Don’t be a religious EXTREMIST
23-point booklet tells you how not to

IN THREE LANGUAGES

According to the booklet, these websites typically start by giving simple advice on religion, before moving on to advocating armed jihad. (See report below.)

Ustaz Muhd Haniff, 39, said: “We want to empower the community with a guide book that identifies tactics used by such websites. We want to put this in a simple and clear manner.”

Written in English, Malay and Tamil, their 19-page booklet will be given away free at mosques and religious organisations.

Other than reaching out directly to the teens, it also serves as a handy guide for family members of any would-be radicals to identify the symptoms.

It includes a section on how and where to get help when you have identified a potential radical.

The booklet is supported by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) and the Singapore Adult Religious Students Association (Perdaus).

Ustaz Muhd Haniff said youths are the target readers because their high rate of computer-literacy, impressionable nature and generally shallow understanding of religion makes them vulnerable.

The danger is when the ignorant start subscribing to such extreme ideology, believing that these are “better” forms of Islam, he said.

Websites countering terrorism are not new – Muis runs one and so does Ustaz Muhd Haniff, who offers blog entries, forums, music and even videos on counterideology.multiply.com.

Still, they feel more needs to be done.

Ustaz Mohd Ali, 34, said: “At this stage, it has come down to this – whoever manages to influence more people wins.”

“The challenge today is not just about countering extremist arguments, but being able to propagate our arguments to reach out to more people.”

The two authors said that more moderates need to be heard and so, more platforms to reach out to youths need to be created.

QUESTIONS

Ustaz Muhd Haniff said young people have asked him questions via his website. These are mostly on the daily application of religion, such as how to pray.

A check on the Muhs website also showed similar questions.

Though the questions may seem trivial, Ustaz Muhd Haniff is not disappointed.

He said: “We need to get youths acquainted with religion through us and so, it can start with small things like these. If they go to extremist websites for answers ... they can get sucked in by radical ideas.”

He said he also gets comments from people condemning Islam.

But neither the comments, nor the recent controversy over the “Fitra” video produced and released by right-wing Dutch MP Geert Wilders depicting Muslims as radicals, dishearten Ustaz Muhd Haniff or his co-author.

Instead, it spurs them on.

Ustaz Mohd Ali said: “As religious scholars, we are given the ‘amanah’ (trust in Malay) to talk about religion and counter such extreme ideas.”

“It is our responsibility to step up on behalf of fellow Muslims who may feel it is not in their position to do so.”

That is why they are also planning a website related to this booklet.

No date has been set as they are still looking for sponsors.