about “something needs to be done about them”
- Pushes the idea that burdens on society need to be dealt with, and those who are weakening us should be removed.

CAUSES

- Psychological need: Craving purpose and belonging. Groups/recruiters offer identity
- Material need: Young people have become isolated from their community and now only have the radical groups left
- Manipulation: Love-bombing (e.g., “we’re your real family”)
- Example: A lonely incel praised by a militia group for the first time in his life.



RESPONSES

At this stage, you must be conscious of your limitations as a youth worker. Making sure you are taking care of yourself, and your community is important when engaging with someone at this stage.

- It is extremely unlikely that you can talk them out of their beliefs by yourself, and continued connection is still important if you can. Keeping them engaged in the real world can help reduce the risk of acting out
- With that being said, they are actively becoming a risk to those around them, particularly from communities they are targeting, so engaging with whānau, schools, Police and Oranga Tamariki where necessary is important in order to keep everyone safe
- If you notice any signs of planning or contemplating a violent action, you must report it to either the police or the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) (www.nzsis.govt.nz).

▲ Mana Taiohi reflective question for youth workers:

What are ways to maintain some level of whanaungatanga if they are willing to engage? Small wins can make a big difference. Protect and prioritise your working relationship with the young people involved, and try to use these challenges as a means of strengthening the relationships you have. Remember this is not necessarily the reason the young person engaged with you, even though supporting them through this might be necessary.

▲ CoE key clause: Clause 17, Kia Mataara ki Ngā Ripa Tauārai | Knowing Your Limits -

17.1 Youth workers understand their role and responsibilities, and that the Youth Work relationship has limitations.

Recognise your limits as a youth worker personally and professionally. Be realistic around what you can and cannot provide to the young person at this stage.

FUNNEL TIER FIVE:

Full Radicalisation – Terrorist Acts or Violence

SIGNS

- Stockpiling weapons or researching attacks
- Writing manifestos or suicide notes
- Severing all non-extremist relationships
- Practising weapons training for “self-defence”
- Expressing suicidal ideation tied to their ideology
- Openly advocating for ethnic cleansing or violence against their perceived enemies
- Creating or sharing violent manifestos
- Celebrating real-world attacks (e.g., Christchurch, Charlottesville).

EXAMPLES

- Planning and the desire to carry out attacks
- Learning/fascination with weapons and explosives
- Engaging in “training” for different kinds of actions
- Scouting out potential targets
- Using language like martyrdom and dying for a cause.

CAUSES

- Psychological need: Desperation for legacy and romanticises martyrdom
- Material need: fully isolated, lacking any connections
- Manipulation: Recruiters glorify violence as “heroic”
- Example: A radicalised young person sees mass shooters as idols who “fought back”.



RESPONSES

While it is unlikely you will ever experience a young person at this stage, it is possible and continuing to recognise your limitations and capacity is important here. But you can still have a positive impact, engaging and caring for the young person.

- They may be trying to disengage from their community entirely but continue to give them any opportunity to engage as long as it is safe for them to do so. Do not bring them into spaces which are connected to their targeted group
- When you are aware of threats of violence or plans for violence, make sure to contact police at 111
- If you notice any signs of planning or contemplating a violent action, you must report it to the police
- Make sure you have strong self-care in place to manage your commitment in this space.

▲ Mana Taiohi reflective question for youth workers:

Mauri – How can you honour the mana, mauri and whakapapa the young person carries, despite their dangerous and toxic beliefs. You may need to adopt a long-term view of this, reflecting on the time you’ve known the young people involved and how you’ve experienced their mauri. Has this evolved? Think about how your smaller actions today might have larger ripple effects later in this young person’s life. What might be the impacts on your own mauri if you learn of radicalisation after you have finished working with a young person? What can you change today about your own practice that helps your future self feel more tau and at peace?

▲ CoE key clause: Clause 24, Haumaru | Safety -

24.2 On the rare occasion where a young person is unable to act with self-determination, youth workers act to protect the young person’s rights and welfare.

Safety is of utmost importance.



“Extremism doesn’t always begin with hate sometimes it begins with belonging. Help them find a place to stand that doesn’t require burning the world down”



“Connection before correction. It’s the relationship that makes any shift possible, not the tools, not the theory, but the trust.”



“When a young person starts to pull away, that is when they need connection the most. Don’t give up. Keep showing up with aroha, keep the door open, and let them know their community is still here, ready, waiting, and believing in them. Your presence can be enough for transformation.”

References

The funnel model is based on the work of McCauley, C., & and Moskalenko, S
McCauley, C., & and Moskalenko, S. (2008). Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20(3), 415–433.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>

The World Beyond White Supremacy

Radicalisation thrives in the cracks of unmet needs, disconnection, and fear. But every crack is also a place where light can get in. This resource is not just about what to watch for, it’s also about what we can build instead.

We believe young people are not problems to be solved, but partners in the solution. The more we centre their voice and ideas, uphold their dignity, and walk alongside them, the more resilient our communities will be to radicalism. Radicalisation is preventable, but empathy-coated hope must be planted early, often, and collectively.

We want to see a world where young people feel connected to their communities and culture. where they are not enticed by the easy answers of white supremacy, and have their real material and emotional needs met. Where they know they have dignity, mana, and a place to shape our collective futures.

There is no single intervention that “fixes” radicalisation, but there are a thousand daily actions that build resilience. Every inclusive group space, every conversation that listens before it lectures, every young person who feels seen and valued, these are acts of resistance against hate.





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MOSAIC PRACTICE NOTE AND RESPONSE SKILLS

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