

## EX POST PAPER

# Building resilience in the classroom using testimonials from victims and formers

Building resilience in young people is key to preventing extremism and boosting the positive forces in society. This can be accomplished in a **classroom** setting, where **pupils** can learn a great deal from victims' and formers' testimonials. This paper identifies the related didactical principles, sets out practical guidelines and presents inspiring examples on how the voices of victims and formers can be used to influence pupils. This is possible thanks to the support of teachers, who create a classroom environment conducive to growth and learning for young people. **The voices of victims and formers** can be extremely useful in achieving these **pedagogical-didactical goals**. How should the testimonies be prepared, executed and followed up on? What practical guidelines will make them more effective?

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## Introduction

Victims of terrorism can enhance pupils' resilience by bringing the stories of their experiences into the classroom. They offer a counter-narrative to extremist narrative attempts to dehumanise 'others' and offset the trend of desensitisation of the public towards news of terror attacks. So victims have a crucial role to play: to rehumanise those directly affected by terrorist attacks as well as the groups and professionals they represent. Pupils can be awakened to tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution, empathy and compassion by well-prepared victims. Thanks to their willingness to step up and engage with students, victims also embody the spirit and will to overcome adverse circumstances and move on — in this way, they offer students a living example of resilience.

Formers (i.e. people who have left a violent extremist group) can impact pupils significantly, thanks to their convincing and credible voices. They can offer a first-hand description of being drawn in by the exploitative allure of extremism and recount their personal experiences of sorrow, shame and guilt — as well as of love and understanding.

The challenge lies in creating an optimal environment for pupils to reap the benefits of formers' testimonials. Both victims and formers trying to boost resilience must identify the related key principles and preconditions that will ensure the encounter benefits all involved.

How can victims and formers offer their voices in support of teachers whose pedagogical-didactical mission is to build resilience in their pupils? This paper begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis for building resilience and an introduction to the existing body of work on resilience-building in the education sector. The paper is focused on effective teaching and lessons learned in the field of classroom work with victims and formers.

## What is resilience in young people?

In the field of prevention of violent extremism, resilience is often considered a kind of precautionary measure against radicalisation, the idea being that we can teach vulnerable youngsters to resist the pull of exploitative recruiters and agents of radicalisation. Victims, formers, teachers and those developing materials to boost resilience will recognise the following definition of resilience in this context.

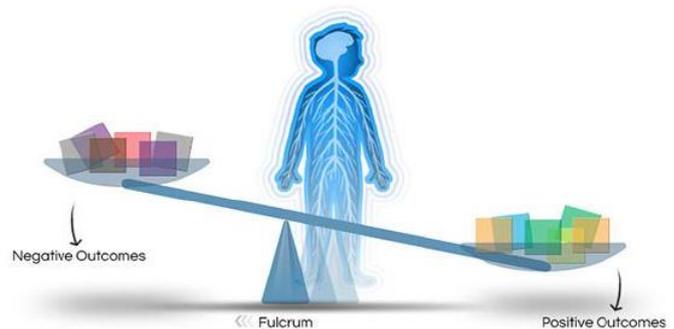
### *Box 1 Definition of resilience*

**Resilience** is broadly defined as 'the capacity to cope, learn and thrive in the face of change, challenge or adversity' (Cahill, 2008). So, in the realm of P/CVE, resilience is the ability to bounce back after a setback or a personal crisis, or perceived injustice and grievances. In this context, resilience also entails questioning simplistic, extremist 'us versus them'-type narratives.

This definition notwithstanding, a misconception exists about resilience: that it is a personality trait, and therefore not equally accessible to all. In fact, current research indicates that all young children have the capacity for resilience — meaning that all children have the potential for successful learning and positive development (Benard, 2004).

Rather than a personality trait, resilience is a process of normal human adaptation, present in children from both risk and non-risk environments (Benard, 2004). Of course, risk factors such as poverty or parental discord may weaken this trait, but studies show that this is the case for only 20 % of young people growing up in a high-risk environment, while the remaining 80 % appeared unaffected. In fact, protective factors related to resilience can predict positive outcomes for between 50 % and 80 % of children growing up in a high-risk environment. Therefore, rather than focusing on risk factors, adults should focus on personal abilities and protective factors promoting resilience within children's families, communities and schools (Benard, 2004).

The Centre on the Developing Child of Harvard University couches the development of resilience in terms of a balance scale or seesaw (Centre on the Developing Child, 2018). Protective experiences and coping skills on one side counterbalance significant adversity on the other. Resilience is evident when a child's health and development tips towards positive outcomes — even when a heavy load of factors is stacked on the negative outcome side.



*Image 1 The balance between protective experiences and adversity (Centre on the Developing Child)*

In line with this theory, Benard (2004) has categorised the protective characteristics that strength resilience into four partly overlapping groups. In order to boost pupil resilience, we must provide an environment that allows young people to develop the personal characteristics set out below (see Table 1). The personal competencies interlinking with resilience are described later in this paper.

Table 1 Protective characteristics promoting resilience

SOCIAL COMPETENCE	PROBLEM SOLVING	AUTONOMY	SENSE OF PURPOSE
Responsiveness	Planning	Positive Identity	Goal Direction Achievement Motivation
Communication	Flexibility	Internal Locus of Control Initiative	Educational Aspirations
Empathy Caring	Resourcefulness	Self-Efficacy Mastery	Special Interest Creativity Imagination
Compassion Altruism Forgiveness	Critical Thinking Insight	Adaptive Distancing Resistance	Optimism Hope
		Self-Awareness Mindfulness	Faith Spirituality Sense of Meaning
		Humor	

Source: Benard, 2004.

## Existing knowledge on resilience-building work in education

Pupils owe their resilience to a combination of individual resilience, family and peer group resilience and community resilience (including school). The school only plays a partial role in this process, and cannot influence all of the many protective factors. Of course, a good school experience and education contributing to the child's well-being can contribute to resilience, but 'simply teaching well is in itself NOT sufficient to build resilience' (emphasis in the original) (Bonnell et al., 2011). To achieve high levels of resilience among pupils, schools need to take into account the three crucial ingredient clusters set out below (Bonnell et al., 2011).

'Simply teaching well in itself is NOT sufficient to build resilience.'

Bonnell et al., 2011

### 1) Make a connection through effective design and a young person-centred approach:

- make sessions **enjoyable** for participants and ensure they feel **distinctly different** to normal classroom lessons;
- **clearly communicate learning objectives** to pupils;
- ensure concrete and tangible **goals and outputs** have been set for young people, so as to foster **ownership and involvement**;
- ensure sessions are young person **centred** and young person **led**;
- ensure sessions result in students producing something '**real**', in order to encourage young people to work together collaboratively and foster transferable skills.

### 2) Facilitate a 'safe space' for dialogues and positive interaction:

- recognise the key context factors for creating a '**safe space**';
- have the willingness, confidence and ability **to connect with young people**;
- respect young people's **preconceptions**;

- possess sufficient **knowledge**;
- be willing to **admit gaps** in your own knowledge;
- take time to accurately assess **student knowledge levels**.

### 3) Equip young people with the appropriate capabilities:

- build **personal resilience** and a positive sense of (self-)identity;
- use simple theoretical frameworks and **interactive techniques**;
- build a 'stretch' element into the design and provide opportunities for young people to **reflect on their achievements**;
- support young people to explore, understand and celebrate their **personal identity**;
- **promote critical thinking skills** that are crucial for interrogating and challenging extremist ideologies;
- raise awareness in young people of **views and experiences other than their own**;
- encourage participants to engage with a balanced range of information and appreciate an **evidence-based approach**.

The list is taken from *Teaching approaches that help to build resilience against extremism among young children* (Bonnell et al., 2011). It was also presented during the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) joint meeting in Madrid and is required reading, presenting lessons learned for all professionals hoping to build resilience in the educational sector.

## *Using testimonies in support of resilience-building in education*

At the joint RAN Education (EDU) working group and Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism (RAN RVT) working group meeting, psychologist Raafia Raeez Khan <sup>(1)</sup> highlighted certain aspects that appear relevant for resilience-building in terms of preventing recruitment by extremists. These are competences or attitudes related to identity issues, the sense of belonging, and dealing with perceived grievances and injustice.

Both victim organisations and schools are appropriate actors to support this means of resilience-building in young people and to promote non-violent solutions to conflicts, to help youngsters resist the rhetoric of agents of radicalisation. In this context, victims and their organisations can offer unique support to school programmes.

The following statements on the contribution of victims are taken from the *Handbook: Voices of victims of terrorism* <sup>(2)</sup>, produced by the RAN Voices of Victims (VVT) working group, the predecessor of the RAN RVT working group:

'Victims of terrorism are the ambassadors of collective memory. Collecting, recording and distributing their testimonies will keep the terroristic attack and its victims visible — for this

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<sup>(1)</sup> Raafia Raees Khan, psychologist and Vice CEO of Social Welfare, Academics and Training (SWAaT) for Pakistan, an organisation focused on CVE and PVE work in the northern region of Pakistan.

<sup>(2)</sup> The RAN VVT handbook is accessible online ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/about-ran/ran-rvt/docs/ran\\_vvt\\_handbook\\_may\\_2016\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-rvt/docs/ran_vvt_handbook_may_2016_en.pdf)).

and future generations, in order to not forget.... Testimonies, in order to be effective, should be used in a broader programme and can be linked with related issues such as civic education, history and critical thinking. Start the testimony preferably from a general democratic perspective, and express democratic values. It is important to include the notion of dehumanisation in the testimony, and to state explicitly that not all perpetrators are inspired by the same ideology. For instance, the religiously inspired extremist attacks might lead people to believe that all perpetrators of terrorism are Muslim.'

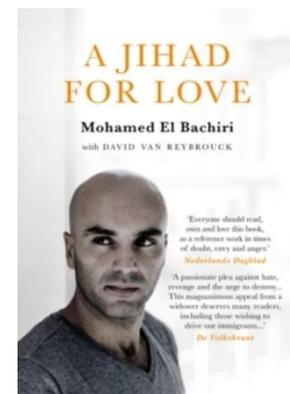
It is evident that the contribution of victims and formers is of great value in the classroom. To maximise the benefit of this contribution, the following advice in the form of lessons learned is invaluable.

### ***One testimonial: differing impacts?***

The testimonies and initial contact of formers or victims with pupils in the classroom will spark diverse emotional and psychological processes, depending on the group: while it may be overwhelmingly positive for some, others may find it traumatic.

For instance, let us first consider the scenario of a victim of a right-wing extremist bombing recounting the attack on the refugee centre where she lived. The hypothetical classroom group comprises two children with refugee parents, a girl whose family has nationalist sympathies, a boy whose family supports Antifa, and several pupils concerned about the effect of the influx of refugees and immigrants on society at large, on the welfare state and on safety, integration and demographics.

In this situation, the first question to consider concerns the intended effect of the testimony or encounter. Is this the guest best suited to contribute to the intended learning? What might happen during the discussion? Whom are we trying to make resilient? Might the situation generate more tension or difficult emotions for a certain pupil, or exacerbate an existing polarisation between different people in the classroom? Is there a risk that certain pupils might become even angrier or feel more isolated than before the encounter?



*Image 2 A plea against hate and revenge*

A second example is that of a victim of the Brussels attacks visiting a school in a multicultural neighbourhood with a majority of young Belgium Muslim pupils. Would it make a difference whether the victim has a Muslim, atheist, Jewish or Christian background? Which response is most appropriate if pupils question why this individual wishes to visit their school or how they are connected to the attacks. Who should be responsible for responding to such questions, the moderating teacher or the victim? Some pupils might be angry or confused about the relation between Islam and western modern society, or might have peers sympathetic to radical Islam. How would such situations be managed in the classroom? This example highlights some of the opportunities and risks that might arise during an encounter.

The two hypothetical examples above illustrate how bringing victims or formers into the classroom to recount their stories can have unintended, unpredictable effects. By and large, this kind of project primarily uses the testimonials of victims or formers and the resulting interaction with pupils for resilience-building in the classroom. As stated before, resilience involves being critical of simplistic, extremist 'us versus them'-type narratives. Projects that aim to make a difference should allow young people to express their views, fears, misconceptions and opinions. What better place for emotions and opinions be expressed and discussed than the classroom?

### ***Be aware of provoking guilt and shame in pupils***

On the whole, the RAN EDU working group promotes freedom of expression for pupils. However, moderators should be particularly vigilant and attentive in cases where the guest is potentially vulnerable to negative or hostile student feedback and reactions. Such an encounter could engender feelings of shame and guilt.

For example, extremists falsely claim that they operate on behalf of specific political, cultural or religious groups: Muslims, animal activists or patriots. Pupils identifying with one of these groups might already be struggling with difficult feelings: of being different or of being excluded, threatened, ridiculed or disregarded. This emotional state renders them susceptible and puts them at higher risk of being drawn in by radicalisation tactics. Therefore, discussions of extremism should not engender further feelings of guilt, shame and blame in already vulnerable children, as it would be counter-productive. Such situations can be prevented with good project design and deflected with vigilant moderation by teachers or facilitators.

### ***Good moderation and a safe space in the classroom***

After the pupils have listened to the testimony, the 'real' learning begins as each pupil individually processes the encounter emotionally and intellectually. Moderators should guide the discussion and challenge the pupils to be aware of their emotions, to reflect on the salient points and to ask each other questions.

The classroom should be a safe space for everyone involved: not only pupils (especially vulnerable individuals) but also victims/formers who could be challenged by a class of pupils who might be tired, bored or distracted. Moreover, intense discussions can give rise to painful experiences for victims or extremist formers.

The process should be guided by a facilitator, who could also be the class teacher. However, not all teachers possess the confidence and skills required to steer a group and a speaker through potentially challenging conversations. Likewise, not all teachers have been trained to ask the right questions, deal with emotional or tense moments, or handle pupils or speakers who might need attention.

To support teachers or facilitators in creating a safe space for pupils and victims, any organised testimony should contain (a minimum of) a list of potential questions and assignments, and a suitable teaching/training pack for managing challenging conversations.

## ***Evaluation***

Project evaluation is just as important as the testimony's impact, and the importance of good moderation. Victims or formers enter the classroom with the best intentions. Schools allocate teaching time to the encounter and some even run larger projects with victims or formers. All of these actors involved should be asked to provide feedback after the work has been carried out. What elements or aspects were appreciated? Which loose ends need follow-up? What improvements might make for a better impact?

Moreover, schools need to ask further questions: Did the project contribute to the school ethos and the curriculum? To what extent were the predetermined learning goals met?

## **Additional points**

### ***How and when to involve parents***

Children grow up in diverse environments and cultures, and they follow different rules and norms and relate to different values and standards at school, with their peers and at home. While this is routine and expected, it can also create confusion and conflict, and complicate children's sense of belonging and identity. Ideally, parents and schools should work together to prevent this happening.

For example, when pupils are engaged in a project with victims or formers, it is expected that emotions might be volatile, as the subject matter of the testimonies creates a highly charged atmosphere. Parents should be informed of this possibility and be given guidance on managing it, for instance by being given the contact details for support networks.

In the case of former terrorists or extremists meeting the pupils, there is risk of disapproval or protest from parents. The school must verify the credibility of the speaker and request references beforehand. All visitors should comply with the school rules and ethos, and teachers or even management should always be present in the classroom. These rules of engagement should be discussed beforehand, to avoid problems.

Informing the parents proactively can open the door to family schooling. Schools can play a role in strengthening communities as well as helping them boost their resilience. For instance, on a given day, during school hours, the pupils could work on a project with victims or formers. They could subsequently present what they learned to the parents in an exhibition or performance. The former or victim could also attend this, and engage with the parents.

## ***Differences between formers and victims***

Although both victims and formers can have considerable impact in the classroom, they are notably different.

Victims are uniquely placed to rehumanise victims and demonstrate how their resilience has helped them overcome obstacles. They can highlight the value of friends and family, and offer a positive perspective. Victims' stories underline (victim) empathy, suffering and gratitude. The more pupils that can identify with victims, the bigger the impact. When victims are considered 'one of us' by pupils, the question of 'Who are they?' can be posed.

Formers, on the other hand, often recount how and why they were drawn in by extremist narratives and culture. This is a story about push and pull factors. For example, if you feel your group is considered inferior or even threatened by others, you are more susceptible to extremist recruiters' black-and-white narratives of 'us and them'. When you feel isolated and fearful, members of extremist groups will offer to befriend and support you. Besides making this situation understandable to pupils, formers can also recount the remorse, shame and guilt that they feel, or describe how unhappy they were in the self-destructive subculture of extremist groups.

Sometimes, audiences sympathetic to the extremist cause will not accept or relate to formers, and their narrative will not go down well. Instead of convincing the audience to support non-violent solutions to conflict, formers may be accused of lacking strength and betraying the cause. For such audiences, formers may not be the appropriate means for building resilience. In fact, any given speaker (whether former or victim), can have a positive effect on some audience members and unintended negative effects on others. As has been stressed before, any decision to work with a former or a victim should be taken bearing in mind the school's agenda and the group of pupils.

## ***Modifying victim narratives***

If certain topics are controversial or too sensitive to be broached in a testimony, the details and particulars can be changed. This long-established strategy is used to sidestep direct confrontation over a sensitive topic by focusing on another — even fictional— topic instead. While victims or formers may focus on a specific incident from their own past, they do not necessarily have to do so. For example, they could discuss alternative, different conflicts, groups or attacks. The key elements of their narratives relate to how they cope with problems and how they relate to people. The testimony supports the broader goal.

## ***Live vs recorded testimonies***

There is an undeniable advantage to having a victim or former present in person in the classroom. Their proximity adds an extra dimension of immediacy to the exercise: pupils and victim can interact with direct and immediate involvement, and this can prove an unforgettable and exciting experience for both parties.

On the other hand, there are benefits to recorded testimonies, too. There is far wider reach as more teachers are able to use such materials. But recorded testimonies allow teachers or moderators to

direct and steer the lesson, without interruptions, in line with a plan or programme. Also, in certain cases, the rehearsed, taped and edited version of a narrative may be safer for the victims and formers involved, or more effective than a real-life encounter.

Alternatively, you may opt for best of both worlds: to show a video (containing media clips and other interviews) and also have the victim or former present in the classroom to follow up with a discussion.

## **Practical guidance for preparation, execution and follow-up**

There are three phases to consider when working with victims or formers in the classroom:

- Phase 0: preparation and design
- Phase 1: the testimony, encounter or project
- Phase 2: aftercare, evaluation and follow-up.

Schools, teachers, victims, formers and their organisations all play a part in these phases.

## Phase 0

### **Before entering the classroom: preparation and design**

As has already been stressed, victims and formers should not just deliver a stand-alone testimony in the classroom. Preparation as well as follow-up are required for the enterprise to be effective. The key points involved in the preparation phase are set out below.

#### **❖ *Project design***

Beyond the particulars (agreeing a time and place with a former or victim), your planning should involve determining what your learning goals are, and consequently, what the subject of evaluation will be at the end. For guidance on designing a project, see the proposals in the section on teaching approaches earlier in this paper.

#### **❖ *Schools***

Schools should ensure that the testimony complements the curriculum, is in line with the school ethos and benefits the dynamics in a specific class. The school (ideally, the teacher and/or the person moderating the event) should meet the victim or former beforehand. The class teacher could also moderate during the encounter, but sometimes other staff members might be better able to guide challenging conversations, and they should play the part of moderator. Schools can inform victims or formers about the class group and explain why they have invited them to the school. Moderators can also consult colleagues for guidance at schools where the victim or former has visited previously. Teachers should also prepare the students to receive the former or victim, explaining the rules of engagement and informing them of any sensitive points. Teachers can also explain the purpose of the victim's or former's visit, and how it is part of the planned school activities and the curriculum. The school can also ask pupils to send in any questions they might have beforehand, as a preparatory activity.

#### **❖ *Victims, formers and their organisations***

The victim or former should also prepare for the encounter. In Spain, for instance, the government has made it possible for victim organisations to offer courses in story-telling.

Young children in particular can be exceptionally direct in their questions and reactions, and victims and formers should be aware that a session with a group of pupils can be challenging. Therefore, victims and formers must do some self-assessment, where they should ascertain whether they have the required resilience to present their story to a group of pupils, and whether they have their self-help resources at hand in case they need them.

Questions or assignments should be prepared for the pupils. This can be done by an individual victim or former, but a victim organisation or an organisation matching schools with guests could

also play a role. You should try to pre-empt responses to difficult questions or remarks that might be made. Also, visit the school to get acquainted with the space, the atmosphere and the school ethos. Try to understand the level of knowledge and development of the pupils, and make sure you know what the teacher is looking for in their effort to build resilience in their pupils.

The organisation could, in cooperation with teachers/facilitators and experienced victims, draw up a list of potential questions, with suggestions on how to deal with them. If an organisation of victims or formers is involved, there is even the option of matching the pupils' needs and characteristics with a suitable guest.

## **Phase 1**

### **The testimony, encounter and project**

#### **❖ *Schools and teachers***

First and foremost, the school should arrange for good moderation of the session, to secure a safe space for all parties involved. This means protecting the guest from inappropriate interventions, as well as ensuring that the pupil-guest interaction does not get out of hand. Everybody must be safeguarded: pupils, the guest, and also the teacher (who should be able to meet their educational goals as a result of this encounter). It is also helpful to schedule the visit of victims or formers before a break, as this offers pupils and school staff the opportunity to unwind and engage in aftercare.

The moderator and guest should try to ensure that pupils are offered the chance to experience diverse perspectives.

#### **❖ *Victims and formers***

The guest can expect the hosting organisation to have arranged appropriate moderation for the event and secured a safe space for all parties involved. The victim or former should ask pupils for questions and responses, or challenge them to write or create something based on the discussion. Keep the objectives of the project in mind, be age-appropriate and avoid being too graphic in the descriptions and the details.

## Phase 2

### Aftercare, evaluation and follow-up

#### ❖ *Schools and teachers*

Schools are responsible for ensuring appropriate aftercare for everyone involved. Teachers, moderators or class mentors should be vigilant for any signs of the need for aftercare in pupils. Immediately after the guest has left, and the next day, gauge reactions by asking the pupils questions: How have you been feeling about the session? Did you discuss the encounter with others? Is there anyone who wants to share something about the guest's visit?

The school, and preferably the mediator, should contact the guest to thank them and also provide feedback. It is vital to ensure that the guest is not made to feel incidental or inconsequential after the encounter.

If the lessons might have an emotional impact on pupils, inform parents about the activity again afterwards.

Besides aftercare, and keeping parents informed, schools should evaluate the predetermined learning goals and explore opportunities to expand the activity in overarching themes and curriculum activities.

#### ❖ *Victims/formers and their organisations*

Victims should debrief with facilitators and request feedback from pupils. It is also important that victim organisations share experiences with other victims, reflect on the session, appreciate the positive moments and plan improvements for subsequent testimonials. This can take the form of support for the former or victim, or be part of the quality management.

**Five golden rules for victims' or formers' testimonials in the classroom**

**Rule 1. Keep it youth centred: connect and interact with pupils and their environments**

As all teachers know, you are most influential when you engage with pupils. Pupils should experience the lesson as an invitation to connect and interact.

**Rule 2. Prepare facilitators, so as to create a safe space and support the learning process**

Prepare and support facilitating teachers, or ask colleagues or even external mediators to take on the role.

**Rule 3. Predetermine the learning goals and consider the bigger school picture — and evaluate**

Choose didactical goals appropriate to the specific group, the curriculum and the school ethos.

**Rule 4. Create an inviting setting that encourages pupils' questions and the expression of their fears, emotions, perceived grievances and identity issues**

Don't shy away from difficult questions and heated discussions, particularly when dealing with pupils at risk of being influenced or manipulated, and where resilience-building is particularly necessary.

**Rule 5. Be aware of unintentionally generating feelings of guilt, shame or blame**

The pupils most at risk of radicalisation might already be struggling with feelings of being ostracised, ridiculed, excluded and disregarded. Make sure they do not feel associated with acts that they are not responsible for.

## Five inspiring projects on resilience-building in classrooms

The following projects, presented at the joint RAN RVT and RAN EDU meeting, all have the common goal of involving victims or formers in their projects, in order to boost resilience of pupils. They apply different approaches and employ diverse means in this effort, providing valuable material for us to learn from.

### *One World Strong*



Founded by victims of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, One World Strong is a growing international community of survivors who have overcome serious injury and psychological trauma to begin life anew. The mission of One World Strong is to establish a vibrant international

community of survivors of terrorism, hate crimes and traumatic events, that provides peer-to-peer hope, support and mentorship to all those impacted by these events. Publicly sharing survivor stories of community resilience, strength and solidarity will support the global fight to counter violent extremism.

#### **What can we learn from One World Strong?**

- Cross borders to learn about inspiring projects, and share diverse experiences.
- Think outside the box and link projects to activities like sport or music.
- Link pupils across different countries.

**Link:** <https://www.oneworldstrong.org/>

### *Extreme Dialogue*

The logo for Extreme Dialogue features the words 'EXTREME DIALOGUE' in a white, bold, sans-serif font on a dark grey rectangular background.

Workers who deal with young people have indicated that they have difficulty broaching and exploring issues around hate or extremism, and that they often feel unequipped to hold constructive conversations. In an attempt to address this issue, the Extreme Dialogue project provides a structured framework that suits different groups, objectives and sensitivities. Schools and other practitioners can contact them to request Extreme Dialogue training workshops and in-classroom session delivery to young people in schools and community settings.

#### **What can we learn from Extreme Dialogue?**

- Make use of emotions in your work, but beware this does not backfire and produce counterproductive results!
- Young people relate to their peers, so make use of other young people in your projects.
- Be prepared for any reaction.
- Timing is important when aiming for long-term results.
- Integrate projects into the school curriculum.
- The follow-up should be a process of discovery: ask what has changed in pupils' perspectives?

Link: <http://extremedialogue.org/>

### *The testimony of victims of terrorism at schools*



MINISTERIO  
DEL INTERIOR

This is collaborative work between the Spanish Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, the Foundation for Victims of Terrorism and the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism — both public bodies — and the associations and foundations for victims of terrorism. Their joint effort is a project preparing the necessary teaching material for the core curriculum subjects at all educational levels in Spain (primary, secondary, and further education (A-levels) and vocational training). The curriculum covers the respect for and treatment of victims, the rejection of terrorist violence, the prevention of terrorism and violence, as well as the history and current situation of terrorism at national and international level.

#### **What can we learn from Spain?**

- Link the project to a broader theme.
- Provide victims with a training course on storytelling before they start.
- Testimonies may affect students differently.

### ***Circles — we have the choice***

'Circles — We have the choice' emerged from a voluntary citizens' initiative. Intransigence, polarisation, extremism, blind violence and terror all have a traumatic effect. Circles nurtures a healing culture of inclusion and dialogue, from which new connectedness, solidarity and engagement can arise. Circles are meaningful encounters of a group of people who each reflect on how extreme violence and harsh times have affected them. Circles provide a safe space for people to express their feelings around this subject. There is no pressure to participate by speaking, and silence is also accepted as a valid response. Circles allow the indivisible situation to be shared, so as to transcend pain, sadness, anger, fear, guilt and shame. They create openings for new meaning, connection, joy, solidarity and well-being.



#### **What can we learn from 'Circles — We have the choice'?**

- Concentrate more on discussions when high-impact events occur.
- Avoid judgement and find novel ways to create an open, safe space.
- Acknowledge the power of silence.

Link: <http://wehavethechoice.com/>

### ***Echoes of IS***



Echoes of IS – #wesharethescars is a web documentary comprising 15 captivating stories by people affected by Islamic State. These are people from very different backgrounds — parents, children, ex-fighters and refugees — who bare their souls and share their life-changing

experiences with the world, for the first time. There is urgent need for effective and powerful online counter-narratives. These 15 stories can serve as a countermeasure against the duplicitous promises and myths fabricated by the propaganda machine of IS, which continues to target susceptible groups of people for its own underhand means. The aim of the documentary is not to victimise anyone or pass judgement on former IS fighters. Rather, it is to start a dialogue, and the hope is that these stories can do just that, because they ultimately affect everyone.

**What can we learn from Echoes of IS?**

- Acknowledge differences across audiences: a villain can be more effective than a victim.
- Indirect testimonies sometimes allow more **space** to talk openly, while direct testimonies leave more room for discussion.
- Avoid framing the discussion around anti-radicalisation in the classroom; instead, broach the subject of shared scars, group pressure or a sense of belonging.

Link: <https://echoesofis.submarinechannel.com/>

## Key messages

### *For victims*

- Victims are **living examples of resilience**. They have the unique ability to rehumanise people by relating their stories.
- An **experienced mediator** in the classroom is key: mediators can create a safe space and avoid the risk of re-victimisation.
- Young children can be direct in their questions and reactions, and victims should be aware that a **confrontation with a group of pupils** can be challenging.
- Victims should be informed about the class beforehand, and adapt their testimony in line with a given target audience. Good preparation and moderation should ensure that feelings of guilt, shame and blame are not unintentionally provoked in already vulnerable children.
- Direct confrontation over controversial or sensitive topics can be avoided by using another **adjusted, comparable or even hypothetical scenario**.
- The victim should also debrief with the facilitator and request **feedback** from pupils. Moreover, it is just as important to share experiences with other victims, reflect on the event, appreciate the positive moments and plan improvements for subsequent testimonials.

### *For schools*

- As Bonnell et al. (2011) note, merely teaching well is not sufficient for resilience-building. There are three other important components of effective teaching and intervention: connecting through effective design and a youth-centred approach; creating a safe space for communication; and furnishing young people with the capabilities they will need.
- Resilience-building is particularly relevant to pupils dealing with issues of belonging, identity and perceived grievances and injustice.
- The emotional and psychological processes resulting from the testimonies depend on the group, the individuals and the group dynamics.
- Besides clearly indicating the school's goal in inviting formers or victims to speak, it is also necessary to link the goal to the right stories and testimonies of these guests, as well as to the school ethos.

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