

REFLECTION GUIDE FOR FORMER EXTREMISTS

Considering Involvement in P/CVE



2026 Version

BEFORE YOU GET INVOLVED

Working in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) can provide a meaningful opportunity to use your lived experience to help others. It can also have significant personal consequences, affecting your wellbeing, privacy, future career opportunities, recovery, and the people close to you.

This guide is designed to help you reflect on whether working in P/CVE is the right step for you at this point in your life. It is not about whether you are good enough to do this work, but whether it fits with what you need and want in your life right now.



There are no right or wrong answers. As you work through this guide, take your time and answer honestly. Some questions may be easy to answer, while others may require more thought. The aim is to help you identify what you feel ready for, what concerns you may have, and what you may want to discuss with others before making a decision.

1. Why Do I Want to Do This Work?

People become involved in P/CVE for many different reasons. Understanding what draws you to this work can help you think about how it fits with your interests, goals, and life.

- What do I hope to get from this work?
- What draws me to this type of work?
- Do I feel pressure to "give back" or prove that I have changed?
- What do I hope to contribute?



It is natural to want to make something meaningful come from difficult experiences. But it can also lead to unrealistic expectations, disappointment, or burnout if you feel that the work has to give meaning to what happened or prove that you have changed.

2. Recovery, Wellbeing, and Readiness

Working in P/CVE may involve situations that remind you of your past, difficult conversations, or experiences that affect your wellbeing. It helps to have a stable foundation in your own life before taking on this work.

- What parts of this work concern me or might be especially difficult or triggering?
- What strengths do I already have that would help me in this role?
- How do I usually cope with stress?
- Am I comfortable asking for help?
- If this work became emotionally difficult, who could I turn to for support?
- Do I have supportive people in my life outside of work?



Motivation is important, but so is readiness. Think about what would make this work difficult and whether you have the support and coping strategies you would need. Recovery is not a destination that you either reach or don't—it is an ongoing process.

3. Boundaries and Balance

One of the biggest challenges in this field is maintaining a healthy work-life balance. People who work effectively and sustainably in this field recognize their limits, seek support when needed, and maintain interests and relationships outside of P/CVE.

- Do I feel responsible for helping everyone I meet?
- Can I assess my limits when there is too much going on (work, socially, emotionally)?
- Can I take breaks or say “no” without feeling guilty?
- Am I comfortable referring someone to another person when needed?
- Can I leave work behind at the end of the day?
- Do I have interests and relationships outside of P/CVE?



Caring about the work does not mean you have to be available all the time or take responsibility for everyone you encounter. Think about what your limits are, how you will communicate them, and when you may need to step back or ask for support.

4. Working as a Professional

Lived experience is valuable, but it is only one part of working in P/CVE. Professional roles also require reliability, communication, teamwork, accountability, and continued learning.

- Am I comfortable working as part of a team?
- How do I respond to direction from others?
- How do I respond to criticism or feedback?
- Am I willing to keep learning and developing my skills?
- Am I comfortable saying when I don't know something?
- Can I work as a professional without relying only on my lived experience?



Many people first become involved in P/CVE because of their personal experiences. While lived experience can open the door to this work, staying curious and continuing to learn are necessary for a lasting career.

5. Sharing My Story

When people first begin this work, they may feel excited or pressured to share more than they later feel comfortable with. Once something is public, it can be difficult to take back. Sharing your story can be meaningful, but you should remain in control of what you choose to share.

- Am I comfortable talking about my past, and have I practised doing so in a safe setting?
- What parts of my story do I want to keep private?
- How might public exposure affect my family, relationships, or future career?
- Could sharing my story publicly lead to unwanted contact or negative reactions from former comrades or others connected to my past?
- How would I respond if my story were misunderstood or criticized?
- Am I comfortable saying no to media or public speaking opportunities?



Once your story is public, it may be quoted, edited, taken out of context, or continue circulating for years. Think carefully about what you share and how it may affect your future beyond P/CVE.

6. Building My Future

Working in P/CVE should support the future you want to build—not become the only way you define yourself. Your lived experience is one part of who you are, not your entire identity.

- Who am I beyond my lived experience?
- What other interests, goals, or careers are important to me?
- Am I building skills that I can use outside of P/CVE?
- If I stopped working in this field one day, what would I want the next chapter of my life to look like?
- Is this work helping me move forward, or keeping me in my past?
- Is there another field or career I would like to pursue if I was able to?



Working in P/CVE can be a meaningful chapter in your life, but it does not have to be the final one. As your life changes, you may want new interests, opportunities, or a career less connected to your past.

7. Compensation & Costs

P/CVE work can include employment, consulting, mentoring, training, research, public speaking, or voluntary roles. Before agreeing to a role or activity, make sure you understand whether and how you will be paid, what expenses are covered, and what time the work may require beyond the activity itself.

- Is this a paid role, voluntary position, consulting arrangement, or project-based work?
- How will I be compensated for my time and responsibilities?
- Will my travel, accommodation, meals, childcare, or other expenses be covered?
- Will preparation, travel, follow-up, or time away from other work be taken into account?



Wanting to contribute or “give back” does not mean you should be expected to work for free. Your time, skills, and experience have value, and it is appropriate to ask how your contribution will be compensated.

8. Choosing the Right Organization

Just as organizations should consider whether they are ready to involve people with lived experience, you should consider whether they are ready to support you. A good organization should value your experience, respect you as a professional, support your growth, and take your wellbeing seriously.

- ▶ Remember: you are interviewing the organization just as much as they are interviewing you.
- ▶ Be cautious if you feel pressured to share more than you want to or take part in something you are uncomfortable with.



Not every organization is prepared to involve individuals with lived experience. A good organization will respect your boundaries, provide appropriate support, and value you.



Questions to consider asking a potential employer

ROLE EXPECTATIONS

- What will my responsibilities be?
- What does success in this role look like?
- How will I receive feedback?

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Will I be expected to speak publicly?
- Can I decline public speaking or media opportunities?
- How does the organization respond to harassment or negative media attention?

SUPPORT AND WELLBEING

- Who will supervise me?
- What support is available if the work becomes difficult?
- What happens if I need to step back temporarily?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Will I receive training?
- Will I have opportunities to develop skills beyond my lived experience?
- What opportunities will I have to develop my skills and grow professionally?

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- How are people with lived experience treated within the organization?
- How does the organization handle concerns or disagreements?
- Who can I speak to if I have a problem with my supervisor or the organization?

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- Is the role permanent, temporary, or project-based?
- What are the expected working hours and workload?
- Will I receive a written role description or agreement?

8. Looking Ahead

There is no perfect time to begin this work, and not everyone with lived experience needs to work in P/CVE. Another path may be a better fit for your goals, wellbeing, and the life you want to build.

- ▶ Take time to reflect before saying “yes.” Taking time to decide is a well-informed and professional choice.

Final Questions for Reflection

- Why am I considering becoming involved?
- What do I hope to contribute—and what do I hope to gain from this work?
- If I chose not to become involved, how would I feel?

You may decide that you need more time, more support, or that this work is simply not right for you. All of these are valid outcomes. Whatever you decide, continue building a healthy, meaningful life beyond P/CVE.



Feedback and Questions

This is a living document and may be updated as practice develops. We welcome questions, suggestions, and feedback on how the guide works in different contexts.

For more information, please contact Katharina Sengfelder at Exit Nexus (contact@exit-nexus.com) or Gordon Clubb at the University of Leeds (G.Clubb@leeds.ac.uk).



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This document is part of the Lived Experience in P/CVE toolkit, developed by Katharina Sengfelder (Exit Nexus) and Gordon Clubb (University of Leeds), in collaboration with INDEX / Violence Prevention Network gGmbH.

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