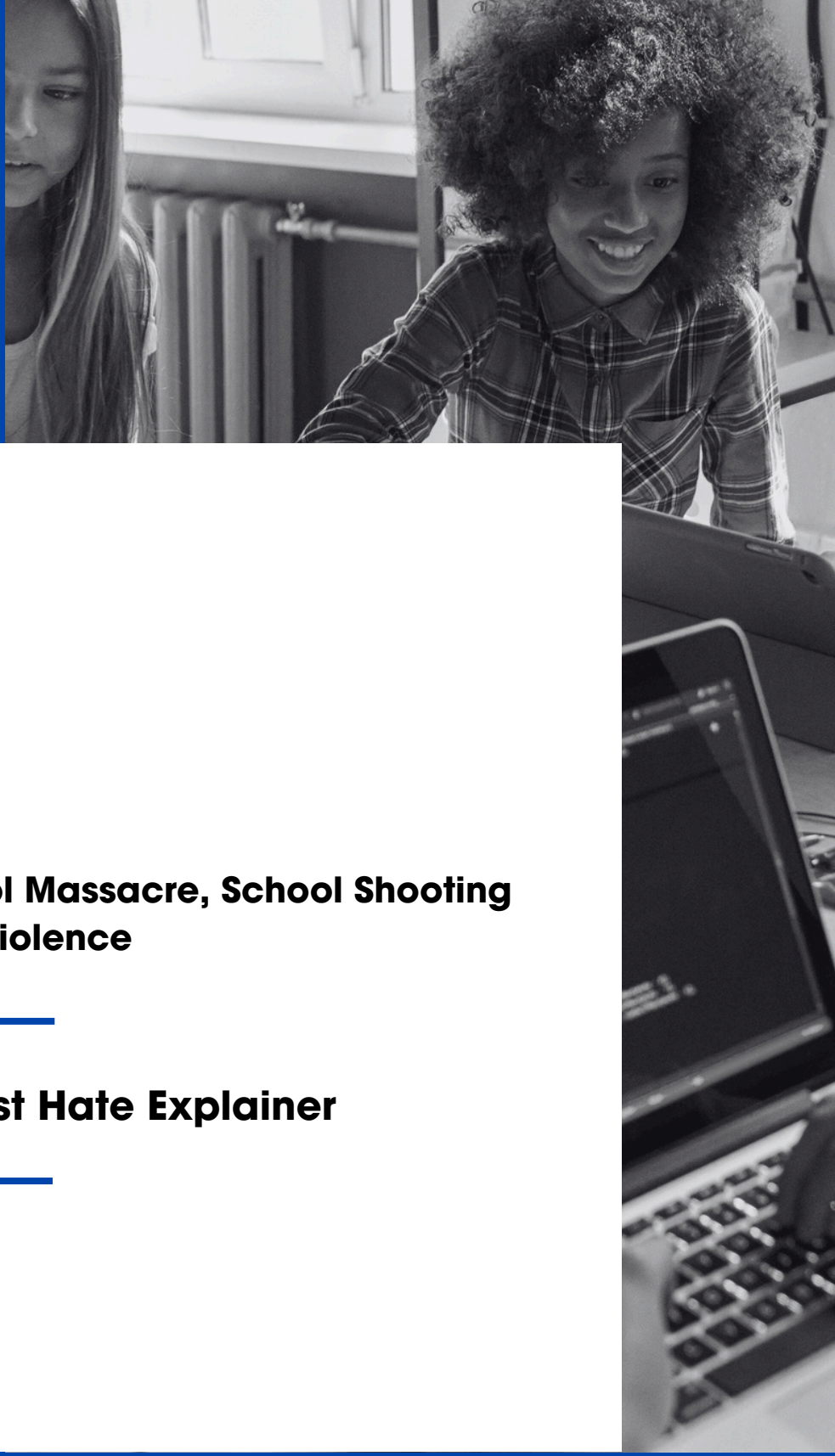
Educate Against ~~Hate~~



Targeted Education Violence

Also known as School Massacre, School Shooting or Targeted School Violence

An Educate Against Hate Explainer

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Who is this explainer for?

This explainer is part of a suite of documents designed to help you understand and identify a range of issues affecting young people. It is complementary to our explainers on:

- Incels
- Algorithms
- The Manosphere

This explainer sets out what Targeted Education Violence is and the signs that a young person may be engaging with it. It will be useful for:

- secondary school and Further Education teachers
- school leaders
- designated safeguarding persons
- all those working in education settings subject to the Prevent duty

Content warning

This explainer includes:

- references to violent attacks on education including school shootings and school massacres
- references to extreme content including the celebration of school massacres, and other extremist ideologies
- references to bullying, self harm, and suicide

We would encourage you to seek support if you are affected by any of the content.

Page 14 of this document explains what to do if you have concerns about a young person.

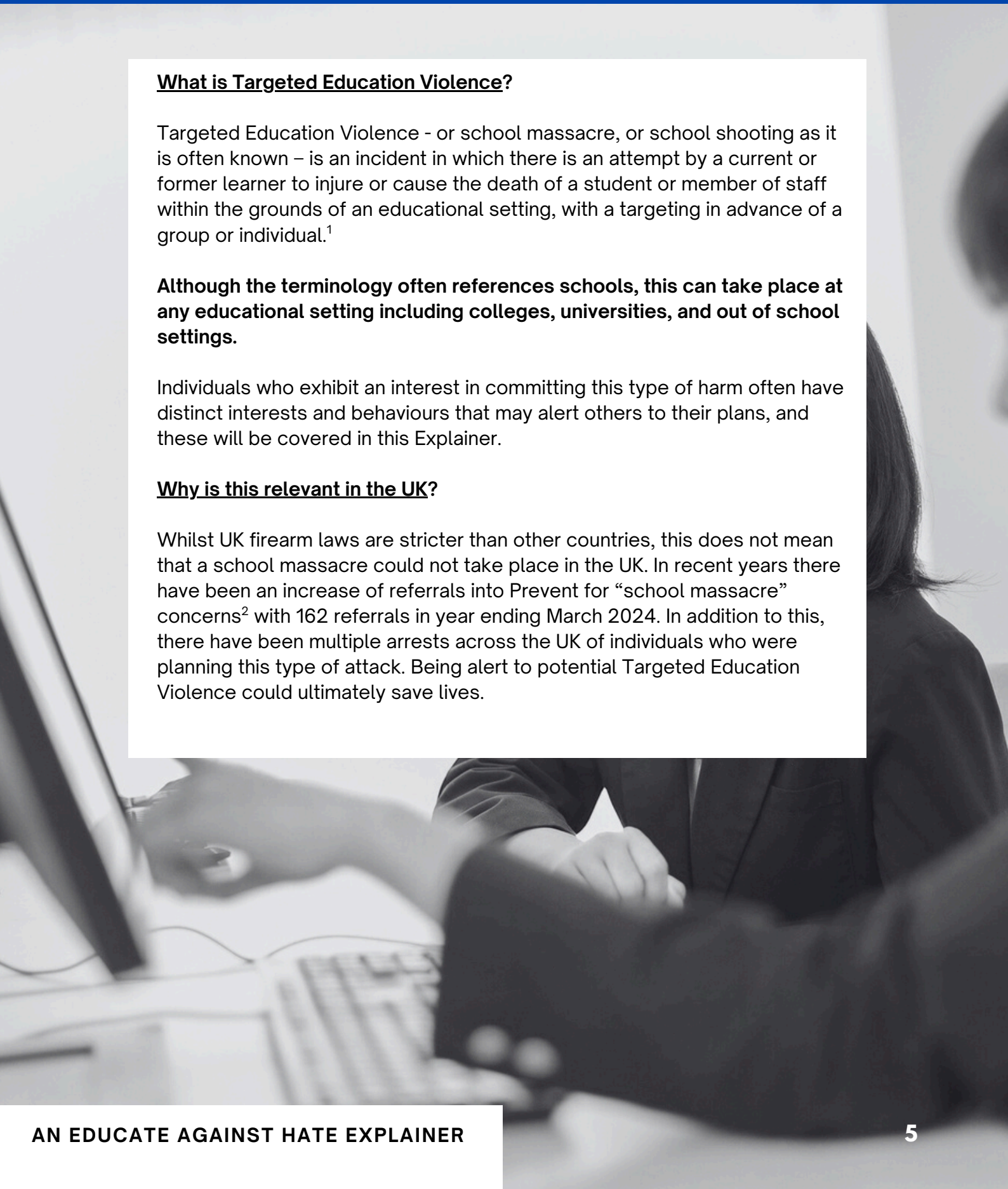
Why this explainer exists

This explainer has been created to help educational settings of all kinds understand the warning signs of Targeted Education Violence and to signpost to further information and support.

It is not designed to be official guidance or support, and settings should seek further advice from their relevant Prevent teams either in their Local Authority, Police teams, or Department for Education Regional Prevent Coordinator. Support offered will vary case by case.

If there is a threat of Targeted Education Violence towards your institution you must contact the police immediately.

Targeted Education Violence



What is Targeted Education Violence?

Targeted Education Violence - or school massacre, or school shooting as it is often known – is an incident in which there is an attempt by a current or former learner to injure or cause the death of a student or member of staff within the grounds of an educational setting, with a targeting in advance of a group or individual.[1]

Although the terminology often references schools, this can take place at any educational setting including colleges, universities, and out of school settings.

Individuals who exhibit an interest in committing this type of harm often have distinct interests and behaviours that may alert others to their plans, and these will be covered in this Explainer.

Why is this relevant in the UK?

Whilst UK firearm laws are stricter than other countries, this does not mean that a school massacre could not take place in the UK. In recent years there have been an increase of referrals into Prevent for "school massacre" concerns[2] with 162 referrals in year ending March 2024. In addition to this, there have been multiple arrests across the UK of individuals who were planning this type of attack. Being alert to potential Targeted Education Violence could ultimately save lives.

Behaviours and interests

There is no profile

As with most Prevent concerns, there is no singular profile of an individual – or profile for a targeted educational setting - who may commit or be a target of Targeted Education Violence. The below behaviours and interests that have been taken from existing cases as well as academic research do not constitute an exhaustive list. Behaviours should be taken within context and where ambiguous there should be appropriate conversations with the person concerned - if appropriate - as well as safeguarding professionals and police.

Online influences

The idea that an individual's problems can be solved by Targeted School Violence is one that is sometimes seen to have originated through engagement with material online relating to previous school massacres or shootings, often US based, for example.

Through engaging with some online communities which aim to identify with or glorify the actions of the perpetrators of previous Targeted Education Violence, it can result in individuals seeing commonalities between their own situation and that of the perpetrators. This can lead to viewing the actions of the perpetrators as a legitimate solution to their own problems and make the idea of Targeted Education Violence seem a realistic possibility.

Targeted Education Violence content can be found on multiple mainstream social media platforms and so it is imperative that students are educated around online safety and paths of referral for concerns they may have.

Interest in the Columbine attack, April 20th 1999

In many targeted education violence type concerns there are references to the attack at Columbine High School in the US on April 20th, 1999.

The attack at Columbine High School led to the loss of 15 lives and many more injuries. The attack was perpetrated by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold – aged 18 and 17 respectively – and was originally planned as an explosives attack though these did not detonate. Both perpetrators took their own lives after concluding the attack.

The attack took place in full view of the media and as such there are many aspects of the incident which were publicised, such as the diaries of the perpetrators and various media profiles of them which are still available online. This has led to some individuals relating to the perpetrators assumed motives and, in some cases, idolising them.

Behaviours and interests

If someone is doing the below and/or you have other or existing concerns, seek advice as a matter of urgency:

- Appearing obsessed or overly fascinated with the Columbine attack, alongside other contextual safeguarding concerns
- Seeking out gory images related to Columbine, including images of the perpetrators and victims' bodies and methodology of the perpetrators
- Glorifying or celebrating the attack or the perpetrators
- Emulating the images of the perpetrators, such as the 'Wrath' t-shirt or 'Natural Selection' t-shirt
- Expressing a desire to commit a Columbine style attack
- Finding specific meaning in the date of April 20th relating to Columbine, or using related phrases or wording
- Using the nicknames of the perpetrators (REB and VoDKa)

This is not an exhaustive list and all should be taken within the context of other concerns. Educational settings should seek advice if they have any concerns, which may include, or not, the above non-exhaustive examples.

Interest in other school massacres

A behaviour of concern can be an obsession or fascination with other school massacres or shootings in a similar way to a fascination with Columbine. This may present in different ways, for example documents or notes detailing other school massacres and mass murders.

Some of the most referenced attacks are US based and include Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland, and Virginia Tech though there are many more.

Context is key; there is a lot of information out there about previous school massacres – some of it academic, some of it not – and individuals may simply be researching an interest. Where it may become particularly concerning is where the interest becoming all-encompassing and obsessive as well as where other safeguarding or welfare issues are present and professional judgement should be used. Any disclosure of intent around committing an attack should be immediately referred to the police.

Behaviours and interests

Sharing plans with others (leakage)

A large feature of Targeted Education Violence type concerns is leakage of plans to others. In the US, 94% of cases involved the perpetrators sharing their intentions of carrying out an attack with others.[3]

This leakage can occur in multiple ways and disclosures can happen to various people, including family, school staff, and other students and peers. The following examples are not exhaustive, but could look like:

- Linking to online postings about a planned attack
- Linking to manifestos
- Warning friends to avoid attending on certain days
- Sharing 'kill lists'
- Outright detailing the plan of attack
- Posts online on various social media platforms
- Plans and expressions of concern within school essays, creative writing exercises, and coursework, for example

Related to this are 'final messages' which though are often intended to be found post-attack are sometimes shared beforehand with friends and romantic partners, for example. These can include goodbye messages, expressions of suicide, the giving away of possessions, and versions of wills.

Threats of Targeted Education Violence must always be taken seriously, and routes to raise concerns must be made clear to staff and students. Police should be involved as soon as any threats are received.

Kill lists and attack plans

A common feature of Targeted Education Violence is the presence of a kill list and / or plan of attack. These can vary massively in terms of detail and realism but must always be taken seriously. It may be in the below formats, although these are only examples:

- A map of the educational setting with notes
- A list of people to target which may include justification and an order
- A list of weaponry
- A list of materials of concern that could be used to create a weapon or explosive
- A timeline of attack with events and triggers

This list is not exhaustive. If a student discloses a kill list and/or attack plan to anyone this should be referred into the police immediately.

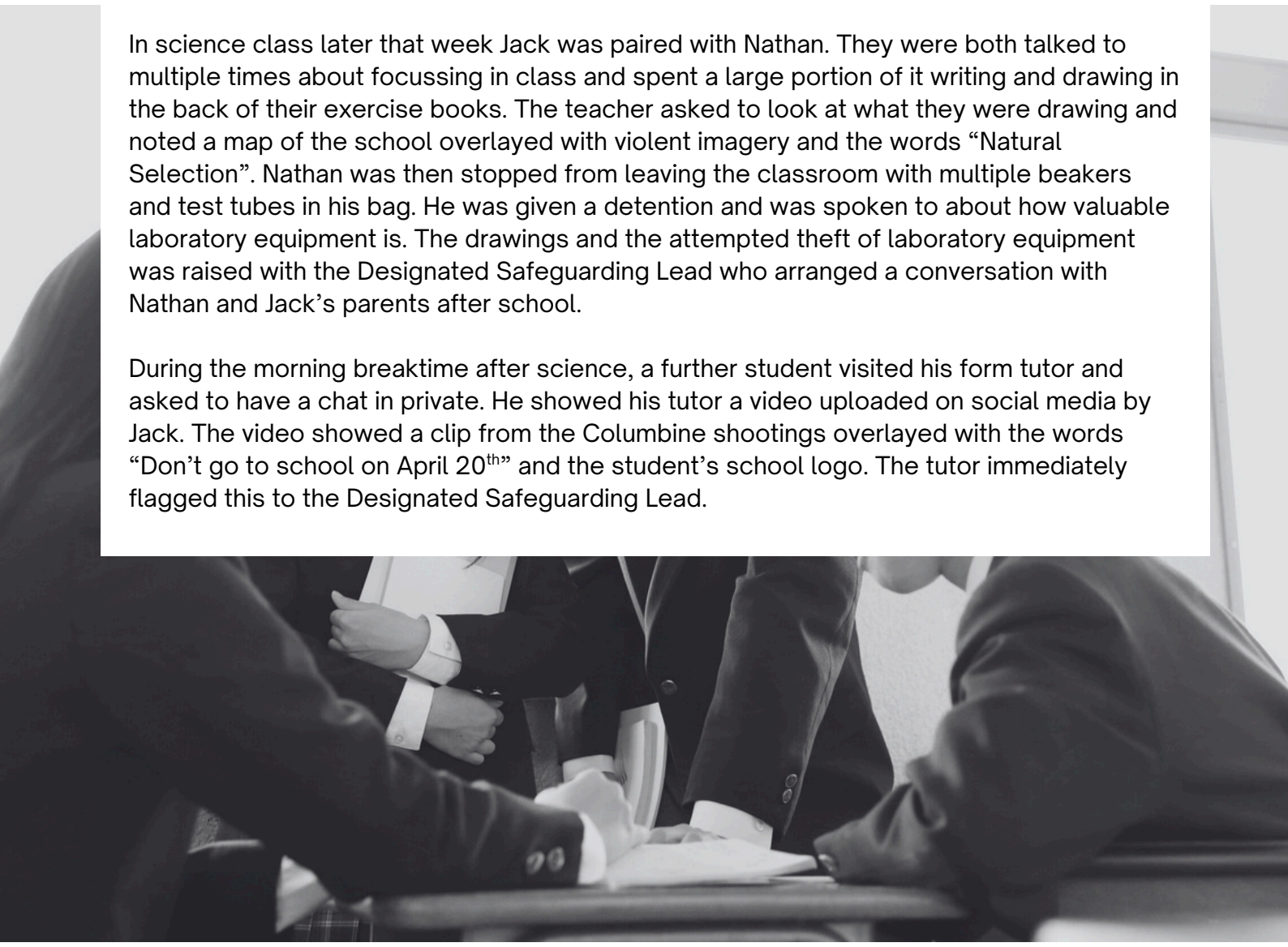
Case study

This case study is based on a real-life situation in the UK, details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Mr Brown, an English teacher at a secondary school, had set his class a creative writing assignment. Upon receiving the completed assignments, he became concerned about Jack's submission. It was written from the perspective of a gun used in a school shooting that bore a resemblance to Sandy Hook and appeared to be a positive depiction of the event. Mr Brown flagged this to his Designated Safeguarding Lead and had a chat with Jack. Jack explained that he was interested in school shootings after seeing information about them on social media, and Mr Brown explained how his depiction of the event could be distressing and seen as a positive view on school shootings. Jack said he understood and apologised for causing concern. Mr Brown relayed this to his Designated Safeguarding Lead who noted it on the system.

In science class later that week Jack was paired with Nathan. They were both talked to multiple times about focussing in class and spent a large portion of it writing and drawing in the back of their exercise books. The teacher asked to look at what they were drawing and noted a map of the school overlayed with violent imagery and the words "Natural Selection". Nathan was then stopped from leaving the classroom with multiple beakers and test tubes in his bag. He was given a detention and was spoken to about how valuable laboratory equipment is. The drawings and the attempted theft of laboratory equipment was raised with the Designated Safeguarding Lead who arranged a conversation with Nathan and Jack's parents after school.

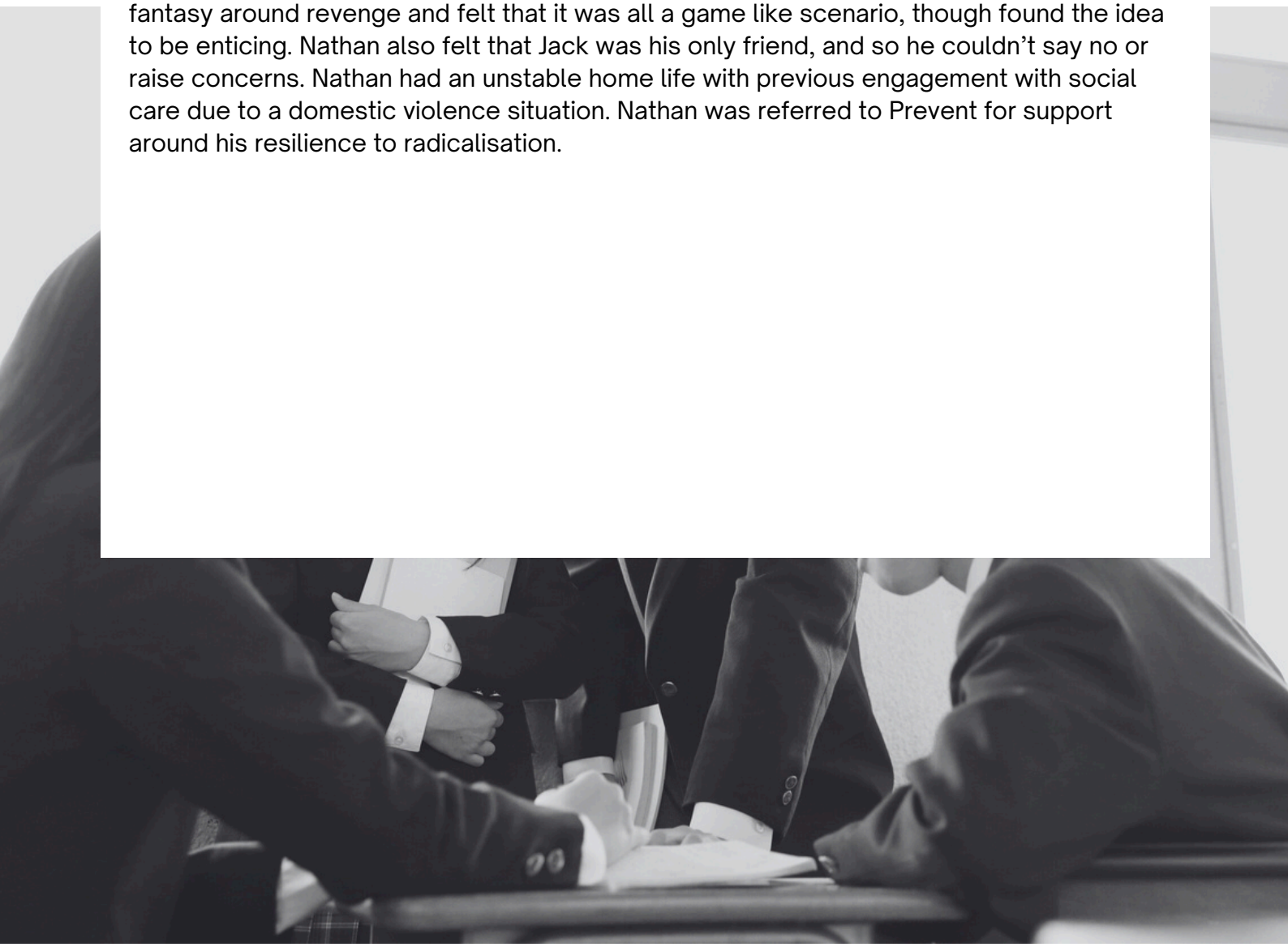
During the morning breaktime after science, a further student visited his form tutor and asked to have a chat in private. He showed his tutor a video uploaded on social media by Jack. The video showed a clip from the Columbine shootings overlayed with the words "Don't go to school on April 20th" and the student's school logo. The tutor immediately flagged this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.



Case study

After receiving the concern about the video on social media, the Designated Safeguarding Lead called the police due to the threat to the school. The police investigated and unearthed a plan by Jack to create Molotov cocktails and attack the school canteen when the most students were present for lunch. There were also further social media posts found which detailed grievances Jack had with several students and staff around bullying and low grades in classes and included a detailed kill list. Jack was found to be active in multiple online spaces dedicated to glorifying school shooters and had a large collection of gore on his phone, most of which were images from other school massacres. Jack also had an instructional document that was illegal under the Terrorism Act and was arrested and awaits trial.

Nathan was found to have been brought into this plan through his interest in chemistry and was not aware that the plan was entirely real. He believed that Jack was acting out of a fantasy around revenge and felt that it was all a game like scenario, though found the idea to be enticing. Nathan also felt that Jack was his only friend, and so he couldn't say no or raise concerns. Nathan had an unstable home life with previous engagement with social care due to a domestic violence situation. Nathan was referred to Prevent for support around his resilience to radicalisation.



Support for educators

If you have a concern to discuss:

One avenue of support where a Prevent concern is raised that aligns with Targeted Education Violence is through the relevant local authority who can – with the support of Counterterror Policing assist with risk assessing the situation and offering bespoke support to your educational setting. This is done on a case-by-case basis, and each offer of support will be unique to the situation at hand. This support will be activated when a referral is made and will be conducted through local Prevent partners such as Police, Local Authority teams, or the Channel Panel process.

If you are in any doubt, speak to the police.

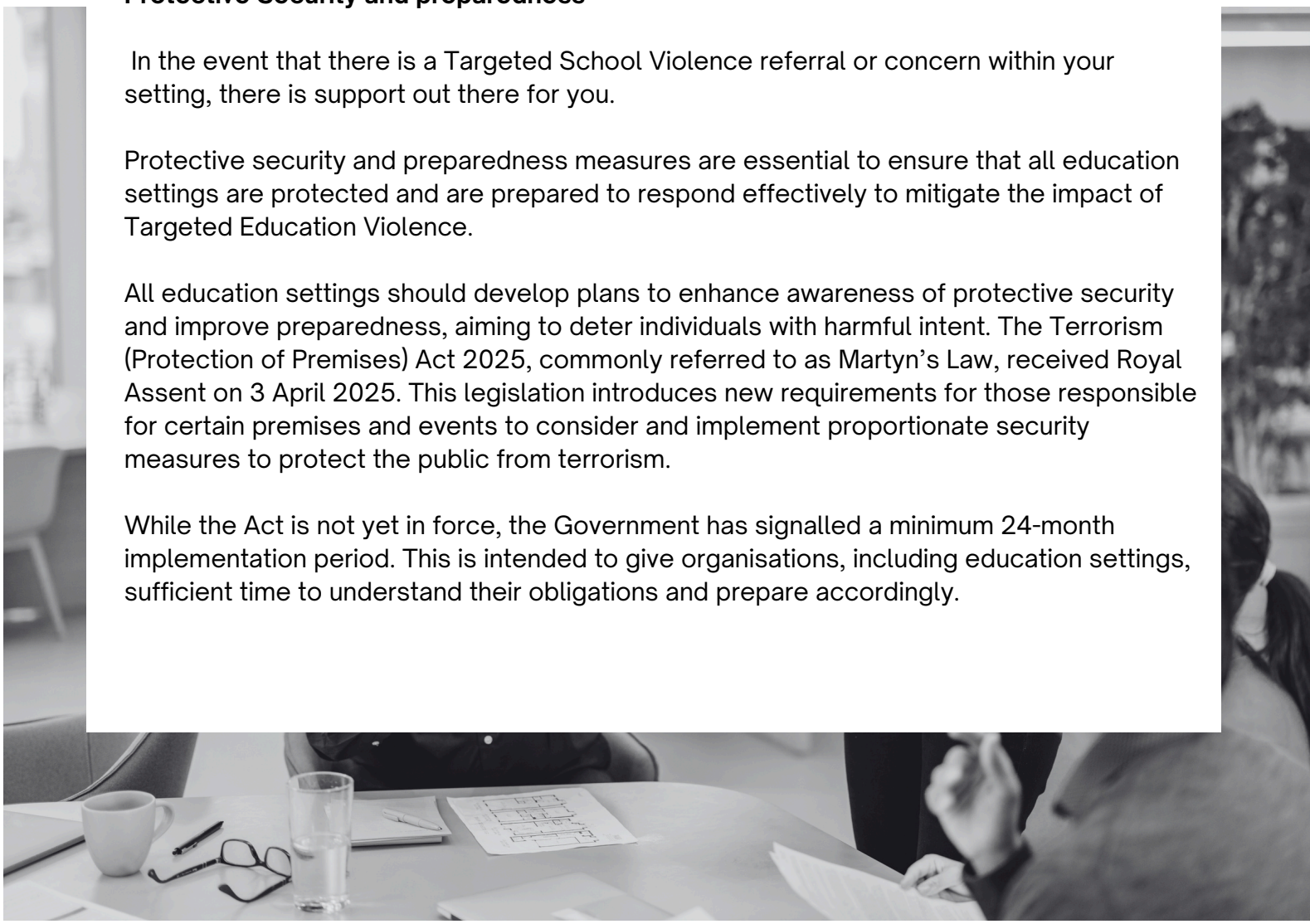
Protective Security and preparedness

In the event that there is a Targeted School Violence referral or concern within your setting, there is support out there for you.

Protective security and preparedness measures are essential to ensure that all education settings are protected and are prepared to respond effectively to mitigate the impact of Targeted Education Violence.

All education settings should develop plans to enhance awareness of protective security and improve preparedness, aiming to deter individuals with harmful intent. The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, commonly referred to as Martyn's Law, received Royal Assent on 3 April 2025. This legislation introduces new requirements for those responsible for certain premises and events to consider and implement proportionate security measures to protect the public from terrorism.

While the Act is not yet in force, the Government has signalled a minimum 24-month implementation period. This is intended to give organisations, including education settings, sufficient time to understand their obligations and prepare accordingly.



Support for educators

The UK Government's Department for Education has published information explaining how the Act will affect schools, colleges, and other education providers. Statutory guidance will be published ahead of commencement, designed to be clear, accessible, and practical.

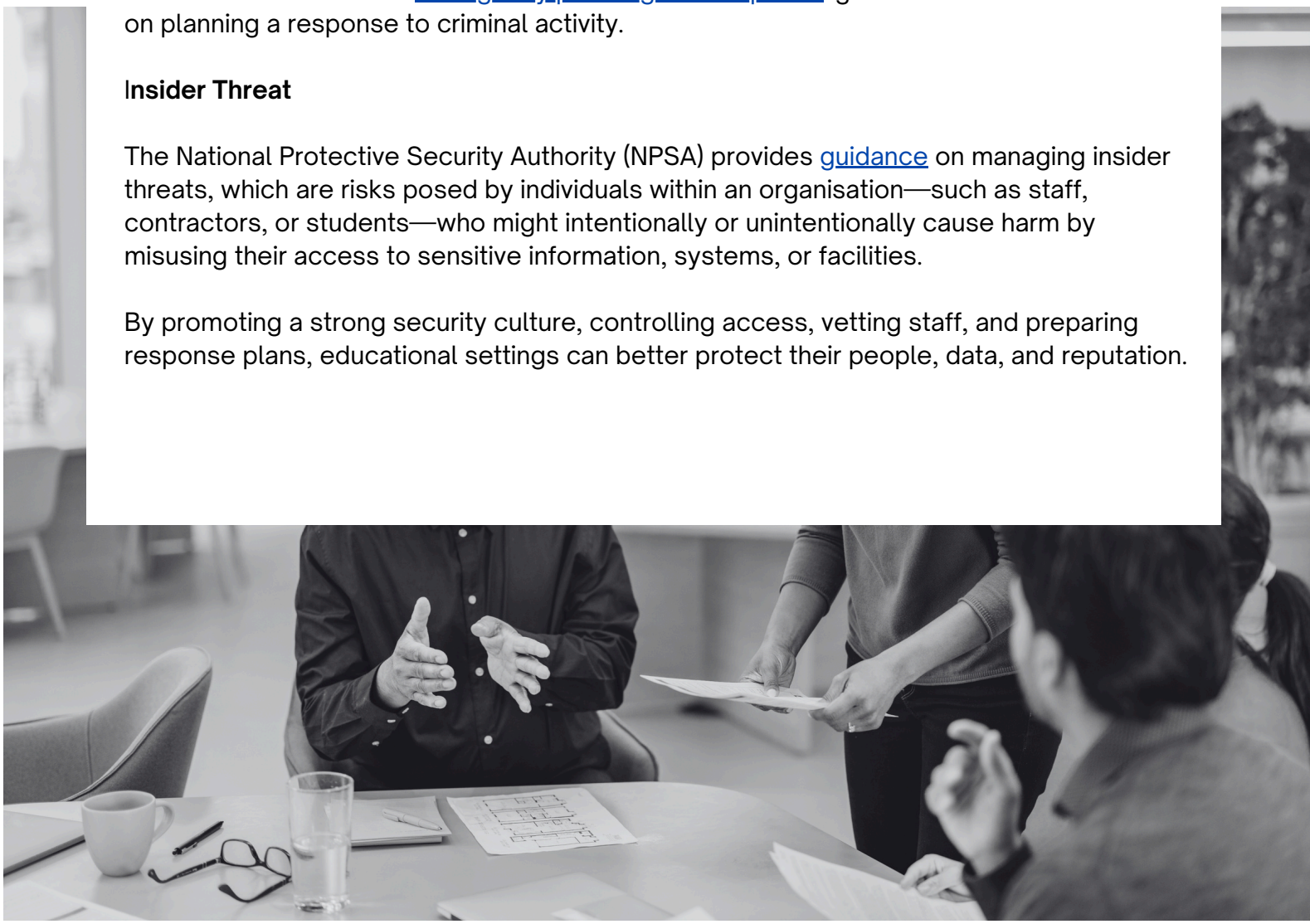
Settings should establish and routinely test incident response plans. These plans should include invacuation, evacuation and lockdown procedures, as well as communication protocols and strategies for business continuity and returning to normal operations. Every member of staff plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of security and preparedness. Staff should be well acquainted with the setting's response procedures, exit routes and the preparation of crisis response kits.

The Welsh Government 'Emergency planning and response' guidance includes information on planning a response to criminal activity.

Insider Threat

The National Protective Security Authority (NPSA) provides guidance on managing insider threats, which are risks posed by individuals within an organisation—such as staff, contractors, or students—who might intentionally or unintentionally cause harm by misusing their access to sensitive information, systems, or facilities.

By promoting a strong security culture, controlling access, vetting staff, and preparing response plans, educational settings can better protect their people, data, and reputation.



Resources

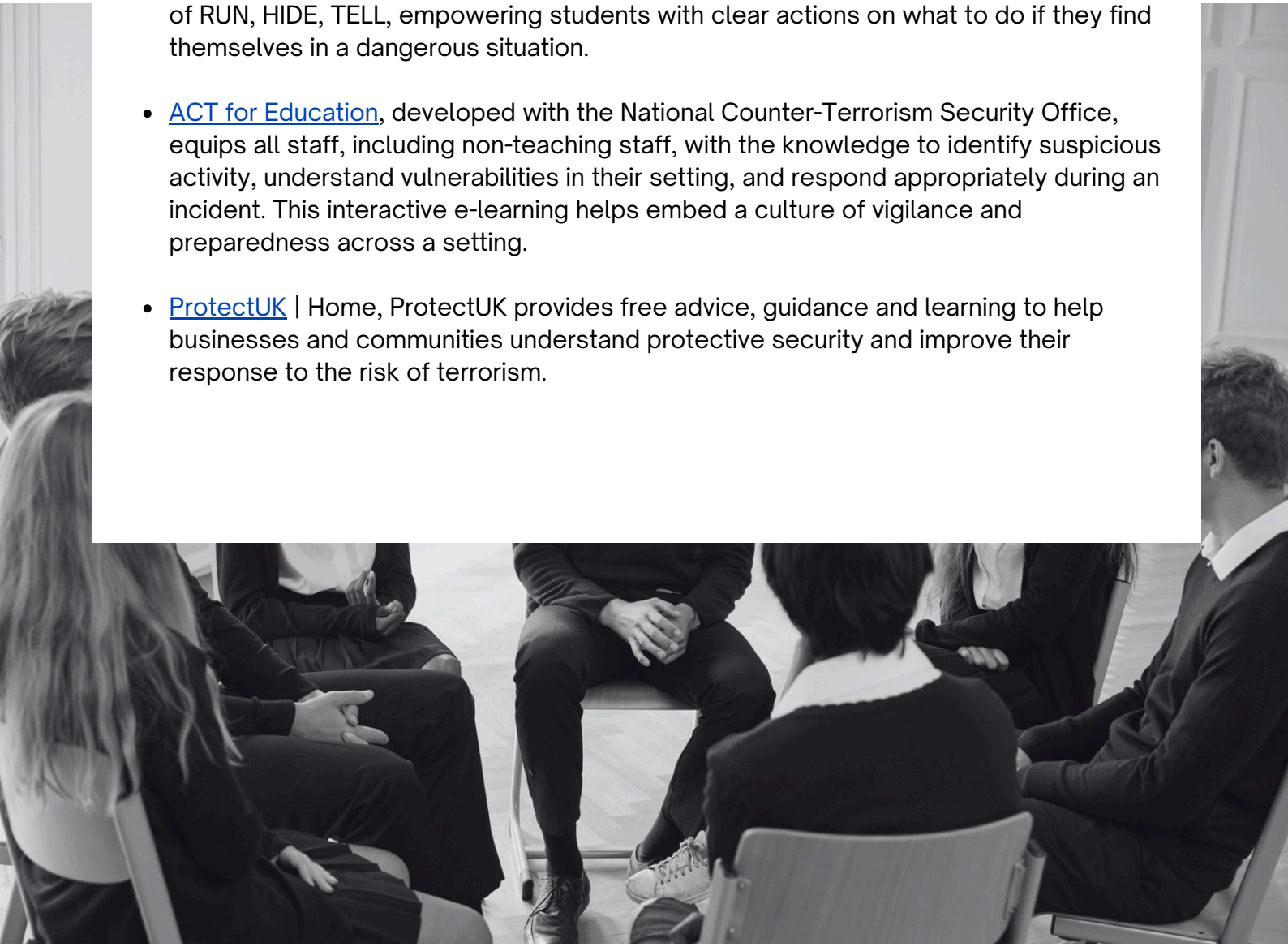
The UK Government's Department for Education have a number of resources that have been developed in collaboration with sector partners who are responsible for both counter terrorism, national level security and protection. These resources help education settings prepare, response and recover effectively:

- Keeping Safe Online is a Welsh Government website available through Hwb - Wales' teaching and learning platform. It hosts information, guidance and resources for the school community on a wide range of issues, including misinformation, hate, radicalisation and extremism.

- ACT for Youth is a teaching resource aimed at young people aged 11-16, teaching them how to stay safe during a terrorist or marauding attack. It focuses on the core principles of RUN, HIDE, TELL, empowering students with clear actions on what to do if they find themselves in a dangerous situation.

- ACT for Education, developed with the National Counter-Terrorism Security Office, equips all staff, including non-teaching staff, with the knowledge to identify suspicious activity, understand vulnerabilities in their setting, and respond appropriately during an incident. This interactive e-learning helps embed a culture of vigilance and preparedness across a setting.

- ProtectUK | Home, ProtectUK provides free advice, guidance and learning to help businesses and communities understand protective security and improve their response to the risk of terrorism.



What to do if you have concerns

What to do if you have immediate concerns for safety

If you think someone is in immediate danger, or if you see or hear something that may be terrorist-related, trust your instincts and call 999 or the confidential Anti-terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321.

What to do if you have concerns over radicalisation

Your first course of action should be to follow your setting's standard safeguarding procedures. This includes discussing any concerns with your school's designated safeguarding lead, who may take further advice from the local authority.

Additional support outside of your school

Speak with your local authority school safeguarding or Prevent team and/or contact your local police force or dial 101 as the non-emergency police number.

For more information on what to do if you have concerns visit Educate Against Hate.



What to do if faced with an incident

In the event of a Targeted Education Violence type incident, immediately call the police on 999 and provide them with full and accurate details of the situation. Where possible, escalate the incident without delay to your security lead or a member of staff best positioned to coordinate your setting's incident response plans and relay any police advice to them. The police will offer crucial advice on managing the incident, including strategies to mitigate risks and ensure the safety of all individuals on site.

The Welsh Government works with partners in the UK Government and others such as local authorities and police to support educational settings in Wales which have been impacted by serious incidents, including potential terrorist attacks. This includes sign posting advice on how to access mental health support and resources for teachers on how to discuss the issues related to serious incidents.



References

1 Protecting_Americas_Schools.pdf (p3)
2 Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2023 to March 2024 - GOV.UK
3 USSS Averting Targeted School Violence.2021.03.pdf (p25)

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