



National Offender  
Management Service

# Healthy Identity Intervention

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Summary and Overview

Interventions Unit

National Offender Manager Service

Her Majesty's Ministry of Justice

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## **Background**

NOMS Interventions Unit have an established international reputation for developing and delivering high-quality, evidence-based assessments and interventions to effectively manage and prevent offending behaviour. In 2008 a team in this unit were tasked with developing interventions to prevent extremist offending and methodologies to assess risk of extremist offending.

Casework with volunteer extremist offenders in custody was conducted to learn about their pathways into extremist offending, effective approaches to engaging and working with them and how to facilitate disengagement and desistance. This experience accompanied by a review of the literature regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders directly informed the design and development of the Healthy Identity Intervention (HII). It was also designed & developed on the established 'What Works' research and principles associated with effective interventions to reduce offending behaviour.

Delivery of the HII was piloted in 2010 and 2011 at various prisons and community regions with extremist offenders associated with different ideologies, groups and causes (e.g. Al Qaeda, Extreme Far right, Animal Rights). This included offenders of different ages and gender who had committed a variety of offences. An evaluation of the HII was completed in 2011 which supported delivery of this intervention across NOMS and provided recommendations to enhance it. Revisions to the intervention were made and since 2012 it has been available to all convicted extremist offenders in both custody and community who are assessed as suitable. We continue to monitor and supervise the progress of offenders completing this intervention and this learning continues to inform its evolution.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the intervention is to try and prevent individuals from committing future extremist offences. To achieve this, it encourages and empowers participants to disengage from an extremist group, cause or ideology. It addresses both the factors and circumstances which *motivate* individuals to engage and offend and also those attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that *enable* them to offend. The intervention provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on who they are and where they are going with their lives. It encourages them to reconsider whether the commitments they have made to an extremist group, cause or ideology really allow them to 'get on in life', meet their personal needs and allow them to be the type of person they want to be. Ultimately, it encourages them to 'move on' with their lives, embrace new commitments and feel empowered to 'walk away'.

## **Key Features**

The notion of identity is central to the intervention. Identity issues appear to go to the heart of why people commit these types of offence and also why they choose to disengage and desist. The HII recognises that when people identify strongly with other relationships, groups or values in their lives, these bonds can have a powerful effect over their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Helping people to step-away from the things they identify with (and can often love or care passionately about) is a process that requires support, sensitivity and persistence. This focus allows the intervention to take a genuinely holistic approach and focus on what really matters to people's lives rather than just addressing more peripheral issues.

The intervention is delivered in a one-to-one setting (or two facilitators to one participant). This has a number of benefits over a group format, the most important of which is helping participants to reconnect with their own personal values and beliefs, rather than being influenced by those shared by an extremist group or cause. The relationship between the facilitator/s and the participant is viewed as crucial to facilitating change and disengagement. It is intended to be delivered and experienced as a collaborative process in which participants take responsibility for their own progress but with the support and skills of the facilitator/s. This can strengthen their engagement with the process and see this as benefitting them at a personal level, rather than just as a means to an end.

It is flexible in that facilitators can decide which sessions they want to complete for each individual and over what time period. The sessions selected are those assessed as being most relevant to target each participant's individual risks, needs and circumstances. These are typically assessed using the Extremism Risk Guidelines 22+ (ERG). The intervention targets and addresses the majority of the risk factors identified in the ERG. The pathways individuals take into becoming engaged with (and disengaged from) an extremist group, cause or ideology are often varied and complex and require sound assessment and competent facilitator skills.

To facilitate disengagement and desistance, the modules and sessions of the intervention are intended to help participants:

1. Meet their personal needs without needing to be committed to an extremist group, cause or ideology
2. Strengthen their own sense of personal agency in making decisions about their current and future commitments
3. Address their offence supportive attitudes, beliefs and thinking
4. Express their values and pursue their goals without needing to offend
5. Increase their tolerance and acceptance of challenging emotions. These goals will vary for each participant but are based on addressing the factors and circumstances which seem to contribute to extremist offending and facilitating those which encourage disengagement

The intervention is not ideologically based or intended to re-educate participants in a particular set of beliefs or doctrine. It does however allow participants to explore and be challenged about their beliefs, ideas and attitudes which contribute to offending behaviour. Addressing inaccurate, unhelpful or distorted beliefs and attitudes is just one component of the intervention.

## Aims

The sessions and modules in the HII are designed to achieve one or more of the following aims depending on the circumstances of each individual participant:

- To assist participants in leading more fulfilling pro-social lives in which they can meet their needs without having to be engaged with or offend on behalf of an extremist group, cause or ideology.
- To develop their professional support and networks, creating a foundation for future intervention, supervision and management.
- To become familiar with the style and approach of intervention work and to develop a strong, trusting facilitator-participant relationship.
- To prepare them to engage in more offence-focussed work or participate in more intensive intervention work.
- To encourage and support participants in reconsidering and re-examining their engagement and/or identification with an extremist group, cause or ideology.
- To equip them with insight and knowledge to prevent them from accepting and identifying with extremist values, beliefs and ideas *without question*.
- To enable them to express and pursue their values without feeling that they have to offend or be engaged with an extremist group etc.
- To make them less willing or prepared to offend on behalf of an extremist group, cause or ideology (e.g. to make it harder for them to justify harming other groups).
- To enable them to meet their needs through alternative commitments (e.g. relationships, occupations, interests etc) without being engaged with an extremist group, cause or ideology.

- To provide a context through which opportunities can be developed outside of sessions to allow participants to build new commitments and move them away from commitments associated with offending e.g. taking steps to re-build family relationships.
- To help establish whether and what further intervention work may be required.

### **Intended Outcomes**

As disengagement is a process and not an event, progress is dependent on the participant's position prior to beginning the intervention. For those who are strongly engaged, the process of simply participating and coming to question their continued identification with an extremist group, cause or ideology may represent considerable progress. For those who have already begun to have doubts, taking active steps to separate themselves from other associated with a cause may be an important outcome. For those who have already disengaged, helping them to consolidate their commitment to 'move on' and strengthen new commitments which can prevent them from re-engaging, may be an important outcome. In this respect, the intervention is relevant to participants at various stages of engagement or disengagement. It may also be relevant to repeat previous or complete new sessions of the intervention as individual's progress over time.

## **Suitability**

The intervention is for individuals who committed their offence/s because of their engagement and or identification with a specific extremist group, cause or ideology. It is intended for use with individuals convicted of a Terrorist Act (TACT) offence, and for those convicted under criminal law of other offences where the motivation behind these acts is considered to be extremist.

In some cases, the motivation behind offending is not always clear and the intervention may not always be appropriate. For example, some offenders may have had minimal engagement with a group, cause or ideology or been largely ignorant to their involvement in an offence taking place. Similarly, some individuals may only have become engaged for more superficial or criminal reasons to e.g. for the excitement, to launder money or supply drugs etc. In these instances the intervention may be less appropriate and/or have limited value. Further advice and guidance should be sought from Interventions Unit in these circumstances.

The intervention can also be used for offenders who have not been convicted of a previous extremist offence but for whom there is evidence of current engagement with an extremist group, cause or ideology. This may also include evidence of their intent to offend on behalf of such a group/cause/ideology and evidence that they are capable of doing so. It is not appropriate for those about whom there are vague concerns about vulnerability where evidence of engagement remains ambiguous or lacks credibility. Completion of the Extremism Risk Screening Guidance (or Extremism Risk Guidance 22+) for each individual is recommended to decide whether the intervention is appropriate and legitimate for this purpose.

## **Approaches Used**

The intervention has been based on general approaches and specific methods that already have currency in effectively addressing offending behaviour (e.g. those identified in the 'What Works' literature) such as pro-social modelling, emotional management and cognitive restructuring (changing thinking). However it also uses methods and approaches that are more unusual and innovative such as identity development and mindfulness.

Given that the intervention is focused on facilitating changes in personal commitments (process focussed), it is less concerned with developing new skills than some other offending behaviour programmes.

To ensure the intervention is likely to be effective, the intervention has been developed and is delivered in-line with principles of effective intervention. For example, the intervention has a transparent theoretical basis with clear aims and methods, it is manualised to ensure consistency of delivery and integrity, a formal training programme is delivered, facilitators need to be suitably qualified and facilitators are supervised during delivery.

## **Delivery**

The HII is a flexible intervention in that different sections can be delivered depending on the risks and needs of the individual and the nature of their offending. Facilitators have to identify which sessions are most suitable for their participant. Some individuals may require considerable time to engage in a meaningful relationship with a facilitator and the process itself. Some offenders whose involvement in a group or cause may have been peripheral may not require the intensity of work required by an individual who is heavily identified with a cause. The number of sessions will vary depending on the level of work required and the current circumstances of the participant.

## Modules and Sessions

The HII includes a number of modules and sessions which are outlined below to give a flavour of their focus and purpose:

- **Engagement and Insight Sessions:** Focus on the participant's needs, beliefs and values, help them explore what is important in their lives and how they can work towards these fulfilling these values and goals without having to remain engaged in an extremist group or cause or having to offend.
- **Foundation Sessions:** Participants identify how they have come to be the person they are today (their identity), why they became interested and involved with a group, cause or ideology and (if relevant) the reasons why they offended.
- **Mindfulness Sessions:** Help participants to manage and tolerate specific thoughts or feelings which may impair their daily lives, their ability to engage fully in intervention work and/or their ability to relate to staff.
- **Personal Identity Sessions:** Participants re-examine the specific commitments they have made in their lives and how they can make new commitments or strengthen old ones to get on in life without offending.
- **Group Involvement Sessions:** Participants explore the costs and benefits of their involvement and offending (including any disillusionment) and the changes they can make to their involvement to get on in life without offending.
- **Self-Image Sessions:** Participants explore how they can make changes in their life to maintain a desired self-image/identity without offending.
- **Group Conflict Sessions:** Participants develop insight into why they may have taken sides and supported or committed harm against another group and how they can deal with similar events differently in the future.
- **Seeking Change Sessions:** Participants reconsider and question the legitimacy of offending to achieve and express their own ideological or political goals and values.

- **Moving on Sessions:** Help participants consider how they can move forward with their lives in a way that fits with their values, beliefs and needs in a constructive way. They also look at concrete ways in which participants can make progress including skills they can develop, opportunities they can make and take, relationships they can form or strengthen and any additional intervention work they may need.

### **Further Information**

For further information about how the National Offender Management Service has approached addressing extremist offending, including further background information to the approaches outlined above, please consult '*Combating Extremism & Terrorism, Prison Service Journal, September 2012, No 203.*' and/or contact NOS\_Correspondence.OSIG@noms.gsi.gov.uk.