

Title: Parent Zone response to the Commission for Countering Extremism's consultation and call for evidence on Extremism in England and Wales. Parent Zone is well placed to respond because:

Our Home Office-funded [Resilient Families Programme](#) delivers training to pupils, parents and professionals on the topic of online radicalisation and extremism. The programme includes online and face-to-face training, and has reached over 70,000 families since its launch in 2016.

Our channel [Parent Info](#), in partnership with NCA: CEOP, is accessed on 4,500 school websites and publishes expert-written articles providing essential guidance and support, giving parents the knowledge and confidence to discuss a range of issues, including violent and/or far-right extremism.

Introduction to Parent Zone

Parent Zone specialises in providing support to parents and families as they respond to the challenges of a digital age.

Our mission is to make the internet work for families. We reach over **five million families** a year through our various programmes including:

www.parentinfo.org: our free national newsfeed service for schools delivered in partnership with the CEOP command of the National Crime Agency, providing information to parents on issues caused or amplified by the internet, from gambling to self-harm, cybercrime to grooming.

[Parent Lounge](#), an online space where parents can complete our digital parenting programme and access expert parenting support via our Live Chat service. The Lounge has over 1000 visits a day, with over 50,000 parents taking our online Parenting in The Digital Age parenting programme in the last year. The programme is the only digital parenting programme available in the UK and is currently being adapted for use in Romania, India, Finland, Norway, Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh, funded by Telenor, the national telecoms company in Norway.

Dove Self-Esteem Programme in partnership with Unilever, helping parents play their part in improving girls' self-esteem.

Digital Life Skills, in partnership with Vodafone Global, which delivers parent sessions designed to help parents build children's digital literacy and life skills. The programme will be delivered in 9 countries including the UK.

Resilient Families Programme delivers training to pupils, parents and professionals on the subject of online radicalisation and extremism, with online and face-to-face training; the Resilient Families Programme has reached over 70,000 families since its launch in 2016.

Be Internet Legends, in partnership with Google, provides internet safety assemblies and curriculums to primary school children in England and Wales. In 2018, we reached over 120,000 children by delivering 608 assemblies. The Be Internet Legends programme is being scaled to reach more schools and families in 2019.

Digital Schools, working with schools throughout the UK to provide a complete digital resilience-based education - including online safety lessons, online digital parenting courses, and training for teachers and support staff.

Digital Families Events - our annual programme of events which includes an internet safety conference in partnership with CEOP, and the Scottish government's internet safety summit.

Finally, we conduct research with parents, children and professionals including:

How are we doing? Research conducted with children to ask them how they think the first generation of digital parents is doing.

The Perfect Generation. Research with children and teachers to ask whether they felt social media was having an adverse impact on their mental health.

The Digital Family. An exploration of the risks and opportunities families face online.

Our response

Our response reflects the work we have been doing to help parents and carers understand and respond to the risk of online radicalisation and extremism. Commissioned by the Home Office in 2016, our [Resilient Families](#) programme responds to local threats and meets the needs of people on the ground, making difficult information accessible by de-stigmatising and contextualising the issue of online extremism and radicalisation.

Background

Digital Resilience and Parent Info

Parent Zone is an organisation that helps families, schools, police forces and local authorities build children's digital resilience and safety. Since 2004, we have advocated for digital resilience as an effective way for individuals to enjoy the opportunities offered online while being protected from potential, sometimes unintended, negative consequences of the internet. Since 2016, we have co-chaired the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) Digital Resilience Working Group. Acknowledging the importance of its work, this has been carried forward into the newly formed UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS). Through the Digital Resilience Framework, in whose architecture we have played a major part, we have worked with experts across the full spectrum of online harms to define resilience and equip users to manage online risks by developing a better understanding of when they are at risk; knowing what to do to seek help; recovering when things go wrong; and learning from the experience.¹ There has been widespread support from a wide range of stakeholders and communities.

Informed by this thinking, Parent Zone's Resilient Families programme captures our digital resilience approach and applies it to supporting practitioners, parents, teachers and pupils to understand the risks of online extremism and the best ways to deal with them.

In addition to our work on digital resilience and Resilient Families, Parent Zone, in partnership with NCA-CEOP,² provides advice and guidance to parents via Parent Info. Parent Info is the only available government-initiated website which provides expert content

¹ <https://parentzone.org.uk/article/parent-zone-and-rise-digital-resilience>

² <https://parentinfo.org/>

for parents, tackling a range of issues amplified by the internet, including online grooming³ and preventing violent online extremism.⁴ To date, over 4500 schools and community organisations subscribe to the free newsfeed service, enabling them to host Parent Info content on their own website, and reducing the need for parents and staff to search for expert content.

Our Resilient Families programme and Parent Info site provide evidence of our current response to online extremism and the ways we account for the interaction between online and offline spaces. Both of these projects destigmatise complex information and make it accessible to families and professionals who are nervous about looking for content on online extremism. Our response will reflect the ability of digital resilience to support parents, carers, local authorities and young people in cases or threats of online extremism.

Our Current Response to Extremism - Resilient Families

Our Resilient Families programme is aligned with one of Parent Zone's core policies, namely that digital resilience is an effective way to respond to online harms, including extremism. Since 2016, Resilient Families has been delivered in 22 local authorities across the UK and is delivering four key aims⁵: to facilitate conversations about online radicalisation and extremism between parents, children and professionals; to promote an understanding of online risks; to enable young people to recognise and challenge online extremism when they see or experience it; and to support professionals working with families. These aims are achieved by face-to-face resilience workshops in schools and community settings and digital resilience professional training. These digital resilience parenting courses, face-to-face workshops with pupils and teachers, and professional training for practitioners, have helped us reach over 16,000 children and young people and over 2,000 parents and professionals in 2017-2018. We will continue this strong outreach throughout 2019.

Our Approach and the Interaction between Online and Offline - Resilient Families

Children and young people

³ <https://parentinfo.org/article/what-you-need-to-know-about-online-grooming>

⁴ <https://parentinfo.org/article/preventing-violent-extremism-what-parents-can-do>

⁵ Local authorities include Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bradford, Brighton, Camden, Croydon, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, Islington, Lambeth, Leeds, Luton, Manchester, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark.

When providing face-to-face resilience workshops for children and young people, we focus on critical thinking about news and opinions encountered online. This helps them to understand when they are at risk online, know what to do to seek help, recover when things go wrong, and learn from their experiences. In our experience, children do not make a significant distinction between their online and offline lives - relationships, friendships and social interactions take place in both spaces simultaneously. For these reasons, the workshops we provide that focus on critical thinking around the potential risks of **online** interactions, also help to protect children **offline**. Helping a young person build digital resilience encourages them to understand the online risk of interactions and 'fake news', and the ways in which this could lead to radicalisation or extremism both on and offline.

The outcomes of our sessions have helped support children and build confidence in their ability to be digitally resilient.

After one school session, we found a 23% increase in children being able to spot 'fake news', a 33% increase in children understanding the need to check the credibility of information sources, and a 64% increase in children who felt able to challenge extremist ideas.⁶

Parents and Practitioners

In comparison to children and young people, our training for practitioners and parents aims to reduce the complexities of online extremism and equip them with the knowledge and confidence to help vulnerable individuals. The generational knowledge gap between young people's and parents' use of the internet is a common theme in the work we do at Parent Zone. In relation to online extremism, parents' own lived experience is often very different to that of their children, and they can struggle to understand the risks faced by them with regard to online extremism. Combined with fear associated with the subject matter, this means that parents find it difficult to access information without fear of stigma. Taking account for this in our training, we encourage open discussions among practitioners and parents about the risks of online extremism to boost confidence and promote effective digital parenting. We provide digital resilience resources to practitioners so that they can extend this process to their local communities in an accessible way, helping us reach many vulnerable individuals.

⁶ Bailey G., & Wong K., 'Independent Evaluation of Parent Zone's Resilience Programme', (April 2018), Manchester Metropolitan University Policy Evaluation and Research Unit.

After one session, there was a 50% increase in the number of professionals who felt confident to have a difficult conversation with someone regarding extremism.

Bridging Generational Knowledge Gaps - Parent Info

To help further support parents, Parent Info is delivered on school websites and assists in bridging the gap between children's online experiences and parents' perceptions and understanding. Parent Info publishes expert-written articles which help parents spot the signs that their children may be being influenced by violent and/or far-right extremists. These accessible articles explain how young people are targeted by extremist groups, and what parents can do if they are worried - they provide essential support which gives parents the knowledge and confidence to discuss online extremism with their children.⁷ We recommend that trustworthy resources, such as Parent Info, are given careful consideration as a means of closing the gap between parents' perceptions of online extremism and young people's lived experience. We are currently looking for sustainable funding to maintain this already trusted resource.

Concluding Remarks

Parent Zone is responding to online extremism with our Resilient Families programme and Parent Info service. We de-stigmatise complex issues by focusing on parenting and by bringing our expert knowledge of the digital world, and our ability to engage with the industry to a complex subject matter. A 'digital resilience' approach is effective because it helps young people understand when they are at risk; know what to do to seek help; learn from their mistakes; and recover when things go wrong. This creates a cycle of resilience, which continues to help children understand the risks of online extremism. Developing these skills will help children deal with online risks, regardless of the nature of the threat. For digital families, a parent-focused approach prevents fear-mongering and instead enables open conversations about online extremism, helping both parents and children to understand the potential risks, know how to spot the potential signs, recover when things go wrong and to learn from the experience.

⁷ <https://parentinfo.org/article/preventing-far-right-extremism-a-guide-for-parents>

Parent Zone's additional resource, Parent Info, serves a similar purpose, helping build confidence in parents and bridge the generational knowledge gap, as well as enabling parents to be proactive about understanding and managing potential risks online. Parent Info is a helpful and accessible resource that should be taken into consideration when evaluating responses to online extremism and the impact this has on individuals.