

Explainer: Gore Content and Violent Extremism

Rachel Jones and Beth Daviess

This article series looks beyond ideology to reveal the online dynamics and ecosystems that accelerate youth radicalization by normalizing violence and rewarding cruelty and harm. Through short, practical explainers, this series seeks to equip caregivers, school officials, and other frontline practitioners with essential information on the complex and rapidly evolving online landscape that young people are navigating today.

Graphic violence has always existed in media, but the accessibility of the internet has fundamentally changed how easily violent content can be accessed, shared, and reused—especially by young people. Today, children and teenagers can find free online content showing extreme violence within seconds. This type of content,

referred to as “gore,” includes graphic, disturbing, and violent visual materials such as videos or images that depict serious injury, death, or other bodily harm. Such violent content often appears without context, is available despite safeguards for young viewers, and can be found on platforms and websites that lack

Key Takeaways

- If you are concerned that someone you know may be consuming gore content in a harmful way, reach out to a trusted community organization or leader for help (see the “Resources” section for information). **In the case of an imminent threat of harm, call 911.**
- Anyone can become interested in gore content, regardless of gender, race, or age.
- Gore content is available on mainstream social media sites, gaming platforms, private networks, and dedicated gore websites. Caregivers, school officials, and other frontline practitioners should be particularly alert to instances in which a young person is accessing dedicated gore websites or private networks on which gore content may be widely available.
- Caregivers, school officials, and other frontline practitioners should watch for indicators of dangerous consumption of gore content, including increasing time spent online, praise of mass casualty events, and other key warning signs (see the section “What Caregivers and Practitioners Should Watch For”).
- Practitioners do not need to be experts in extremism to respond effectively. If concerned about a young person’s potential exposure to gore content, caregivers or concerned adults should talk to the affected person, tighten internet restrictions and parental controls, and seek support (see the “Resources” section).
- Schools can respond to this threat by teaching digital literacy, creating reporting pathways, and training staff on risk factors and warning signs.¹ To effectively mitigate this threat and support a vulnerable person, responders must understand the context, recognize patterns, and intervene early in ways that emphasize support, critical thinking, and connection.

The DVERT Center is supported by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice under Award No. 15PNIJ-24-GK-00750-DOMR. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

ways to report users or content. Because of how this material is used and shared, gore content has become intertwined with online radicalization and violent extremism. As a result, gore content is especially dangerous for young people, and it can be used by bad actors, including extremists, as a desensitization tactic to normalize violence.²

Sometimes parental controls simply are not enough to protect young people from gore content. One mother reported that her 14-year-old son was radicalized by interacting with gore content and the communities that consume it—despite the parental controls that she had in place on accessible online content. While looking for other fans of black metal music online, the teen was exposed to harmful content and manipulation that led to him parroting extremist beliefs, engaging in self-harm, having suicidal thoughts, withdrawing from his social life, exhibiting a drastic personality shift, and eventually being hospitalized. His mother said that the violent content he was consuming became “a form of coercive control...he still doesn’t realize how bad it was. He has been desensitized in a lot of ways.”³ This family’s experience is just one example of how gore content can be used by extremists to exploit social isolation and desensitize victims to violence.

This paper explains what gore content is, where young people may be exposed to it, and why it matters. It also describes how bad actors, including extremists, use gore content strategically when they target young people as victims or recruits.

What is gore content?

Gore content is graphic, disturbing, or violent images or videos showing serious injury, death, or other bodily harm. Gore content can take many forms, including livestreams showing mass casualty events, terrorist-produced execution footage, graphic war images, content showing violence against women, and extreme pornography involving visible harm or coercion.⁴ Being both explicit and sometimes illegal, gore content usually circulates in fringe parts of the internet, such as dedicated gore websites or extremist online spaces.

It is important to note that young people can encounter violent content in many ways, such as during breaking news coverage, in historical documentation, or in fictional entertainment. Viewing it in these contexts is different from intentionally consuming high volumes of graphic, real-world violent content for its own sake. **Consuming graphic violent content becomes concerning when done repeatedly outside the context of news, fictional entertainment, or historical documentation.**

How extremists use gore content

Viewing gore content does not necessarily mean someone is violent or radicalized. But extremists use gore content to normalize violence and expose victims and potential recruits to propaganda.⁵

For extremists seeking to incite violence, gore is a tool. It helps dehumanize victims and reframe brutality as justified or admirable. Extremists have been known to encourage the sharing of graphic content to prove commitment to an online group, shock newcomers, and desensitize participants. For example, some white supremacist channels share gore content depicting violence toward racial and ethnic minority groups to promote and celebrate racism and xenophobia.⁶ Gore content is used to target young people and children who may not understand the material itself or how it will affect their developing minds.⁷ Extremists seek to exploit the fact that young people and children are often looking for a sense of connection and belonging, and this process usually happens slowly and through repetition, rather than through a single shocking image or video.

Extremists use gore to desensitize young people to extreme violence. Repeated exposure to graphic violence over time can make violent acts feel less shocking and more ordinary. This desensitization can cause young people to deepen ties with these extremists and, in some cases, engage in physical violence of their own.⁸ Extremists may reinforce desensitization using humor, memes, and celebration of the violence shown, making it easier to accept as normal.⁹

Gore content also acts as a social filter. Young people who find extreme violence disturbing are more likely to disengage from it, whereas those who choose to continue watching show a willingness to tolerate or possibly endorse violence.¹⁰ This self-selection process helps extremists identify who is “serious” and who is not, while gradually pushing their targets toward more extreme norms. Young people who seek out violent content often have pre-existing risk factors for radicalization, such as being male, having low self-control, or having a mental health condition.¹¹ Over time, these young people may engage with gore content more often, develop an even higher tolerance to it, and form bonds with others with similar interests on these platforms. As a result, young people may feel that they have found a tightly bonded community of individuals who understand them, share their experiences and interests, and have the same values.

Validation plays a role in this process as well—especially for young people who often look externally for validation and identity. **Young people who share graphic content can gain attention, praise, and a sense of identity.**¹² Some may feel that they are proving their loyalty or ideological commitment to the group or its beliefs by engaging with material that others reject. Extremists may also use a young person’s perceived social isolation or frustration with their social status to lure them further in.¹³

Exposure to gore content

Young people can be exposed to gore content in several ways. Though gore content violates the policies of most platforms, it can appear on mainstream social media sites, such as **X**, **YouTube**, and **TikTok**, or on gaming platforms, such as **Minecraft** and **Roblox**, and is often removed only after being seen by many viewers.

Young people may also find gore through unrelated internet browsing. Several young people who later went on to hurt themselves or others first found gore while searching for content and communities related to their nonviolent interests, including music and horror stories.

They may also be shown gore content by others. Peers may share content out of curiosity or the enjoyment of being transgressive. Individuals online may enjoy spreading violent content for the same reasons. Extremists may also share content with young people for the purposes of grooming, desensitization, and recruitment.

Caregivers and practitioners should be aware of **two key ecosystems** that often house gore content: gore websites and extremist online spaces.

Gore websites

Gore websites host violent content for shock or curiosity. On their own, these websites are not explicitly extremist; however, they can still help extremists target young people. Extremists sometimes source graphic material from these sites; in fact, researchers have found evidence of videos on gore websites being downloaded and reshared thousands of times by violent extremist networks on messaging platforms such as Telegram.¹⁴ Extremists may also monitor these sites for individuals who show a high tolerance for and interest in violence or violent content, use their interest to lure them to private spaces, and then share extremist content and ideas with them more explicitly.¹⁵

Extremist online spaces

Extremist networks use private spaces to recruit, radicalize, and build a community with other individuals. These spaces may be message forums, static websites, private social media channels such as Telegram,¹⁶ or private servers on gaming websites such as Discord.¹⁷ Extremists use gore content within these private spaces to amplify their own views and push each other toward physical violence.¹⁸ In these spaces, gore is usually shown alongside extremist ideas or propaganda—messaging that may even be completely unrelated to the context of the violence being shown.¹⁹ For example, the content may be overlaid with slogans, symbols, music, or text that tie the violence depicted to the beliefs of the extremist network.

Why gore content is especially concerning for young people

Children and adolescents lack fully developed critical thinking skills and are more at risk of peer pressure and influence. Taking advantage of these factors, extremists who share gore content often target and groom young people to lure them into private spaces that are flooded with more gore content.²⁰ They also may push consumption of gore content through threats, manipulation, and peer pressure. Such exposure to violent content can influence already impressionable young people and inspire them to engage in violence of their own.²¹

For young people, exposure to gore content might begin slowly. What starts as viewing dark humor, memes, or generally violent language can slowly escalate into seeking out and watching shared graphic imagery. Because young people are still developing emotionally and intellectually, they may not be able to recognize manipulation or coded extremist language, and they may accept claims like “it’s just a joke.” For these reasons, they might absorb violent messaging without being able to critically evaluate it. When gore content is paired with claims that violence is necessary or that society is beyond saving, it can fuel fear, anger, an “us-versus-them” mentality, and a warped sense of moral obligation or duty.

What caregivers and practitioners should look for

Warning signs related to gore content tend to appear as patterns over time, rather than one isolated incident. The following are common online and offline warning signs.

Online warning signs:

- Repeated sharing of graphic violence
- Humor or praise directed at mass casualty events
- Increased time spent online
- Migration to fringe or unmoderated spaces

Offline warning signs:

- Sudden onset of mental health concerns or increased severity of existing conditions, including suicidal ideation or self-harm
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- The development of new radical beliefs or extreme habits
- A growing fixation on violence or perpetrators of violence
- Use of language and symbols that push an “in-group” ideology

These signs do not automatically indicate extremism, but they do suggest the need for closer attention and supportive intervention.^{22, 23}

Resources

If you are worried about someone who might harm themselves or others, connect the person with mental health resources. If there is an immediate life-threatening emergency, call 911.

- Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force: <https://www.icactaskforce.org/internetsafety>
- The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction: <https://virtual-addiction.com/>
- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org/>
- The National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Helpline: www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline
- The Victim Connect Resource Center: <https://victimconnect.org>
- FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center: <https://www.ic3.gov/>
- FBI Field Offices: <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices>
- LearnSafe’s article “Grooming in Kids’ Games: What’s New, What It Looks Like, and How to Stop It”: <https://learnsafe.com/grooming-in-kids-games/>
- The Southern Poverty Law Center’s guide *Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization*: [splc_peril_parents_and_caregivers_guide_june_2021_final.pdf](https://www.splc.org/peril-parents-and-caregivers-guide-june-2021-final.pdf)

References

1. eSafety Commissioner, “Gore Online: How Violent Content Is Reaching Children and What You Can Do,” July 10, 2025, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/blogs/gore-online-how-violent-content-is-reaching-children-and-what-you-can-do>.
2. James Hardy and Christopher Stewart, “Gore and Violent Extremism: How Extremist Groups Exploit ‘Gore’ Sites to View and Share Terrorist Material,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, June 29, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/gore-and-violent-extremism-how-extremist-groups-exploit-gore-sites-to-view-and-share-terrorist-material/>.
3. Odette Yousef, “Nihilistic Online Networks Groom Minors to Commit Harm. Her Son Was One of Them,” National Public Radio, Aug. 6, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/06/nx-s1-5479882/teen-forums-violent-extremist-grooming>.
4. Ali Fisher and Arthur Bradley, *Gore and Violent Extremism: An Explorative Analysis of the Use of Gore Websites for Hosting and Sharing Extremist and Terrorist Content*, Human Digital, 2025, <https://voxpoleu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DCUPN0751-Gore-Extremism-WEB-250704.pdf>.
5. Fisher and Bradley, *Gore and Violent Extremism*.
6. Fisher and Bradley, *Gore and Violent Extremism*.
7. “Gore Online: How Violent Content is Reaching Children.”
8. Barbara Krahe et al., “Desensitization to Media Violence: Links with Habitual Media Violence Exposure, Aggressive Cognitions, and Aggressive Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, no. 4 (2011): 630–46, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021711>.

9. Gitau Regina, "Meme Warfare: How Extremist Groups Weaponize Internet Humor to Normalize Radical Ideologies," *Center's Substack*, Dec. 12, 2024, <https://centerfordiplomaticinsight.substack.com/p/meme-warfare-how-extremist-groups>.
10. Heather Wolbers et al., "Understanding and Preventing Internet-Facilitated Radicalisation," *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* no. 673 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti77024>.
11. Wolbers et al., "Understanding and Preventing Internet-Facilitated Radicalisation."
12. "Gore Online: How Violent Content is Reaching Children."
13. Peter Gažo, "The Recruitment of Youth into Terrorist Groups: Psychological, Social and Security Aspects," *Vojenské Reflexie* no. 3 (2025): 70–87, <https://doi.org/10.52651/vr.a.2025.3.70-87>.
14. Hardy and Stewart, "Gore and Violent Extremism."
15. Know2Protect, "Tips2Protect Against Sadistic Online Exploitation," US Department of Homeland Security, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/25_1217_k2p_p2p_Sadistic-Online-Exploitation.pdf.
16. Heather J. Williams et al., *The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream*, RAND, 2021, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA1400/PEA1458-1/RAND_PEA1458-1.pdf.
17. Danielle Ong, "Extremist Groups Are Using Online Games to Recruit Children, Researchers Say," *International Business Times*, Feb. 16, 2026, <https://www.ibtimes.com/extremist-groups-are-using-online-games-recruit-children-researchers-say-3797231>.
18. Daniel Karell, "Online Extremism and Offline Harm," Social Science Research Council, June 1, 2021, <https://items.ssrc.org/extremism-online/online-extremism-and-offline-harm/>.
19. Fisher and Bradley, *Gore and Violent Extremism*.
20. "Tips2Protect Against Sadistic Online Exploitation."
21. Anti-Defamation League, "Striking Similarities and Overlap in Online Footprints and Extremist Content of Teen School Shooters, ADL Research Shows," Aug. 21, 2025, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/striking-similarities-and-overlap-online-footprints-and-extremist-content>.
22. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, "Online Radicalization," Jan. 2025, https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Online_Radicalization-143.
23. "Tips2Protect Against Sadistic Online Exploitation."

About CNA

CNA is a not-for-profit analytical organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. Nearly 700 CNA scientists, analysts, and professionals provide data-driven, innovative solutions to complex problems. It operates the Center for Naval Analyses—the Department of the Navy's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC)—as well as the Institute for Public Research, which supports federal, state, and local government officials advancing national and homeland security.

To learn more about the DVERT Center, contact our team at dvert@cna.org.

Any copyright in this work is subject to the Government's Unlimited Rights license. The reproduction of this work for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited. Nongovernmental users may copy and distribute this document noncommercially, in any medium, provided that the copyright notice is reproduced in all copies. Nongovernmental users may not use technical measures to obstruct or control the reading or further copying of the copies they make or distribute. Nongovernmental users may not accept compensation of any manner in exchange for copies. All other rights reserved. This report may contain hyperlinks to websites and servers maintained by third parties. CNA does not control, evaluate, endorse, or guarantee content found in those sites. We do not assume any responsibility or liability for the actions, products, services, and content of those sites or the parties that operate them.

CNA® is a registered trademark of The CNA Corporation and may not be used without prior written authorization.