

The logo features the text "OptiMoment" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, with "Tool" in a slightly smaller, bold, white sans-serif font below it. The text is centered within a white circular outline that is open at the top and bottom, resembling a stylized smile or a partial circle.

# OptiMoment Tool

A decision-support tool for police and security services to optimize referrals of individuals to intervention programs that counter radicalization to violence.

*Version 1, March 2026*



organization for  
the prevention  
of violence

# Table of Contents

---

<b>OptiMoment: When to refer to CVE</b>	<b>2</b>
CVE Programs	2
Referrals	2
Using the OptiMoment Tool	2
Step 1. Conduct life circumstance evaluation	2
Step 2. Review the OptiMoment tool	3
Step 3. Identify optimal moments	3
Step 4. Initiate the referral	3
Direct approach: Engaging the person of concern	3
Indirect approach: Engaging spouses, parents, and family members	4
Step 5. Following up	4
<b>Obtaining information about CVE program participants</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Considerations</b>	<b>5</b>
Optimal moments come and go	5
Other optimal moments may exist	5
“No” today doesn’t mean “no” tomorrow	5
Optimal moments vs. risk assessment	6
Risks to consider when engaging a person of concern	6



organization for  
the prevention  
of violence

[preventviolence.ca](http://preventviolence.ca)



[canses.ca](http://canses.ca)

*The OptiMoment was developed by the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, with the generous support of the Canadian Network for Research on Security, Extremism and Society.*

*Please direct any inquiries about the OptiMoment tool, or requests for training, to Michael King: [mike@preventviolence.ca](mailto:mike@preventviolence.ca)*

## OptiMoment: When to refer to CVE

---

The OptiMoment is a tool to help police and security services identify the optimal moments to refer individuals involved in violent extremism, and other forms of targeted violence, to a psychosocial intervention program aimed at countering violent extremism, otherwise known as a “CVE program”. The OptiMoment tool is designed for situations where police and security services are seeking to encourage voluntary participation in a CVE program. It is not for cases where courts or the criminal justice system mandate program participation.

Based on social scientific evidence, the OptiMoment leverages specific circumstances that are known catalysts for disengagement from extremist groups, ideologies, and grievance-fueled violence.<sup>1</sup> These specific circumstances represent the *optimal moments* to engage the individual because (a) the individual is more likely to be receptive to intervention, and (b) the intervention has the greatest potential to trigger disengagement.

## CVE Programs

---

Programs to counter violent extremism (CVE) exist in most Canadian provinces and offer specialized psychosocial services aimed at helping individuals disengage from violent extremist ideologies, hate motivated activities, violent conspiracies, and grievance-fueled violence. These programs are delivered by professionals who help address the psychosocial needs and vulnerabilities of program participants, mitigating the risk factors that keep them involved in violent extremism, while fostering pro-social behaviours and lifestyles.

## Referrals

---

Most CVE programs accept referrals from a variety of sources, such as concerned parents, spouses, schools, as well as self-referrals. In some cases, people are mandated to participate in a CVE program through court-ordered conditions for probation, bail, or a terrorism peace bond.

Outside of court mandates, the referral process for police and security services will entail direct engagement with the individual and/or their families, suggesting that they contact, and ultimately participate in, a CVE program. The OptiMoment tool helps identify the most opportune moments to engage with the individual, and/or their families, increasing the odds that they will participate in a CVE program. Once suggested, you can either leave the process of contacting the program to the individual, or offer to facilitate a meeting for them.

## Using the OptiMoment Tool

---

### Step 1. Conduct life circumstance evaluation

Review all information you possess about the current life circumstances of the individual. Identify any major life changes, personal struggles, and interpersonal conflicts. Assess their relationship to their ideology or grievance, such as the depth of their conviction, or any doubts. Determine whether their beliefs are impeding their life goals or damaging their relationships with family or friends.

---

1 Windisch, S., Simi, P., Ligon, G. S., & McNeel, H. (2016). Disengagement from ideologically-based and violent organizations: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal for Deradicalization*, 9, p.1–38; and Morrison, J. F., Silke, A., Maiberg, H., Slay, C., & Stewart, R. (2021). *A Systematic Review of Post-2017 Research on Disengagement and Deradicalisation*. Full Report: Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats.

## Step 2. Review the OptiMoment tool

The tool (see page 8 & 9) focuses on five categories of *optimal moments*: doubts, hardships, helpful allies, new beginnings, and incentives. Each category of *optimal moments* represents life circumstances that, as research suggests, can potentially initiate disengagement and deradicalization processes. These circumstances also render the individual more likely to be receptive to receiving services from an intervention program. Review the categories of *optimal moments* as well as the examples of observable behaviours provided for each category. Please note these examples are not exhaustive.

## Step 3. Identify optimal moments

Compare the individual's life circumstances reviewed in Step 1 to the *optimal moments* listed in the tool. If the individual is currently experiencing a situation that corresponds to any category of *optimal moments*, consider initiating the referral (Step 4). If the individual does not appear to be experiencing an *optimal moment*, reassess the individual's life circumstances (Step 1) at a later date.

## Step 4. Initiate the referral

Police and security services can channel an individual to a CVE program using one of two approaches. The direct approach consists of engaging the individual of concern. The indirect approach leverages a 'helpful ally,' such as a family member or friend, to encourage the individual to contact a CVE program. Key considerations for each approach are detailed below.

### *Direct approach: Engaging the person of concern*

While the objective of a CVE program is to help people disengage from belief systems that justify violence, police and security services are not advised to describe CVE programs in this way to individuals. Descriptions that highlight ideological change may be viewed by some individuals as a threat to their core beliefs and cause further entrenchment in their ideology.

Instead, police and security services are recommended to center the conversation around the specific *optimal moment* that the individual is experiencing, as identified through the OptiMoment tool. Specifically, the conversation should leverage the *optimal moment* to introduce the CVE program, highlighting how the services offered by the program may be useful for managing the *optimal moment*.

For example, CVE programs can be described as neutral organizations that offer free counselling to help address family conflict (*optimal moment*: hardships), to help navigate their application to a university program (*optimal moment*: new beginnings), or as a safe space to discuss their conflicting views about an ideology (*optimal moment*: doubts). By framing the CVE program as potentially beneficial to the individual, especially if the program can help address a particular need currently experienced by the individual, the individual is more likely to engage with the CVE program.

Police and security services can facilitate connection with the CVE program in one of two ways. They can provide the individual with the program's contact details (some programs have business cards that police can give), making the next step of contacting the program the individual's responsibility. Alternatively, they can offer to share the individual's contact details directly with the CVE program, simplifying the process further. However, this direct sharing of information can only proceed with the individual's explicit consent.

In sum, the aim of engagement should be to guide the individual towards connecting with the CVE program by highlighting how the program can help address their needs. This approach can be especially effective if the individual is highly motivated to meet certain needs. Successfully framing the program as beneficial, however, requires that police and security services familiarize themselves with their local CVE program and its services prior to their engagement with individuals involved in violent extremism and their families.

### *Indirect approach: Engaging spouses, parents, and family members*

Family members who are worried about a person's involvement in violent extremism will often welcome the suggestion of specialized programming for their loved one. In these cases, police and security services can simply provide the family with information about the CVE program, and suggest they reach out to the program to strategize how to get their loved one to enter the program. It may be useful to mention that CVE programs often provide resources for families, such as guidance on how to maintain a relationship with a family member who believes in conspiracy theories. Family members can also enroll in a CVE program to get support for their own needs.

While discussing CVE programs with family members, it is important to consider any potential risks of having this conversation. If family members are fearful that the individual may retaliate against them for contacting a CVE program or talking to the police, it may not be an appropriate time to engage family members. In these cases, contact family members discreetly, and ensure the individual of concern is not present when engaging them.

## Step 5. Following up

In the days following their initial engagement (step 4), police and security services should consider checking-in with the person or family to inquire if contact with the CVE program was made. If they have connected with the program, police can briefly ask about the experience. If they have not connected with the program, police can inquire about any existing barriers or concerns.

A simple check-in can sometimes provide the necessary nudge for individuals to follow through with this first step in their journey towards disengagement. In cases where they have not followed through, police and security services can help with any questions or concerns that may have emerged since being recommended a CVE program.

Checking-in once, several times, or even regularly, can be framed as "wellness checks", and provide police and/or security services the opportunity to ask the individuals about their initial experiences with the program. These follow-ups can demonstrate that police and security services are genuinely invested in the person's successful disengagement. This positive perception can, in turn, strengthen the individual's motivation to disengage as well as build greater trust with authorities.

## Obtaining information about CVE program participants

---

There are important limitations surrounding how much information CVE programs can share. The psychosocial professionals who staff CVE programs, such as social workers and psychologists, operate under strict professional codes of conduct, as well as provincial legislation, that mandate client confidentiality. Therefore, police and security services are unlikely to receive feedback after referring someone to a CVE program, including information on whether the individual's circumstances improved following program participation, or even if the individual accessed the program.

The privacy of participants is fundamental to the success of CVE programs. If staff improperly disclose confidential information about program participants, social workers and psychologists can be fined and lose the right to practice their profession. Even *perceived* disclosure of confidential information can undermine a program's reputation, leading to an erosion of public trust, as well as the perception that CVE programs engage in surveillance.

While confidentiality is paramount, professional codes of conduct and legislation also specify circumstances when CVE staff must disclose confidential information. These circumstances include imminent risk of serious harm to self (such as suicide), imminent harm to others (such as assault, homicide), and when a child needs protective services.

Within these parameters surrounding confidentiality, however, police and security services have clear, lawful methods to access information about participants. The first method is through consent: CVE programs can ask participants if they agree to have information about them disclosed to police and/or security services. The participant may then voluntarily agree to this disclosure, specifying the type of information to be shared and purpose of that sharing, which then legally authorizes the program to release the agreed-upon information. The second method involves bypassing the program altogether and asking the participant directly. Since the individual is the owner of their own personal information, they are free to answer any questions from police or security services about their involvement, progress, or attendance in a CVE program.

## Considerations

---

Following are additional considerations when deciding to refer someone to a CVE program.

### Optimal moments come and go

---

Many *optimal moments* to engage in discussion about a CVE program are transient, limited windows of opportunity. While the circumstances listed in the OptiMoment tool might not be present in an individual's current life at a given moment, these circumstances may arise in the future. We recommend reassessing the individual's life circumstances on a regular basis to identify *optimal moments*.

### Other optimal moments may exist

---

It should be noted that the OptiMoment tool does not contain an exhaustive list of *optimal moments* to engage an individual about the benefits of a CVE program. There are undoubtedly other circumstances not captured in the social science research that underpins this tool, including situations based on specific cases, police experience, and the expert judgement of counter-terrorism investigators. This tool should thus serve as a prompt for recognizing opportunities, rather than constraining users to the circumstances listed within it.

## “No” today doesn't mean “no” tomorrow

---

Even when *optimal moments* are present, the individual may refuse to contact a CVE program, or may refuse the program's services after contacting them. Some individuals are simply not ready for change, while others might be unwilling to even consider change. In some cases, an individual may interpret an *optimal moment* very differently than an external observer. For example, even though an individual's involvement in extremism brings hardship to the family, they may blame their partner for the hardship, thereby seeing no need for change.

Hesitation and reluctance are common before an individual begins a process of disengagement. However, their refusal to engage with a program may not be permanent. A refusal, therefore, is not a lost opportunity, but rather a chance to introduce the idea of CVE, which may simmer in their mind for a while and revisited when different *optimal moments* arise in their life. Future attempts to discuss a referral should be considered, especially if different *optimal moments* arise.

It is worth informing the individual that, with most CVE programs, there is no requirement to “sign-up” immediately. Individuals can get acquainted with the program at their own pace, either in person or through texts or calls, to learn about what services are available, whenever they feel ready. They can reach out for information without having to disclose their identity.

## Optimal moments vs. risk assessment

---

Some police and security services have used risk assessment tools to select who should be referred to a CVE program, with the assumption that that “lower risk” cases are more suitable for CVE intervention.<sup>2</sup> We caution against this method, as risk levels have proven to be poor indicators of who should be referred: Some “low risk” individuals may not be suitable for CVE interventions, while some “high risk” individuals experience ideal circumstances for a referral. Most importantly, specific life circumstances – often undetected by risk assessment tools– are better at predicting who will be receptive to an intervention, and who is more likely to disengage from violent belief systems. Therefore, identifying the *optimal moments* to engage an individual about CVE intervention should be prioritized over their score on a risk assessment tool. That said, risks must always be considered when engaging an individual about CVE intervention.

## Risks to consider when engaging a person of concern

---

When considering referring an individual to a CVE program, it is important to weigh the potential risks and unintended consequences related to engaging the individual and/or their families. Engagement can generate:

- **risk to the investigation:** Individuals and/or their families will be alerted to a potential investigation when police or security services engage them about their involvement in violent extremism, hate-motivated activities, or violent conspiracies. Individuals may react by increasing their operational security, becoming more secretive about their behaviours, communications, and intentions.
- **risk to public safety:** Believing authorities are investigating their activities may trigger some individuals to accelerate their plans to perpetrate violence.

Lastly, the safety of caseworkers at CVE programs must be considered if the individual has access to weapons, and/or a history of making threats or perpetrating violence. The CVE program must be made aware of all potential safety concerns related to referrals.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, J., & Marsden, S. (2023). *Secondary Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Interventions: A Rapid Review of the Literature*. Full Report: Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats.

Case \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# OptiMoment Tool



Optimal Moments	Present?	Case Notes	Examples of Optimal Moments
<b><i>Doubts</i></b>			
Has the individual expressed any doubts about the <b>extremist ideology</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>The individual posts questions online about Holocaust denial claims after being exposed to contradictory information.</p> <p>When asked by a friend, the individual admits that he's not convinced a holy race war will actually happen.</p>
Has the individual expressed doubts about the <b>extremist group's tactics, goals, or dedication</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>After learning their fellow group members is dating an immigrant, a member of an extremist group wonders if anyone is truly committed to White Nationalism.</p> <p>On a private Telegram chat, the individual questions if the Islamic State's brutal violence against locals caused them to lose support for its Caliphate in Syria and Iraq.</p>
<b><i>Hardships</i></b>			
Has the individual complained about group <b>conflict within the extremist movement</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>The constant power struggle between members of the active club is frustrating the individual.</p> <p>Group members call the individual a "race traitor" for shoveling snow off the driveway of his Jamaican neighbour.</p>
Has the individual's extremism caused conflict with <b>loved ones</b> (friends, family, spouse)?	Yes/No		<p>Their spouse is angry and worried due to the individual's new association with extremists.</p> <p>An individual regularly argues with family members who reject their conspiracy theories about the government.</p>
Has the individual experienced <b>negative repercussions</b> due to extreme ideas or actions?	Yes/No		<p>Because the individual boasted their support for a recent terrorist attack, their workplace terminated their employment.</p> <p>Antifa groups posted the individual's picture and address online, outing them as a neo-Nazi.</p>
Has the individual expressed <b>frustration about police or security service scrutiny</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>The individual is visibly frustrated with how often security services follow him while driving.</p> <p>The youth, who is active in pro-ISIS Discord groups, is furious after police interview her parents.</p>
Is the individual experiencing <b>hardships unrelated to involvement in extremism</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>A self-proclaimed incel, who calls Alek Minassian a "saint", is being evicted from his apartment next week because he has not paid rent for the last three months.</p> <p>A woman who is engaging on far-right Discord servers often complains she feels worthless and suffers from depression.</p>

Optimal Moments	Present?	Case Notes	Examples of Optimal Moments
<b>Helpful Allies</b>			
Are there any <b>family members</b> who might support the individual through change?	Yes/No		<p>The daughter of an extremist group member continuously voices her disapproval about their involvement.</p> <p>Parents have reached out to authorities about their teenager who constantly talks about the need to overthrow the government.</p>
Do <b>friends and/or community members</b> push back against extremist influences?	Yes/No		<p>An Imam regularly challenges the individual's problematic beliefs, trying to refute extremist interpretations of Islamic law.</p> <p>After telling him about joining an active club, his best friend warns he will get in trouble.</p>
Is the individual already receiving support from <b>social or health-related services</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>A young adult who posted support for the Islamic State is in therapy for a psychotic episode.</p> <p>The individual is receiving support from a child protection worker to enhance his parenting skills and retain custody of his son</p>
<b>New Beginnings</b>			
Is the individual about to undertake a <b>positive career/educational transition</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>An individual with extremist views gets promoted at their job and now has more responsibility.</p> <p>A young person under investigation gets accepted into a university engineering program.</p>
Is the individual about to experience a <b>positive life milestone</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>"The individual is declared cancer-free after 6 months of medical treatment.</p> <p>A neo-Nazi group member recently learned he is expecting a child.</p>
Has the individual experienced a <b>negative life experience</b> that might prompt change?	Yes/No		<p>An extremist group member finds out their close friend within the movement was doxxed by Antifa.</p> <p>An anti-authority extremist recently lost a parent to cancer.</p>
<b>Incentives</b>			
Can police or security services provide <b>incentives to encourage program participation</b> ?	Yes/No		<p>The leader of an active club is annoyed by frequent police visits, and is promised less visits in exchange for CRV program participation.</p> <p>Police agree not to press criminal charges if the individual attends a CVE program.</p>

Have you considered the following **potential risks** before engaging the individual and/or their family?

<input type="checkbox"/> Risks to public safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Risks to an ongoing investigation	<input type="checkbox"/> Risks to family members	<input type="checkbox"/> Risks to CRV program staff
---	--	--	---