

THE FAR-RIGHT IS HURTING OUR STUDENTS AND OUR CLASSROOMS

→ TIME TO ACT

The rise of the far-right is a wellbeing and mental health issue for children, young people and families. Research shows that:

**CENTRE FOR
MENTAL
HEALTH**

“The current hostile political climate and increasing overt racism are increasing fear and harm for many people and communities. Experiences of racism in the formative years are long-lasting, affecting self-worth and educational attainment.”

www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk

FOR SCHOOLS, THIS IS URGENT.

Experiences of exclusion and fear directly shape students' relationships and ability to learn. As places that shape how children and young people see themselves and understand the world around them, schools play a vital role in responding to the rise of the far-right. This is relevant for all young people. Far-right narratives do not only harm those directly targeted, but they shape messages that young people of all backgrounds receive about identity, fairness and belonging.

This resource supports schools to:

- Understand the impact of far-right narratives on children, young people and families
- Recognise the root causes of far-right narratives, making connections between wider social issues and how they show up in schools
- Take meaningful action through classroom practice and whole-school culture

Through working collectively, we have the power to build a school that is grounded in safety and trust – a place where all children and young people truly feel they belong, are safe and know they matter.

IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

These stories shared by young people reflect how many students across the country are feeling right now.

“

The area outside my school is covered in England and Union Jack flags. I go through them everyday on my journey to school. But they're not just flags, I know what they're supposed to mean. They mean that someone like me doesn't really belong here. Doesn't matter that I'm born here and England is all I know. Being a brown, Muslim boy means that I'm always going to be treated differently. Less than. I'd be nervous for my mum to walk here, but I'm used to it now. This is just how it is.”

“

Every time I walk down the street, I'm always worried if someone is going to attack me. As a young Black hijabi woman, I experience Islamophobia, racism and sexism. I don't feel safe to just be myself even at school. You have to be careful what you say because teachers judge you differently if you look like me. When they see you as dangerous straight away just because of your religion or culture, you can't trust them on a personal level.”

How are these children and young people feeling?

What is causing them to feel this way?

“

It made me frightened to see all the marches, people shouting things about how England is only for white people and everyone else should be made to leave. Nothing was done about these marches and nothing is done at school either. None of our teachers even talk about what's happening. But it's important for us to be able to have these conversations at school and learn about it and about human rights. When we don't, it puts a barrier between us and the teachers.”

“

Things that are happening in our country and things that are happening in our world matter to us. Teachers are here promoting Citizenship Studies and Politics in A-Levels but when it comes to actual politics, they do everything in their power to avoid it. We need a space to ask questions about what is happening and we feel it differently when it's happening to us. But in school, mental health is addressed as "friendship problems" rather than addressing the real issues that young people are facing. Their perception of us young people is very dumbed down.”

What impact does it have on our students when we avoid discussing issues shaping our society?

NOT RESPONDING IS NOT BEING NEUTRAL.

Young people say that when the reality they are experiencing is not acknowledged, messaging around inclusion feels performative rather than meaningful. The silence from schools contributes to the harm that young people are feeling, damaging their psychological safety and belonging, and eroding trust between students and teachers.



“Child perceptions of belonging within school are positively correlated with academic, wellbeing and behavioral outcomes. For some children, accessing a sense of belonging in the school environment will be more difficult than for others. A Muslim child who has witnessed Islamophobic chants, placards and banners via coverage of the far-right marches we have seen, might find it harder to access a sense of safety and belonging. Fostering a sense of belonging is not about providing the same experience for everyone within a community, it's about meeting the differing psychological and physical needs within the diverse population of a school.”

– DR SEAN OCTIGAN, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

“

I try to bring up my children with self-confidence. But messaging around them is constantly telling them that they have to hide away parts of their identity, or shrink away their culture. My children really look up to their teachers. My son even asked me to pronounce his Arabic name the way his teacher does [Anglicised]. When my eldest started secondary school, his first RE lesson was about 9/11. He said the school only mentioned Muslims when talking about terrorism or oppression. I want my children to feel proud of who they are and be welcomed at school for all parts of their identity. It feels more needed than ever.”

– Parent

“

Far-right support in our area has been rising. My daughter's school arranged visits to a synagogue, temple and mosque. But a third of her year group didn't go to the mosque. A letter of grievance was written by parents saying why they wouldn't be sending their children on the trip. One child told my daughter that they weren't going because their parents didn't want them to be bombed. My daughter was confused and upset. We explained to her teachers that what the parents said was incorrect, harmful and needed to be responded to. After communicating with senior staff at the school, I felt lighter. Schools have the power to educate our children – they make a choice to create either chaos or calm.”

– Parent

Think of the families in your class:

Which of these feelings are present in their experiences?

How does the school's response shape the trust families are able to build with schools?

When parents and carers are affected by the rise of the far-right, whether through fear or experiences of discrimination, this doesn't stay outside the school gates. It shapes what our students hear, feel and bring with them into the classroom. If schools don't respond to the issues affecting families, harmful narratives can go unchallenged. This reinforces misunderstanding and widens the existing disconnect between schools and their wider communities.



Child development theory* confirms the importance of strong links between home and school. Through working in partnership with parents/carers, schools are better able to connect with the lived experiences of their students, improving self-esteem, wellbeing, a sense of belonging and academic outcomes.

[*Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory](#)

WHAT BARRIERS ARE TEACHERS FACING?

“

Teaching is a time-poor profession! There's just no time in the day to actually have these conversations with our students.”

“

As a white teacher (like around 90% of us in the UK!), the truth is that I am not impacted by this in the same way that some of my students and their families are. It's not something I have to carry with me day in, day out. Maybe part of me just hasn't realised how much it takes up for some of my students, and how much my actions can change their experience.”

Which of these feel familiar to you?

What are the barriers for you and your school in responding to students and families affected by the rise of the far-right?

“

It's hard to know how to respond without crossing the boundaries of “impartiality”. We haven't really had any guidance or support around this. I've read about teachers getting in trouble for speaking out or addressing these topics directly with their students. It's safer to not say anything at all.”

We recognise that your own journey as an educator, the support of colleagues, and the culture at your school will affect how confident you feel in responding to the rise of the far-right and its impact on your students. Understanding these barriers is important, and how we act on them will directly shape the experiences of our students.

ROOT CAUSES

For us to respond in a meaningful way, we first have to unpack the root causes: the conditions that allow these narratives to persist.

At its core, far-right ideology relies on the construction of an outgroup, framed as an enemy and threat to the rest of the “nation.” Its beliefs, actions, and policies directly target the belonging of already marginalised people.

It would be unusual to find a school or teachers who actively consider themselves supporters of the far-right! Yet the harms of these narratives are still felt in our schools. Without actively challenging them, we risk reinforcing and contributing to the very sense of exclusion that young people describe.

Use the prompts to reflect on your relationships with students, your current practice, and the culture in your school. This isn't about having the “right answers” but about understanding what support or action is needed to create spaces that feel safe for all young people.

SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

It can be tempting to reduce far-right views or violence to the actions of a few “bad apples” or as a problem of political actors with prejudiced views. But focusing only on individuals can obscure how negative assumptions about people of colour, migrants or Muslims are in-built across society.

Here are some of the realities that marginalised people in the UK have experienced for decades and continue to face today:

- Inequalities in healthcare access and treatment ([Centre for Mental Health](#)). The mental health needs of young people from racialised communities are less recognised and understood by GPs.
- Job applications being ignored because of the sound of a name, and unequal pay once in a role ([TUC](#)). Racialised people are 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty, struggling to pay for essentials like food and heating ([Institute of Race Relations](#)).
- Higher rates of custodial sentencing ([Lammy review GOV.UK](#)). Black and brown children are overrepresented in prison, making up over 50% of those held in youth custody.



When I called to enquire why a student was absent, the parent said they weren't able to wash their child's school uniform. Essentials like washing powder and electricity have become unaffordable for many of our families. A home visit revealed further difficulties for this family, with the sole-earning parent restricted from working while waiting for their immigration paperwork to be processed.”

– Learning Mentor, West Midlands Primary School

How might inequalities across different areas in society be shaping the experiences of the students in your class?

This snapshot illustrates how the far-right doesn't exist in isolation from wider issues and inequalities in society. The rise of the far-right is one symptom of these harmful structures across society.

ISLAMOPHOBIA

The rising number of attacks on visibly Muslim women, desecration of cemeteries and attacks on mosques highlight some of the visible impact of far-right narratives towards Muslim communities. When policies and media coverage portray Muslims as threatening and their behaviour suspicious, and these narratives are amplified by those with power, it shapes how institutions and the public perceive and treat Muslim communities. For example, discrimination faced by Muslim women in work has meant they have some of the lowest employment rates. Muslim children face heightened levels of surveillance and scrutiny, reflected in their disproportionate representation in Prevent referrals – even in cases where no safeguarding risk is found.

For us in schools, addressing far-right narratives means we also have to challenge the Islamophobic ideas that underpin them. When we equip our students with the tools to think critically, they are better able to identify when stereotypes are used to create division and mistrust – essential for building resilience against harmful narratives.



School has never felt safe for me as a Muslim person, because I'm always going to be watched and treated as though I'm different. When there's a news event involving Muslims, the whole school looks at us like we're responsible. We're always stereotyped as being dangerous or a terrorist – given this label even before we've done anything... Islamophobia has affected young people's mental health. Some people don't feel they are safe, or that they'll be listened to, which makes it worse."

– Young person

What does this young person's experience tell us about how Muslim identity or expression is seen in school?

Where might Islamophobia be showing up in relationships or practices at my school?

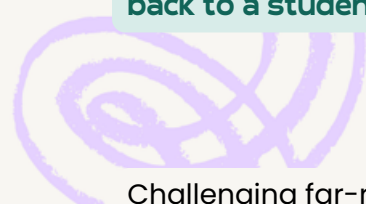
ANTI-MIGRANT RHETORIC

Far-right riots targeting migrant people have swept across the country. But this isn't new. Seeing people who are newly arrived as inferior or a threat has been part of this country's history for centuries. In the current context this is exacerbated by Government policies such as the 'Hostile Environment' – introduced over a decade ago, it set out measures which aim to make life as difficult as possible for migrants. This led to the Windrush Scandal which saw thousands of people still being denied legal right to live in the UK. Alongside sensationalist media stories, migrants are framed as less deserving of safety and dignity.



“The Hostile Environment’ policy effectively turned NHS workers, landlords, bank tellers, social workers and school teachers into border agents. When educators are tasked with sharing personal data or racially profiling families to ‘protect our borders,’ they’re being asked to shift their duty of care to the state instead of the student. In doing so, they are – often without realising it – complying with, and even furthering, harm towards marginalised communities within their classrooms. As educators, it’s important to ask, how can we shift back to a student-centred, as opposed to state-centred classroom?”

www.springboardyouth.com



Challenging far-right narratives in school requires us to address anti-migrant sentiment directly. Supporting our students to understand how scapegoating is used to distract from deeper issues of social inequalities, like the underfunding of community services, they are better able to question simplistic blame narratives that attempt to divide our communities.

When anti-migrant narratives go unchallenged in school, what messages do students receive about whose safety matters?

“

As a migrant, your joy is constantly being suppressed. You’re constantly being told you don’t have a right to be happy, you don’t have a right to live your life how you want. Having a space where you’re able to exist authentically as yourself is a healing experience.”

– Young person



GLOBAL CONTEXT ON LOCAL ISSUES



It is no coincidence that far-right popularity has increased during periods of global instability. Blaming already marginalised communities for broader societal and global problems offers a simple explanation and target for fear and anger.

“

Little connection gets made in schools with global issues, even though we are more connected than ever! For example, there was no mention of the Student Revolution in Bangladesh a couple of summers ago, even though chances are you or I are wearing something that says “Made in Bangladesh.” Or the current war on Iran – it’s impacting the cost of things for us here. British history links back to both countries. So there are lots of reasons for why it’s relevant for children to learn about what’s happening around us. When children have a better understanding of how we got to where we are now, they can see through the simplistic explanations from the far-right.”

– Parent



We are inheriting crises we never asked for. We are the ones who have to deal with what generations have left behind. It makes us worry about our future and the opportunities we will not have. People think racism and sexism are a thing of the past but we're still facing the impact of this today. They don't care about what young people have to say about the world, but it's our lives that will suffer if we don't make change."

– Young person

Global events significantly impact the lived experiences of young people, shaping the conditions they live in and the choices they are able to make for their future. War, genocide and ecological catastrophe, constantly present through online media, impact the mental health of children and young people. When these moments are exploited by far-right movements to spread fear and misinformation, it becomes vital for schools to directly address this. Facilitating spaces for young people to process what they are seeing, ask questions and critically engage with current events, ensures young people are not left vulnerable to incomplete or harmful interpretations.

What global events may be influencing the worries, fears or questions for your students? What spaces exist in school for students to express these?

Our education system doesn't exist in a vacuum. Inequalities ingrained in society shape the experiences of our students – and without intentional action, our schools can reproduce them. A holistic and sustainable response to the far-right acknowledges how the above are interconnected in the way they affect outcomes for our students.

WHAT CAN I DO IN MY SCHOOL?

Take a moment to jot down things that your school may have already put in place as a response to the far-right.

- What support have students or families said is working well for them?
- What are the gaps in current responses, or areas that you want to develop in?

The actions below are not standalone strategies but ways of addressing the root causes explored. They are intended to support day-to-day classroom practice, guide a shared approach across the teaching team, and encourage reflection on the whole-school culture.

We are sensitive to the demands already placed on schools and staff. The approaches here focus on what schools already do – teaching, safeguarding, relationships and leadership – while encouraging a deeper awareness of the experiences of our students and families.

"Nurture-based schools automatically challenge the far-right and its narratives. Instead of fear, exclusion and control, they prioritise inclusion, relationships, care and understanding. In doing so, they create the conditions for safety and belonging, directly countering the division and 'othering' that far-right narratives depend on."

– DR SEAN OCTIGAN, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

1.

CREATE SPACES FOR DISCUSSION, QUESTIONS AND REFLECTION

Why this matters:

Psychological safety and trust is nurtured when children and young people know that their experiences, thoughts and feelings matter. Open discussion strengthens media literacy and gives context to online narratives – thereby reducing the persuasive power and appeal of far-right rhetoric.

IN PRACTICE:

Build regular opportunities for students to explore current events, ask questions and reflect on issues affecting them. **Tutor time, Citizenship lessons or circle time can work well** as they already lend themselves to open discussions. The exercises, books and images in [this resource](#) help scaffold conversations on belonging, migration, inclusion and exclusion.

Use creative activities (that are not handed in or marked) for students to express themselves and process what they are witnessing.

Try using these prompts for zine-making or free writing:

- **What does care mean to you? What does community look like to you? What does hope look like?**

Acknowledge national and local events relating to the rise of the far-right, rather than avoiding them. Use current events as openings for learning rather than problems to shut down.

Connect students with young people from different backgrounds, to become comfortable with difference, make wider community links and collectively explore themes of identity and justice. See how [Project Free](#) builds bridges through School Linking.

“Many teachers are terrified of open-ended dialogues because anything might come up. But a thoughtful approach to oracy—rooted in the pedagogy of Philosophy for Children (P4C)—gives teachers the skills and the confidence to facilitate challenging conversations about topics that students really care about, and what they deeply disagree about. In a changing world, these conversations are scary, but if they don’t happen in school, society suffers.”

– Grace & Emma, Thoughtful
www.thoughtful.org.uk

“Being in a space where we can create projects about issues that matter to us without pressure or fear of being judged makes us feel that our voice matters and we can be ourselves.”

– Muslim Girls Fence participant
www.maslaha.org

“If a young person asks a question you don’t have the answer to, that moment is not a trap. It is an opening. Start with Affirmation. Move to Curiosity, then Community, then shared decisions.”

– See Class 13’s [practical approach](#) to navigating conversations about marches and flags.

Have students work together to create their own manifestos. What would they like to improve in their school or community? How does this compare to the manifestos of local groups? This creates an opportunity for students to see themselves as active members of their community.

2.

PROACTIVELY BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Why this matters:

Trusting relationships with families change how schools can understand the context of their students and respond to their needs.

Far-right ideology relies on deficit narratives about racialised communities. Valuing the knowledge held in communities directly challenges these assumptions and deconstructs the harmful stereotypes that reinforce division.

Where children are exposed to harmful narratives at home, school becomes the counter – places where they are equipped to think independently, recognise prejudice and make sense of different perspectives.

IN PRACTICE:

Identify barriers to parent/carers engagement. What are the ways that school might feel 'hard to reach' for families? Use the 10 tips in this animation as a starting point: [Anti-racism from day 1 – Maslaha](#)

Acknowledge the impact of local or national far-right incidents on the school community, through assemblies, coffee mornings and letters for parents. This example can be easily adapted: [Template-statement-for-schools-on-racist-violence-August-2024.docx](#)

Invite families to input into curriculum topics and incorporate their unique stories, identities and experiences into lessons. See Maslaha's 'Topics Together' tool in action here: [Schools with Roots – Maslaha](#)

Move beyond passive, ad-hoc interactions. Explore how school can become a community space, where parents and community members can regularly interact. See how [this school](#) opened up space for families to run coffee mornings and used learning from these spaces to feed back into school life.

"For our textiles topic, we invited parents & carers into school, and asked them how fabrics are linked to their identities and stories. It was the first time I'd ever been in a meeting with parents where they've been given space to share their ideas! I learned so much from them and it was a great opportunity for parents to also learn from each other. Weaving their input into the lessons made the topic much more meaningful and both parents and children were so much more engaged!"
–Year 5 teacher

3.

DEVELOP CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND GLOBAL AWARENESS THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING

Why this matters:

While critical thinking helps students analyse and evaluate information, critical consciousness goes further, by examining how power and inequalities shape our lives. It moves beyond asking whether something is true, to asking who benefits, who is harmed, and what actions can we take towards justice. Developing critical consciousness gives students the confidence to engage with difficult issues and the tools to create positive change.

Connecting local experiences to global contexts helps students understand how their lives connect to wider histories and movements. They develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging, making them less vulnerable to narratives which seek to divide.

IN PRACTICE:

Embed curiosity and questioning across all teaching and learning. These questions can be used to build critical consciousness across topics, including news stories and events: Whose perspective is centred? Whose voice is missing? Who is it building or maintaining power for? What are the root causes of this issue? What context is needed to help us develop a fuller picture? [Here's an example](#) applying this approach to familiar stories.

Use real-life social justice examples in lessons across the curriculum. Whether through exploring the origins of numerals or data on plastic pollution, see how this can be adopted for maths [here](#).

Make global connections within topics. We worked with young people and families to put [lots of examples](#) together, using everyday examples like food, plants, art or clothing, showing the reality of how we are all connected. Use Hollie McNish's poem [British National Breakfast](#) to reflect on globalisation and the fear of immigration.

Teach histories of resistance and collective action: **"There is a long history of multi-racial and working class solidarity to counter racist narratives. When we teach about the Miners' Strike or learn about local movements – like Manchester's cotton mill workers refusing to handle cotton produced by enslaved people in the US – children can see how British movements have a history of solidarity against the forces seeking to exploit and divide them."**

– Ruth, Project Free
www.projectfree.co.uk

"Build a culture of welcome, understanding and belonging for those seeking sanctuary in the UK. Schools are at the heart of our communities and are central to building a fairer society for everyone." From workshops with storytellers to art exhibitions and films, [Schools of Sanctuary's teaching materials](#) on refugees, asylum and migration raise awareness, compassion and solidarity.

4.

PRIORITISE SAFETY OVER SURVEILLANCE IN SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Why this matters:

When children experience safety and belonging at school, they are less likely to seek belonging in harmful spaces or groups*. But surveillance approaches can reinforce the fear, suspicion and “othering” that far-right ideologies depend on. Black and brown children are more likely to experience these harms, directly shaping their safety and belonging in school. (*Reference: [One Education](#))

IN PRACTICE:

Reflect on how behaviour incidents are typically responded to in classrooms. Do they result in punishment or repair? For example, behaviour charts or reward ladders can contribute to shame and exclusion. Are detentions used more frequently than restorative conversations? How are students supported to understand impact, repair relationships and remain connected to the classroom community?

Review the use of exclusions. Which students are most affected? [Use this resource](#) to understand its impact on safeguarding young people.

Consider how the presence of police in schools affects the safety of different students. The Children's Commissioner found that the incident of Child Q was not an isolated incident, but evidence of wider safeguarding failures. [Use their report](#) to reflect on implications for schools.

Assess the school's use of the Prevent Duty. The Prevent Duty has been criticised for shutting down conversations and breaking down trust between teachers and students. Restricting open discussion makes it easier for far-right narratives to take hold. Reference: [Prevent - Amnesty](#). Instead, create spaces for expression without fear using examples on page 9.

Recognise racist discrimination as a safeguarding issue, rather than an isolated behaviour problem. Ensure students have clear, trusted ways to report racism and discrimination. Anti Racist Cumbria work with schools to set up processes which recognise and respond to the harms of racism:

“Cumbria is 97% white and whilst there is an interest in showing different cultures, many schools don't think they need to go further than representation. Yet racism is a safeguarding issue. It causes racial trauma which is compounded if the racism is not dealt with or denied. It's also a safeguarding issue within the school and community if white perpetrators are allowed to develop racist views unchallenged.”

– Anti Racist Cumbria
antiracistcumbria.org/resources

Use CPD sessions to develop relational approaches to behaviour and safeguarding. Use [this workbook](#) to spark whole-school conversations and action: Is our construction of ‘risk’ relying on profiling? How might adultism be showing up in our practice? What does contextual safeguarding look like? How do we nurture a child-affirming culture?

5.

NURTURE A WHOLE-SCHOOL CULTURE OF BELONGING

Why this matters:

A whole-school approach enables us to move beyond reacting to crises and instead address the underlying inequalities that, if left unchallenged, can reinforce exclusion and allow harmful narratives to persist. School leadership plays a critical role in creating the conditions for meaningful, sustainable change by prioritising time, resources and support. Through this sustained and collective effort, we can create learning environments grounded in safety and belonging for the whole school community.

PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION:

Strategy: Where can existing time, structures or CPD be used to prioritise this work? How will this be embedded across the school rather than relying on a few committed individuals?

Policies: Where do our policies hinder or promote equity? How are they reviewed through student and family voice?

Ongoing learning: How will staff be supported to develop their own critical consciousness? Deepening our own understanding of racism, Islamophobia, anti-migrant narratives and global issues, and how they shape the experiences of our students, makes us better equipped to recognise and challenge harm.

Student experience: How is student voice meaningfully incorporated into school life?

School community: How does the school create a space for ongoing dialogue with the whole school community, including families and all staff?

Collaboration: How can we come together with other schools and local community organisations to learn and share practice?

“This work is not easy, but it is essential. The future of our communities depends on our ability to educate young people who can recognise injustice, challenge hatred and build bridges across differences.”

– RUBY, TEACHER IN LONDON