

# COHESION

*citizenship education  
on social inclusion*

## **HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS**

Background information on and examples of  
citizenship interventions in schools



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## COLOPHON

*Cohesion: Handbook for teachers*

*This handbook supports the Cohesion lesson material for primary and secondary schools on social inclusion with background information and examples of citizenship interventions in schools.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, you have an essential position in the lives of many young people. Children and adolescents, who are developing themselves emotionally, intellectually and socially. This handbook supports you in this role. By offering insights in radicalization processes and their underlying reasons, you are enabled to positively influence your students' development. As a product of the European Cohesion project, the handbook offers additional information for the lesson materials for primary schools (IMIND) and secondary schools (UCARE). Both materials can be found on the project website: [www.cohesion.eu](http://www.cohesion.eu). The chapters of the handbook for teachers explore the same subjects and theme's as the lesson material and provide you with background information and a deeper understanding of the topics, (potential) issues or problems, and possible reactions to such situations.

## POST-ITS AND MARKINGS

The handbook for teachers is developed to be supportive towards teachers, rather than a burden. No time to read the whole chapter? Simply scan the text for the yellow post-its and find the sections that are most relevant for you. Throughout the handbook, you will find these post-its, containing a summary of the preceding section or explaining key concepts. Also, important definitions or elements will be **marked bold** in the main text. UCARE exercises and activities corresponding the themes discussed in the handbook are listed in a colored box.



## RADICALIZATION GROWTH AND RELEVANCE

Although European countries are arguably less affected by violent extremism and terrorism than other parts of the world, the threat is present (and growing) in Europe. Europe has experienced many attacks of extremist groups in the past. Since the 9/11 attacks, the threat of Islamic religiously inspired terrorism has gained particular prominence. While the majority of terrorist acts committed in Europe is still inspired by ethno-nationalist and separatist ideology (see figure 1), nearly all reported fatalities and casualties were the result of jihadist terrorist attacks. Due to their brutality and indiscriminate killing, Islamist extremists' attacks are most prominent in the media. Nevertheless, politically inspired **violent extremism** is also on the rise. While left wing extremism remains the third most common inspiration for terrorist acts in Europe, the violent right wing extremism is also on the rise.

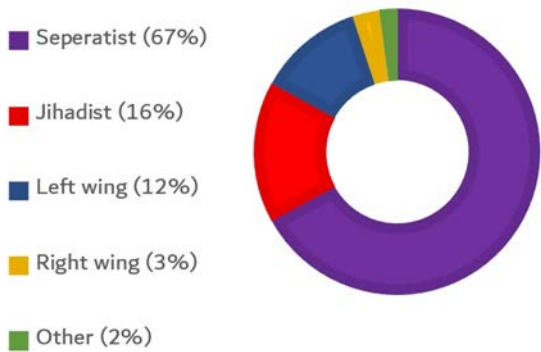


Figure 1: Attempted terrorist acts in 2017 (Europol:2018)

In 2015, the Council of Europe strengthened the accents on preventative activities and called for concrete measures in the public sector explicitly pointing out at schools. By concrete measures it envisions: introducing a **Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture**, entailing “key competences for democratic culture for use in school curricula, describing the values, attitude, skills, knowledge and critical understanding that students at different levels of formal education should have in order to be democratic, active and responsible citizens”; guidelines on the protection and promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies to building inclusive societies; and teaching about religions and non-religious world views as a counter-narrative to the misuse of religion, and creating democratic schools as safe spaces for all.

The Council of Europe points out the role of education at the “soft” end of the prevention, envisioning education engaging in primary prevention by strengthening universal competences. This creates resilience to potential risk factors and recruitment exposure before young people engage in the process of radicalization.

## ARGUMENTS FOR A UNIVERSAL INTERVENTION

The background of individuals engaging in ideologically inspired violence is very diverse, as well as the routes they take and the ideas






which they were exposed to and influenced by. People interpret events in a multitude of ways, and may invest energy and creativity in interpreting them in a particular way when it serves their psychological needs. Therefore, trying to prevent radicalization by finding and addressing a single root cause or most common process is very limited approach. Due to the diversity of routes, and lack of a single model with predictive power to identify those on the path to radicalization, there is no alternative but to use an universal primary prevention approach: building resilience to a broad spectrum of factors facilitating radicalization. This is an approach known from the field of public health.

## SCHOOL AS A PLACE FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION

It is now stressed that schools should be more appreciated as a place to prevent radicalization: “Prevention [...] requires an additional focus, namely on the socialization and educational environments” (Pels & Ruyter: 2012). Educational institutions acknowledge the role of education in the prevention of radicalization. Yet teachers are not always prepared to engage in a primary prevention of radicalization as “educators run out of educational options to impact young people’s behaviour and ideas” (Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks & De Winter: 2015). Therefore, they need educational tools, for example, lesson and instructional materials,

curricula, and guidelines. The effectiveness of this material should be **evidence-based**. There are many potential ways in which teachers can prevent radicalization. Among the most prominent are: (i) fostering cognitive competences such as critical thinking, (ii) promoting democratic values, efficacy and behavior, (iii) stimulating positive intergroup relations in culturally diverse societies, (iv) reducing hostile stereotypical perceptions of other social groups members, (v) stimulating a healthy development of self-image and identity of their students. In the next couple of paragraphs we will outline these possibilities in more detail.

### What can teachers do for their students to make them resilient to radicalization?

-  Teach cognitive competences such as critical thinking,
-  Promote democratic values, efficacy and behavior,
-  Stimulate positive intergroup relations,
-  Reduce hostile stereotypical perceptions of other social groups members,
-  Stimulate healthy development of self-image and identity of their students.



### Schools promoting democratic values and behavior

Educational experts point out that, especially during the early stages of the process of radicalization, schools can make a valuable contribution to help making societies more secure, as the school setting provides the opportunity to pay attention to issues which trouble young people. Teachers are uniquely positioned to prevent radicalization because they have the opportunity to become **moral role models** for students. As role models they can promote certain values, by demonstrating their attachment to these values in their actions. This may, for instance, include the adoption of a **democratic teaching style**.

### Stimulating positive intergroup relations in cultural diverse societies reducing hostile stereotypical perceptions of others





Multiethnic schools should foster an inclusive approach, including cooperative learning, and establishing a sense of 'the school as a community'. While ethnically diverse schools are a great opportunity for reducing prejudice and intergroup hostility, they also might pose a threat if diversity is not taken into account. The effects of **negative contact** are stronger than those of **positive contact**. Thus, great attention should be paid to managing contact between groups in diverse schools to promote positive intergroup contact and prevent negative.

### Education as a means to prevent radicalization by increasing agency and political self-efficacy

We need to equip young people with an understanding of how to organize campaigns and impact their worlds in a non-violent and democratic way. Students who are given responsibility and decision making power within their school context also develop a **sense of agency and self-efficacy**. A sense that they have the power to change the status quo.

### Schools can strengthen cognitive competencies to build resilience to radicalization

Education is the best possible antidote to radicalization, specific forms of citizenship education are important to increase an individual's resilience. It is recommended to address four issues:

-  To combat confirmation bias
-  To enhance perspective-taking skills
-  To foster active open-mindedness
-  To foster delayed decision making

The aim is not that students would accept all points of view of being equally valid but to realize that there are alternative perspectives.

### Schools can promote healthy identity development

Adolescence is the period in life in which questions of identity and belonging feel to be most pressing. Low self-esteem and feeling humiliated is related to aggressive behavior.




Unfortunately, young people, especially from minority backgrounds, often experience humiliation. As institutions tasked with fostering development of youth, schools are ideally positioned to help young people exploring who they are in a safe way, and helping them to **develop positive identity** and not feel humiliated because they are who they are.

## CONCLUSION

It can be said that preventing radicalization by means of primary prevention and building resilience against radicalization among the general population, is far less controversial than targeted efforts addressing individuals identified at risk. Schools are ideally positioned to fulfil a central role in this; not only because young people at this crucial age spend plenty of time at school, but also because many of the activities are already in the mandate and mission of schools. This includes ideals such as: creating a safe environment where all young people may develop to their fullest potential without fear of being discriminated against or humiliated and explore who they are, preparing next generations to actively and positively contribute to democratic society, or fostering cognitive skills critical thinking.

# IDENTITY




In this chapter, we explore how and why identity is important for educators trying to foster resilience to radicalization among their students. After a brief consideration of identity and its development in adolescence, it sheds light on the relation between adolescents struggling with identity issues and perceptiveness towards joining extremist groups or radical ideologies. Most importantly, we consider how educational institutions and their teachers can support a positive identity development of young people to protect them from this process. This chapter will lead you through these three topics step-by-step. After reading you will be able to:

-  Understand and explain the concept of identity
-  Connect identity development and (potential) radicalization
-  Foster positive identity development in your school

## WHAT IS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Identity is often referred to with the simple question: *Who am I?* Although this is indeed the very basic approach of the concept, there is much more to it. Identity is an important aspect of students' personal development, which affects mental health, educational performance and citizenship skills. Identity has definitional and self-definitional aspects. People define themselves through attributes which are associated with who they are, what they look like, which groups they belong to and in which ways they oppose to an 'other'.

### IDENTITY:

-  Describes you as an individual;
-  Allows you to relate to others;
-  Can (and will) change over time due to personal development and social influence.

Identity is also closely interconnected with the concept of **self-esteem**, which is defined as an individual and personally meaningful sense of one's worth. In other words: how much do you appreciate your own identity? Identity describes you as an individual, allows you to relate to others and can change over time due to personal development and social influence.

Identity comes in several connected aspects – personal, social and cultural identity. **Personal identity** can be seen as the individual's grasp of him-/herself as an individual, in terms of character, abilities and physical appearance. **Social identity** represents one's social identifications with various social groups to

which one belongs to, such as people with the same profession or supporters of the same sports club. Social identity theory implies inclination to positive attributions to one's own group as opposed to groups one does not belong to. **Cultural identity** is closely connected to notions of social identity, but focuses on cultural values and norms associated with one's group culture. Cultural identity can be often determined by demographic characteristics, for instance nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion. The values and beliefs, customs and social norms that people hold within their ethnic group, nation or religion compose their cultural identity.

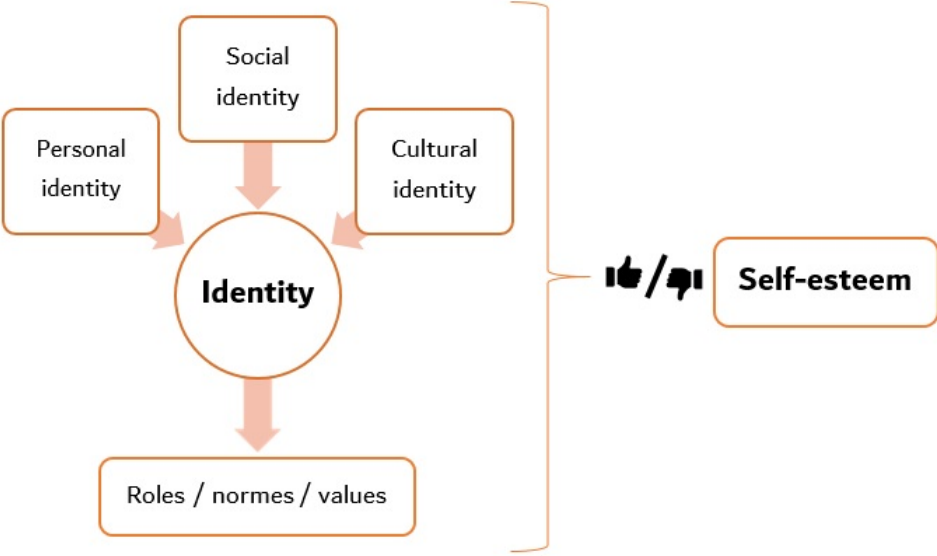


Figure 2: Identity and self-esteem

## **UNDERSTANDING HOW IDENTITY STRUGGLES ARE RELATED TO RADICALIZATION**

During adolescence, the development of a sense of “who am I” becomes of the utmost importance. Biological changes and changes in the social environment pose new demands but also provide new opportunities and stimulate the need for self-exploration. This is often accompanied by **role confusion**. To which ideas, behavioral rules, and social groups’ demands do I adhere? For example, what should you do when offered a cigarette? “Am I a good daughter/son and reject it? Or am I a cool buddy and take my first puff?”. Through the exploration of these options of personal commitment and their social consequences, identity is developed. In the adolescent phase of life, the individual must find out who they are, which behavior is appropriate and constructive, and which social roles will allow them to develop social connections and personal growth. While some adolescents move through the stages of identity development rapidly and resolve the associated conflicts, others find themselves stuck in a stage clueless who they are, or what they should do.

A radical movement offers a solution to young people who feel stuck in role confusion: it provides the individual with answers to questions of identity by delivering allegedly appropriate behavioral rules and strict guidelines as well as social connections.

A low self-esteem and insecure personal identity foster the need to develop obsessive connections with groups. Negative feelings about oneself often lie at the base of developing radical thoughts. The lack of significance and success in life that many radicalized individuals felt due to personal setbacks and failure, can be replaced by a feeling of heroism and purpose when one engages in radical action aimed at changing the fate of a group. Extremism creates narratives that foster stereotypes, perception of opposition, and conflict between ingroup and outgroup. Each of these facilitates a strong sense of group loyalty, comradeship and friendship. On the cultural level, some group characteristics pave the way toward extremism, such as fundamentalism, absolutism, collectivism, familism, “us versus them” dichotomies and derogation of the outgroup.

## **INTERVENTIONS: IMPROVING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION**

Now we know more about identity and its role in the process of radicalization, we can look into educational interventions which foster resilience against this. Schools are a natural place of peer contact, a major influence on adolescents’ identity. They can shape the nature of this contact by creating the opportunities for cooperation or competition. Teachers can inspire students to develop new aspects of who they are and/or act as positive role models.

Schools can influence the amount of intercultural contact through their policy and curriculum. For example with activities such as interschool contacts, school excursions and travelling abroad. They can address personal identity development by including the prospect of change and improvement. Educational institutions are able to help their students to overcome the fear of inadequacy due to personal characteristics and develop a positive identity.

Schools and teachers are capable of helping young people exploring different identities, building complex, strong and positive identities and work with overarching identities to reduce intergroup conflict and discrimination. They strive to create safe environments where all the students are able to develop positive identities regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background by setting clear ethical rules of conduct and assuring interferential treatment as much as possible. One omnipresent notion is the concept of agency: young people have a choice in terms of their identity. They can decide which aspects they chose to make central and which just cursory; the educators can help them to realize it and to make the best choice. There are plenty opportunities for educators who want to facilitate identity development of their students. Starting from explicit activities in which students explore their strengths or multiple facets of their identities, through narrative identity interventions enhancing their self-esteem and psychological well-being by reflecting on who they were and how they grow, and recategorization

interventions aimed at convincing students to perceive themselves as members of communities that overarch ethnic and cultural divisions: for instance, the school community, or interventions expanding the borders of 'we' through perspective taking of 'being an outsider'.

On all levels of identity– personal, social and cultural - we can find working educational interventions. The following six interventions all focus on one of these three levels. They explain why a certain intervention is valued and provide you with suggestions on what to do and what to avoid in your classroom. When UCARE provides exercises that explicitly cover the discussed theme or topic, they are listed with the sections.

#### Intervention activities:

- 🌍 Students exploring their strengths;
- 🌍 Students exploring multiple facets of their identities;
- 🌍 Narrative identity;
- 🌍 Recategorization;
- 🌍 Expanding the borders of 'we' through perspective taking of 'being an outsider'.

### Intervention #1: Stimulating identity exploration

The concept of a dynamic, and changeable identity is important when teachers want to help students grow as a person. Students' agency in shaping their own identity should not be denied despite structural societal factors such as family upbringing or cultural norms influencing young people's identities. Agency refers to the ability to make informed choices and thus changing the outcome of personal situations.

Identity building activities do not only fit in social studies or religion classes. Each course allows the teacher to let students actively engage with the content of the curriculum to become somebody who understands oneself and can make informed identity choices. For example, geography teachers may introduce questions about places in the world which have personal relevance for a student. Mathematics teachers may stress the importance of mathematics in the personal lives of students. For instance social media depending on algorithms that personalize advertisements by 'learning' who the user is. Language teachers can introduce students to books, which cover human experiences which are a source of reflection. In all of these examples, the identity of students, in terms of personal opinion, experience, knowledge of the self in relation to others, and social skills, are triggered and developed.

UCARE offers the 'I am..' exercise for this. The aim of this exercise is to make participants realize that 1) their identity is composed of more than one role, and 2) that different roles may go hand in hand with different responsibilities and rules and expectations attached to them.

UCARE exercises:

 Workshop 1, A1a: *I am ..*

### Intervention #1 (personal level)

Helping young people overcome identity diffusion by stimulating the development of a meaningful narrative identity or personal biography. This reduces the period within which young people feel stuck in role confusion.

UCARE: 'I am...' (p.24)


### Intervention #2: Providing positive identity

Besides stimulating identity exploration, teachers can play a crucial role in supporting young people in developing a positive identity. In the simplest form, this approach can be realized by classroom activities in which children are engaging in identifying their own as much as their peers' strengths. Examples of scripted activities of this type can be found for instance in BOUNCE resilience tools distributed by Salto Youth (see Further reading, p19).

Positive identity and self-image can be fostered by many aspects, not restricted to a school environment. For instance, in arts and sports, the use of one's mind or body can easily be seen as forms of self-expression, and can also be practiced outside of the school. Academic subjects can have a similar capacity. Students identify themselves based on their affinity and educational choice between natural science, social science and humanities – 'Am I an *alpha* or a *beta* person'? Learning explicitly about skills and talents in relation to identity, such as academic, artistic skills or sports, naturally encourages the student to see that there are many aspects to who he or she can be.

Achieving positive identity related to academic, sport, artistic or even professional roles is not without its challenges. These domains are often arenas of competition and social comparison. Where excellence is associated with fame, and where success and recognition are for a lucky few yet unachievable for most. Therefore, collaboration and personal growth should be presented as equally valid educational goals as 'winning' or being the best. In identity assignments, the psychological safety of the participants has to be guaranteed. Moreover, clear expectations, the goals of the exercise, as well as practice or examples are necessary to enable all students to finish and understand the tasks.

IMIND exercises:

 Workshop 2, A1: *You are a superhero!*

### Intervention #2 (personal level)

Stimulating a secure sense of identity, self-worth and meaning among all students.

This reduces potential subjective deprivation and grievances, the acceptance of violence in defense of an ideology and ultimately attraction to extremist organizations providing meaning.

### Intervention #3: Reducing perceived and actual intergroup conflicts

Encouraging members of separate groups to perceive themselves as belonging to a single common social entity, can reduce intergroup bias and prejudice. For instance, the perception of a common group identity can be simulated by assigning students to tasks in groups and referring to them as team members rather than competitors. If students are called to help each other and rely on each other, they show more appreciation of others even if they are part of different groups.


Public education faces the task of making all students view their classmates as members of the same ingroup, the human species. This way,



people would be able to move beyond group distinctions of social class and race and decrease social tensions.

Successful intercultural education interventions reduce stereotypes, perceived and actual intergroup conflicts. Exploring aspects deemed important for their own cultural identity, and comparing this to how these aspects were perceived and interpreted by others indeed led not only to improved intercultural social skills, but also higher scores on 'cooperation'. Another similar type of the intervention is introducing a curriculum for interreligious education. The effect on positive attitudes after interreligious education is even stronger in classrooms where children with different faiths are present, due to the direct intergroup contact.

IMIND exercises:

 Workshop 2, A2: *Class identity*

### Intervention #3 (social level)

Reducing perceived and actual intergroup conflicts among staff and pupils in schools, creating a culture of collaboration instead of intergroup distance and competition. This can be done via: reducing stereotypes through intercultural education and facilitating local common identities.

### Intervention #4: Reducing implicit or explicit discrimination

It goes without saying that schools which fail to address discriminatory practices, whether they are structural or incidental, are a breeding ground for conflict and extremism. Prejudiced teachers and peers who make racist remarks, deliberately disadvantage, or bully other students based on their ethnic or religious affiliation, can undo all positive interventions the school has undertaken. Schools should have explicit rules aiming at ensuring fairness. They should aim to be a school which treats all students equally, avoids favoritism, and is free of discrimination and racism.

There are multiple positive approaches to handling cases of discrimination in a school or classroom. If a student engages in controversial behavior and, for example, uses a racist demeaning term, the teacher should not be telling the student off but give him/her the opportunity "to have an open and mature dialogue about race", including the history of race and racism and learning to take the perspective of 'the other'. It is crucial that the teachers establish mutual trust and are also willing to make themselves vulnerable and share examples of their own life in which they were affected by, e.g., racism, discrimination or hate. In this way, the teacher inspires the students to self-reflect on their own behavior in the future.

Another suggested way of handling the transgressions is to involve the school community. Peer mentoring (with adult guidance) or a committee consisting of students, teachers and staff guarding the norms of the school are forms in which conflict is resolved by discussion. Of course, this still leaves room for possible consequences for students who have crossed the line.

Even though eradication of discrimination at the school appears to be a matter of introducing simple rules, it actually is much harder to achieve than it seems. The stereotypes that are associated with group identities, such as ethnicity and gender, once learned, are deeply rooted in our cognition. This goes for both students and teachers. Not only do stereotypes influence teachers' behavior towards students, they also affect the way students perform. In short, students identified as belonging to a "weak" group are expected to perform weak, and as a result indeed perform worse, despite their individual potential.

#### **Intervention #4 (social level)**

Introducing norms preventing implicit or explicit discrimination and stigmatization and promoting tolerance.

#### **Intervention #5: Support development of positive bi-cultural identities**

In multicultural environments which most schools are, there might be challenges and risks related to the development of bi-cultural identity. Role models or mentors from similar ethnic backgrounds can positively influence students, helping them to gain self-efficacy, become socially competent in both cultures and to gain a positive identity based on "bicultural fluency."

Besides mentors and role models, two-way immersion programs have shown positive results too. In this form of bilingual education, students from two language groups are paired and helping each other in the other language. Besides the gains in oral and written language skills, such an immersion program also leads to an increase in positive cross-cultural attitudes.

#### **Intervention #5 (cultural level)**

Enabling the development of bi-cultural identities for students of immigrant origin, striving towards integration.

### Intervention #6: Strengthening multiple identities that surpass nationality

Finally, learning about and exploring multiple identities and roles brings nuance to stereotypes one may hold of other people, and discredits the narrow focus on one single identity that is typical of radical movements. Exploring and highlighting multiple identities may help individuals to overcome self-imposed limitations related to social group membership. For instance, black students are able to perform better in scholarly tasks when they are not reminded of their race. Similar effects were found for female students with respect to math performance; they are able to perform better when they are referred to as 'college students' than when they were referred to as 'females'.

#### Intervention #6 (cultural level)

Strengthening multiple identities that surpass nationality, culture and religion.

Preventing narrow, unidimensional identity characteristics for violent extremism.



## CONCLUSION

Regardless their situation, all youth are developing their identity during their school career. Some of them will face more difficulties than others in this process. As adolescence and school years mostly overlap, schools prove to be a fundamental place for students to distinguish who and what they are or aspire to be. Students who are struggling with their (perceived) identity are shown to be extra vulnerable for groups and individuals who seek to recruit these youth to join their cause. Strict ideology and social rules within these groups offer a way out of identity confusion. Therefore, schools and teachers find themselves in a crucial position to stimulate *positive* identity development amongst their students. When they succeed to do so, they'll find that their students are able to develop themselves into strong and secure individuals who are ready to find their place within the society they are part of.

This chapter offers 6 interventions allowing for such a safe environment to be established in a school. Covering all levels of identity– personal, social and cultural – they provide teachers with examples, suggestions and information on their role in the identity development of their students.

## **FURTHER READING?**

Looking for more educational materials on identity? Add even more information and practical exercises to your repertoire as a teacher by exploring the materials listed below:

-  BOUNCE  
(<https://www.bounce-resilience-tools.eu/>)
-  Salto Youth  
(<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>)

# PERSPECTIVE TAKING SKILLS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

With perspective taking, we refer to the ability to see the world from other people's point of view. It involves knowing differences in preference, such as "While I myself enjoy being at festivals, I know that Reza rather spends her free time reading". It involves understanding emotions, such as seeing that someone is becoming annoyed. Perspective taking also means that one can imagine other people's point of view taking into account their circumstances and position. By understanding and making use of these other perspectives, intergroup bonding can be stimulated and prejudice can be countered.

## WHAT IS PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Perspective taking is basic human behavior. The ability to take perspective develops through lifetime. Children are born with an innate desire to imitate people and understand that other humans are similar to themselves. As young as three years old, children can understand that other people's behavior is related to their feelings. An understanding of 'misguidance' develops at the age of five, as well as the ability to lie and deceive others. Every human constantly creates theories about what other people think, desire, and intend. This construal is called '**theory of mind**'. Explanations provided by theory of mind allow to predict the behavior of others by their mental state, prepare for it and act to influence it. Theory of mind is a skill

developed through experiences, such as social interactions or assuming different visual perspectives.

Most errors in judging others result from prejudice, misunderstanding or misplaced generalizations. Examples for this are social categorization mechanisms, confirmation bias (or tunnel vision), the effect of emotions on cognition and group commitment.

### Social categorization mechanisms

Social categorization mechanisms foster negative stereotypical perception of outgroup members. In other words, sometimes you'll hold a negative judgement of an outgroup without even knowing why. By putting effort in exploring their intentions and perspectives, you

may find your own perception of this group to be positively changing. Such perspective taking leads to more mutual understanding and plays an important role in conflict resolution. Gaining knowledge and understanding outgroup members might ultimately make negative feelings and judgement disappear.

### Confirmation bias (or tunnel vision)

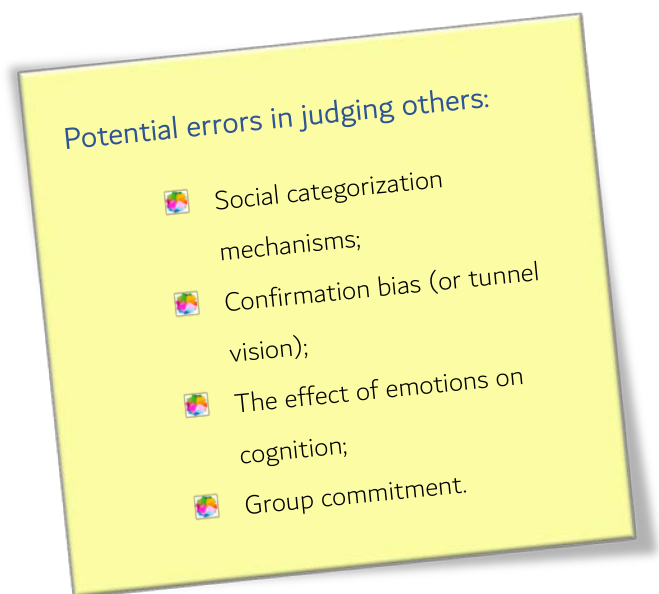
Perspective taking can also be biased by so-called confirmation bias or tunnel vision. It means that people process new information based on their previous preconceptions, and judge its credibility accordingly. Since confirmation bias leads to selectively seeking out information, it allows people to act as if the world is less complex than it actually is. As a side effect, it impairs the ability to understand others who have different views and preconceptions.

### The effect of emotions on cognition

Another factor limiting people's ability to understand other people is the effect that emotions have on cognition. People experiencing anger, stress or anxiety, rely on quick processing of information, and their perceptions tend to align with the dominant emotion. In emotional distress, it becomes hard to take other people's perspective into account accurately.

### Group commitment

Finally, group commitment, which is particularly important in adolescent peer groups, might bias perspective taking. The ingroup favoritism gives rise to positive bias to ingroup members and negative bias of outgroup members. This reduces the ability to recognize outgroup members as fellow human beings with similar flaws and desires.



## PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND ITS RELATION TO RADICALIZATION

In a radical narrative, the extreme truth claims allow for only one perspective. Yet in society and in education, adolescents usually encounter many conflicting views and opinions, and most of them are not very extreme. What allows for a radical perspective to take on so much credibility and obscure the perspectives of all other interpretations?

All **radical narratives** attempt to undermine the credibility of alternative views. Extremist propaganda expresses the view that everything else is propaganda. Any information source outside the extremist group is to be distrusted, notably science, media and the information that is expressed by non-group members. In this attempt at attacking the credibility of other sources, a confirmation bias is used. This means that every bit of news or information is interpreted until it fits the conspiracy.

Prejudice and negative attitudes towards the outgroup play a significant role in radicalization, religious or otherwise. A plentitude of studies demonstrated the capacity of perspective taking to reduce this. Therefore, it is relevant to target these competencies when trying to prevent radicalization. In addition, looking at social situations from multiple points of view can help young people to form more complex, nuanced and, therefore, more **moderate opinions** than those endorsed by radical groups. It may also initiate asking questions about the motives of those who claim to be pious and to have a monopoly on the truth. In the next section, we give examples of how teachers can help young people to develop resilience to extremism by improving these perspective taking skills.

### Radical narratives:

- Adolescents engage in categorical thinking: members of the outgroup are “inferior and evil”;
- Perspective taking and empathy are virtually absent;
- Discrediting and rejection of different perspectives, viewing differences in terms of conflict, increases beliefs of the necessity of violence.

## INTERVENTIONS: INCREASING EMPATHY, PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION


Although people and adolescents in particular can have a limited ability to assume different perspectives, this competence can be developed through training. In this section, we will address the ways in which education may improve perspective taking and teach students effective ways to resolve conflicts. Most perspective taking interventions consist mainly of actual practice, but also improving awareness of social processes and developing a different mindset about oneself or others is considered.

### Intervention #1 Perspective and empathy embedded in regular school program

Empathy and perspective taking competences can be fostered, most obviously, in social science classes but also in art subject.

Especially acting is considered to positively add to the development of empathy among students. In the context of language education, writing personal diaries or letters is a valuable tool to foster both self-empathy and empathy for others.



UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 4, A1: *The chair exercise*


### Intervention #2: Practicing perspective taking

Practicing perspective taking skills can start with a very tangible perceptual exercise in which students experience that interpretation of an image literally depends on a point of view, and try to predict how other people looking at the same image from a different perspective would interpret it in a different way. After that, continue to more activities involving a more abstract meaning of perspective taking, and using perspective taking competences in social situations. Make use of practical demonstrations to let students experience how a lack of understanding of goals of others can generate conflicts. Insights drawn from positive psychology has the potential to encourage perspective taking among participating students through modeling. For instance, shifting your focus from punishing deviancy, towards rewarding positive behavior. Students who are treated by their teachers as well-intending individuals who make mistakes, are likely to copy this view. This means they develop a more positive self-image, but also hold a more positive attitude towards others.

UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 4, A3: *Abstract social roles and conflict resolution*
-  Workshop 4, A2: *The letter exercise*


IMIND exercises:

-  Workshop 3, A1: *Colorful pyramids*


### Intervention #3: Explicit intergroup perspective taking

Intergroup perspective taking focuses, like the name suggests, on groups rather than individuals. Letting students picture themselves in the shoes of others (e.g. a woman with HIV/AIDS, a homeless person, a convicted criminal or a disabled person), increases their empathy for this group and raises awareness of social inequality.

UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 4, A2: *The letter exercise*

IMIND exercises:

-  Workshop 3, A2: *Perspectives in conflict(s)*

### Intervention #4: Tolerance as minimal requirement

Like all educational interventions that are aimed at improving the personal development of pupils, it is important to adapt the training



to the specific group of students and their characteristics. One size does not fit all! If perspective taking cannot be taught, due to cognitive or social impairments, at minimum **tolerance** should be promoted. Indeed, it could be hard for a 15-year old with autism to imagine himself as someone with religious beliefs or cultural habits different from his own. However, it is much easier to imagine what it is like to be bullied, treated unfairly, or to face prejudice and contempt. In perspective taking it might be enough to think about how you would like to be treated yourself. A humble and compassionate view of others can be seen as the educational aim in that case.



## CONCLUSION

Lack of perspective taking, both cognitively in terms of theory of mind and emotionally in terms of empathy, plays a significant role in extremism and radicalization. This lack leads to a vulnerability to one-sided radical narratives and gives opportunity to dehumanize and

justify violence. Fortunately, interventions can increase perspective taking and empathy, and in this way counter or prevent radicalization. Through the reduction of prejudice and negative attitudes towards outgroup members, and the improvement of conflict resolution skills, adolescents can build resilience to extremism and radicalization. Perspective taking interventions in education increase pupils' understanding of the people around them.

## FURTHER READING?

Looking for more educational materials on perspective taking? Add even more information and practical exercises to your repertoire as a teacher by exploring the materials listed below:

-  PATHS  
(<https://pathsprogram.com/curriculum>)
-  Positive Behavior Support  
(<https://wij-leren.nl/school-wide-positive-behavior-support.php>)

# POLITICAL SELF-EFFICACY AND EMPOWERMENT

Citizenship education should prioritize the development of practical democratic skills. Examples of such skills are: expressing your opinion, negotiating with others, conflict resolution, critical thinking, being able to stand up for yourself (and others), willingness to listen to others' opinions and showing respect and tolerance. Such competences strengthen political self-efficacy.

## WHAT IS (POLITICAL) SELF-EFFICACY?

Self-efficacy is the extent to which a person believes that he or she can achieve certain goals in their lives. It has an impact on a person's mood, self-esteem and motivation and can influence their achievements. Low self-efficacy can lead to stress, helplessness and pessimism about one's situation. High self-efficacy, on the other hand, has positive consequences, such as increased motivation and perseverance. Self-efficacy, or the lack of it, influences how people feel, think and behave.

Self-efficacy is also closely related to fulfilment of two psychological needs: **need for achievement** and **need for self-actualization**.

People driven by need for achievement find more satisfaction in achieving the goal or completing the task than in the material or financial reward, praise or recognition attached to it. Need for self-actualization is someone's desire to become everything that is in their capability.

One particularly relevant subtype of self-efficacy is **political self-efficacy**. Political self-efficacy is belief in your own ability to reach desirable political outcomes. People's sense of political self-efficacy influences not only how politically active they are, but also if they support the democratic system. Stimulating political self-efficacy may provide young people with means for achieving their idealistic goals, and also help them to achieve the goal itself.

### Political self-efficacy:

- Own perception of ability to change things (politically);
- Belief in own abilities;
- Evaluation of the political system.

## **POLITICAL SELF-EFFICACY IN RELATION TO RADICALIZATION**

Although terrorism might seem immoral to many, morality and idealism can also lead to it. Political and religious radicalization are often motivated by perceived deprivation and unfairness. Under certain circumstances individuals may even engage in violence in the name of democracy.

Individuals who perceive unfairness are often willing to fight. Mostly figuratively, but, if they have lost faith in the democratic political system to effectively address the unfairness, ultimately, some of them will fight literally for their ideals. Perceptions of unfairness, such as injustice or discrimination, and the willingness to do something about these **grievances** can lead individuals away from the democratic system and towards extremist narratives. Those with low political self-efficacy may easily turn towards violence. Radicalization occurs when extremist narratives provide the 'supply' for a 'demand' of unsatisfied and hopeless citizens wanting social change.

Members of minorities and other social groups experiencing objective hardship and discrimination may have more grievances than privileged subsections of the population and therefore may be more susceptible to radicalization. If people have been discriminated before, this can also lead to altered interpretations and expectations of future

events. This makes these people more likely to develop a radical outlook.

A cognitive process known as **self-serving bias** may further increase susceptibility to radicalization. Self-serving bias is a cognitive process which causes people to interpret negative experiences as due to external, situational factors and blame 'the other' for them.

## **STRENGTHENING POLITICAL SELF-EFFICACY IN SCHOOLS**






Political self-efficacy is certainly shaped by circumstances, such as the political participation of your parents. However, it can also be improved by (civic) education. Adolescence is the right time to learn about political self-efficacy, as political attitudes are developed in this stage of someone's life and mostly remain stable during adulthood. Schools can thus positively influence the development of political self-efficacy among their students by providing them with opportunities for practice and knowledge on how to influence policy.


This section discusses interventions that can strengthen political self-efficacy. Interventions that are found to be successful include engaging in political discourse and learning skills for political action. Analyzing relevant role models, especially those that are similar to the target group, and practical exercises about

political self-efficacy can also reduce the acceptance of violence and provide alternative paths to achieving social change. **Civic education** and **peace education** provide pedagogical frameworks for such interventions.

## CIVIC EDUCATION





In almost all of European countries' national curricula of secondary schools include citizenship education in some form and cover the competences related to democratic and socially responsible action, critical thinking and inter-personal interactions. In order to equip students with active democratic competences, such as critical thinking and conflict resolution modern civic education must involve students with pedagogies and teaching methods which allow them to practice civic competences and engage them in a meaningful way. To achieve this, civic education should have six main characteristics. It should be:

-  **Active:** students learn by engaging, being involved and collaborating;
-  **Interactive:** students learn to understand other perspectives through discussion and debate;
-  **Relevant:** students feel that what they learn is related to their daily life and society;
-  **Critical:** students learn to think independently;
-  **Collaborative:** students learn to work together with peers and others;

-  **Participative:** students partake in the design and delivery of their own education.

Practice of active and democratic citizenship can be implemented at all levels of the school system. For instance, engaging students in governance of the school, through democratic school practices, class councils or student representations. This provides students with a sense of ownership and allows them to practice democratic competences in a meaningful way.

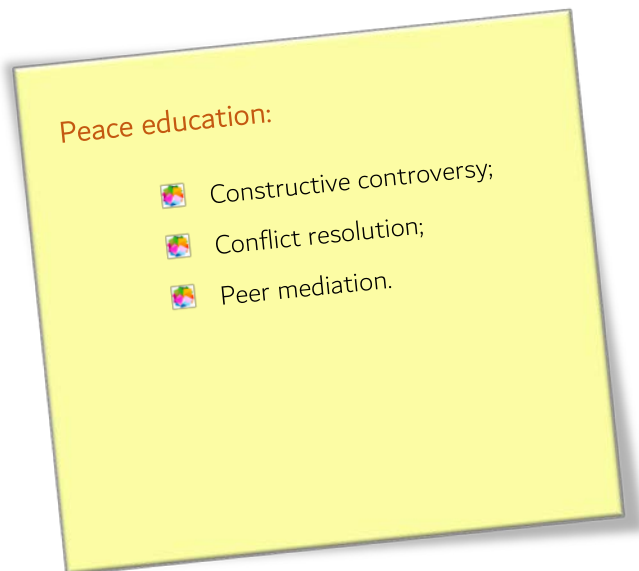
UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 6, A1: *Complaining session.*
-  Workshop 6, A2: *Mini-lecture: Social Change*
-  Workshop 6, A4: *Stakeholders with decision-making power*
-  Workshop 7, A2: *Action plan*

## PEACE EDUCATION

As the name suggests, peace education teaches about peace. The method explores what peace is, why it exists (or not) and how it could be achieved. It helps adolescents to engage in non-violent efforts of peace making and, consequently, helps to prevent extremism and radicalization, and how it can lead to violence. In peace education, roots of different kinds of violence are discussed and non-violent alternatives are taught. Peace education programs help students to accept and understand the narrative of others. It allows

them to negotiate constructively and promotes a less self-focused view on conflicts. The three main elements are practicing constructive controversy, engaging in conflict resolution and using peer mediation.



### Constructive controversy

In constructive controversy, students learn how to handle conflicts through a five-step process. Students defend one position of a controversy (step 1) and then present this to other students (step 2). There is a discussion of the controversy in which the students first argue for their own position (step 3) and then argue and present for the opposite position (step 4). Finally, all participating students synthesize and create a new perspective on the controversy, using the best evidence from the earlier steps (step 5).

UCARE exercises:

- Workshop 5, A2: *Standing on the other side.*

### Conflict resolution:

This type of education can contribute to the development of students by exploring conflict dynamics and providing communicative skills that allow them to positively manage social relationships. This is done through teaching, but also through modeling the practices and skills that are needed for peaceful communication and the resolution of conflicts. Conflict resolution may be implemented through educating the whole school population, either explicitly in conflict resolution classes, or implicitly, incorporated in other classes and subjects. Conflict resolution education improves the school climate, as well as students' attitudes towards conflicts.

### Peer mediation:

Another way of introducing conflict resolution to every-day school activities is selecting students who will act as peer mediators. In many examples of peace education, peer mediation plays a large role. Such programs are shown to reduce violence, but also enhance social skills and self-esteem. As students can relate to their peers better than they can to adults, they generally react well to peer mediation.

## CONCLUSION




Lack of political self-efficacy is a common pathway to the acceptance of extremism,

radicalisation and sometimes terrorism, via feelings of relative deprivation or unfairness and the perception of a lack of legitimate means to address them. Many interventions which can halt this process have been developed within domains of civic education and peace education.

Modern civic education actively engages students in practicing exerting influence in democratic ways and provides them with a sense of political self-efficacy. Various competences practiced in peace education, such as constructive controversy, conflict resolution or peer mediation, teach students means of resolving conflicts in a way that is accepted in democratic systems.

## FURTHER READING?

Looking for more educational materials on political self-efficacy and empowerment? Add even more information and practical exercises to your repertoire as a teacher by exploring the materials listed below:



-  Salto Youth  
(<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>)
-  The European Wergeland Centre  
(<https://theewc.org/resources/>)
-  Young citizens  
(<https://www.youngcitizens.org/Pages/Category/free-teaching-resources>)

# FOSTERING RESILIENCE THROUGH MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness training has been shown to be an effective way to counter the vulnerabilities presented in the previous chapters. Therefore, it is a promising method to increase youth's resilience to radicalization. The key elements of mindfulness are awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of one's moment-to-moment experience. It is a skill that can be learned, applied and integrated in many different contexts.

## WHAT ARE THE UNDERLYING MECHANISMS AND HOW DOES MINDFULNESS WORK?

Mindfulness provides children and adolescents with the capacity of finding control. As such, it adds to every form of education, but especially to development of interpersonal behaviors and social competences. In order to reach this aim, mindfulness focusses on:

-  Awareness and attention
-  Compassion

The following sections provide a deeper understanding of these elements and how they add to the development of students.

### Awareness, attention and changes in brain functioning

Attention, orientation to experience and self-regulation are integral parts of mindfulness practice. Attention in itself is a key aspect of cognitive functioning. Students learn to

acknowledge what really is present at the moment, and foster the ability to stay with it. During meditation, brain areas related to self-awareness and attention are more active. Additionally, the connections of the “control” with the “reward” areas of the brain improve, meaning that they are working better together. Considering that in adolescence, due to the delay in brain maturation, the highly activated socio-emotional reward network is taking over of the cognitive-control network, making them especially susceptible for risk taking behavior, training exactly these cognitive-control areas in the brain is beneficial for brain maturation and subsequently for learning self-control.

These changes in the brain have the effect that not only rumination and negative mood are reduced but also impulses such a risk taking and focus on reward are more efficiently regulated.

## Compassion

In the last years, attention has also been given to the effects of fostering beneficial feelings, such as compassion. While compassion is often primarily associated with compassion for another person, in mindfulness practice especially self-compassion (or: self-kindness) is on the foreground. Self-compassion has been described as “being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical”. Instead of attacking and berating oneself for not being “good enough”, or brooding on a shortcoming, the person learns unconditional acceptance of oneself and the ability to soothing and comforting. This has vast implications on daily functioning and well-being and creates a strong and healthy sense of self. Self-compassion also has a spill-over effect to interpersonal compassion, as self-compassionate young adults have been found to have improved relationship functioning and also report more empathetic concern, altruism, perspective taking, and forgiveness. Being more aware of and compassionate about one’s own flawed condition connects us to the shared human condition and our flaws and particularities. Not seeing the other as separate, bad or outgroup can therefore be a natural protection against radicalization.

## WHICH VULNERABILITIES INCREASE THE RISK FOR RADICALIZATION?

Mindfulness training can serve as a preventive measure against radicalization by fostering resilience. Individual vulnerabilities related to radicalization, can be directly addressed by mindfulness training, which can be successfully executed in educational institutions. In order to identify such interventions, first we need to specify the vulnerabilities that increase the risk for radicalization among school-aged children and adolescents.

### Negative mood and emotional vulnerability

Psychological vulnerabilities such as anxiety, traumatic experiences and/or distress during childhood and adolescence and negative mood such as despair and depression are often reported among radicalized youth. These negative moods can cloud the judgement and radical commitment can be thought of as a way to fight against this mood.

### Low self-regulation and risk taking

It is more commonly observed that adolescents have a heightened disposition to having a lack of self-regulation and therefore engage more frequently in risk-taking behavior, of which radical commitments is one. This effect is increased in the presence of peers as emotional arousal (‘gut feelings’) override the regulatory effectiveness of cognitive control (‘thinking it through’).

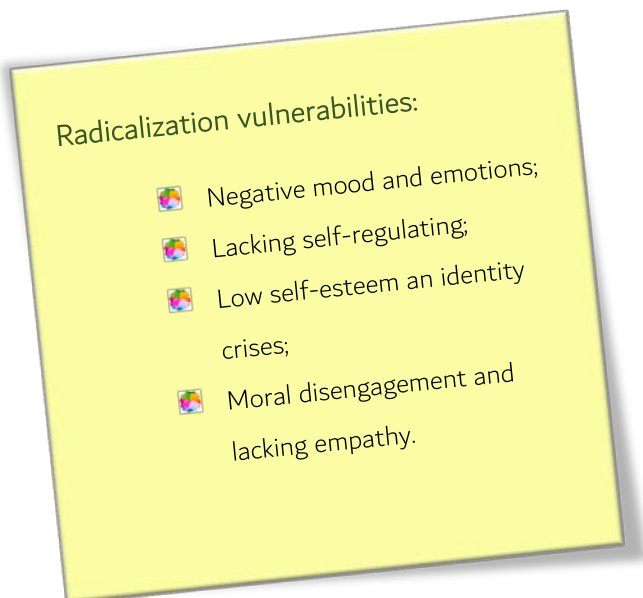


### Self-esteem and identity crisis

Adolescence is the period in life in which questions of identity and belonging feel most pressing. Since adolescents may experience an identity crisis or look for a community, companions or existential meaning, radical ideas can fulfill these needs.

### Moral disengagement and lack of empathy

Radical action against an outgroup member is in sharp contrast to having empathy for another person and being aware of the emotional or physical hurt inflicted upon them. It also means acting against common social conduct and values learned in schools and society. Youth engaging in radical acts therefore distance themselves from these feelings and values through a process called moral disengagement.



## INTERVENTIONS: MINDFULNESS IN SCHOOLS

The mindfulness meditation is easily implemented by a teacher through reading out a text which guides students into becoming more aware of their body and breath sensations. Then, a group enquiry after the exercise is encouraged to integrate the experience. Research into the effectiveness of mindfulness for children and adolescents is increasing and more and more evidence of successful interventions in school environments is gathered. Mindfulness interventions have shown to positively influence a multitude of social skills and perceptions.

### Effect on negative mood and emotional vulnerability


Most adolescents experience negative events at some point in their life. However, the experienced intensity and frequency, and how they cope with them influences the willingness to adopt a radical ideology as coping strategy, or not. Positive emotional coping strategies therefore decrease the 'need' for radical coping mechanisms. Research has shown that mindfulness interventions in schools have positive effects on reducing the risk factors of depression and anxiety.

### Effect on self-regulation and risk taking

A lack of self-regulation and increased risk taking appear to be the by-product of dramatic

changes in brain maturation during adolescence. To train awareness of automatic impulses and subsequently stimulating the maturation of brain areas associated with control can, therefore, be an aid in helping with impulse control and help to reduce taking part in risky activities, such as acting out. Research into mindfulness at schools concluded over many studies that indeed mindfulness-based training positively influences the cognitive abilities, including qualities such as attention, self-regulation, creativity and problem-solving skills.


UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 5, A1b: *The bat and the ball*

### Effect on moral disengagement and lack of empathy

In the process of moral disengagement, radicalized youth becomes so distanced from their own judgements, their own feelings and from feelings for the other, that ideas can overrule empathy and justify a radical act. Here, the need for fostering empathy or compassion for another person becomes relevant as a protective factor preventing this process. Research shows that mindfulness training helps in actually preventing negative conduct in schools, as students become more mindful of their aggressive behavior.



UCARE exercises:

-  Workshop 5, A2: *Standing on the other side*





### Effect on self-esteem and identity

Adolescents might turn towards adopting an extreme ideology to increase their self-esteem or to seek help to go through an identity crisis, or find meaning in life, companionship and community. Several studies showed that mindfulness increases self-esteem and optimism in students participating in school mindfulness programs.

IMIND exercises:

-  Workshop 1, A1: *The bodyscan*
-  Workshop 1, A2: *Gratefulness moment*

Mindfulness interventions have shown to positively influence:

-  Mood and emotional vulnerability;
-  Self-regulation and risk taking;
-  Self-esteem and identity;
-  Moral engagement and empathy.


## CONCLUSION

Mindfulness has a potential of increasing the individuals' resilience through reduction of the vulnerabilities identified as potential risk factors for radicalization, making students possibly more resilient. Factors increasing resilience, such as the ability to assert self-control, self-regulation, and executive functioning skills in youth have a protective effect against radicalization and mindfulness training may be an easy way to foster these skills in schools. It can easily be applied in normal school settings, as shown in the

UCARE lesson material and is applicable for students from all socio-economic backgrounds of belief systems.

## FURTHER READING?

Looking for more educational materials on mindfulness? Add even more information and practical exercises to your repertoire as a teacher by exploring the materials listed below:

-  Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-mbsr/>)

# COHESION

citizenship education  
on social inclusion

## HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

Citizenship education is so much more than learning about politics. It goes to the core of how students develop themselves into engaged and fulfilled participants of the society they live in. This development is a process during which adolescents can feel insecure about themselves and are more vulnerable to the (extreme) influences of others. Teachers play an essential role in guiding their students through this process without falling victim for radical or even violent ideologies. As this is not an easy task, this handbook offers information and examples of interventions on four essential themes: **Identity**, **Perspective taking skills and conflict-resolution**, **Political self-efficacy and empowerment** and **Mindfulness**. Together with the IMIND (primary schools) or UCARE (secondary schools) lesson material, this handbook provides teachers with a complete package. With this they can optimally support their students' development in a responsible and thoughtful manner.

[cohesion.eu](http://cohesion.eu)



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