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School Violence Threat Assessment: Professional Development Training for K-12 Educators

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School Violence Threat Assessment:
Professional Development Training for K-12 Educators

A Professional Development Training Manual
Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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Abstract

While threats of violence are relatively common in U.S. K-12 schools, the likelihood of a threat being carried out is very low. School leaders must take all threats of school violence seriously but must also have evidence-informed means to discern less-serious, transient threats from more serious, substantive ones. School violence threat assessment training is a vital professional development tool, to ensure safer schools while avoiding unnecessary labeling of students or overly harsh consequences through disciplinary over-reaction. This manual supplements an abbreviated professional development training presentation on school violence threat assessment based on research and models developed by Dr. Dewey Cornell, University of Virginia. It's intended audience is K-12 school administrators, school and community based mental health professionals, teachers, case managers, social workers, law enforcement personnel, ancillary school staff, and school board members, among others. This is not intended to be a replacement for Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines training, but rather an abbreviated overview of best practices in K-12 school violence threat assessment. All the necessary components to effectively deliver this training are here, to include instructor preparation, training overview and objectives, pre- and post-assessments, instructional notes, training and instructor evaluation, supplemental forms and worksheets, and literary references. With adequate preparation and content review, any professional instructor will be able to deliver this training effectively and efficiently. A slide presentation template is available from this manual's author upon request. School violence threat assessment is a dynamic and growing field of practice that will inevitably adapt to new challenges and trends. It is vital that this training module be reviewed and updated at least annually.

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Introduction

Until the 1990's, K-12 school safety in the United States had been largely taken for granted. Schools represented central community gathering and learning spaces that were safe havens for children. Several high-profile mass shootings in schools, culminating with the 1999 massacre of 13 people at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado spawned sweeping changes in school safety practices throughout the United States. Since Columbine, at least 143 more people have been murdered in school shootings, with hundreds more injured. Several of those incidents, such as Virginia Tech in 2007, Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, proved even deadlier than Columbine.

With a renewed focus on school safety as a central concept for effective student learning climates, school safety and security strategies have received significant attention from educational and law enforcement leaders. While many evolving school safety practices have included physical plant upgrades, technology improvements, armed resource officers, and other means to “target-harden” schools, a growing desire for practical, cost-efficient, and prevention-oriented strategies has taken hold in education. (Trump, 2011).

While threats of violence are relatively common in U.S. schools, the likelihood of a school shooting or other violent act taking place is extremely low. This creates a conundrum for school leaders, who by policy, ethics, and law, are compelled to take all violent threats seriously (Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008). The task of discerning the difference between an empty and a serious threat is difficult, considering the paucity of reliable indicators for threat-related violence (Mitchell & Palk, 2016). The reality is that most violent threats in schools are maladaptive responses from children and adolescents who lack frustration tolerance, have poor emotional coping skills, lack healthy social

development and emotional control, and internalize disorders, all traits common to these age groups (Cornell & Sheras, 2008; Augustyniak, 2005).

Most threats made by children and adolescents lack genuine intent and capability to do harm. Despite this, school leaders must still act to maintain a safe learning space. So-called zero-tolerance policies sprouted up in schools following Columbine, removing situational context and professional discretion from the decision-making processes of school leaders, essentially labeling all threats of violence at school as equally serious (Cornell, 2011). While this may have relieved school leaders from having to make educated judgment calls based on facts and circumstances, it unnecessarily resulted in the criminalization of normal, albeit maladaptive child and adolescent behavior, further resulting in school suspensions, expulsions, even arrests and criminal charges against students who had no intention or means of harming anyone. Many of these students likely lacked crucial emotional coping and self-regulatory skills.

Consequences of zero-tolerance school policies are heavy, and there is no data backing up their effectiveness. In fact, one four-year study determined that schools with zero-tolerance policies had more crime than those without (Allen, et al., 2008). The educational, social, and legal outcomes for students who are suspended or expelled are poor compared to their peers. They are significantly behind in reading levels, and three-times as likely to drop out of school (Allen, et al., 2008).

Within months of the Columbine killings, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Secret Service applied their criminal profiling expertise toward trying to devise a way to identify students at risk of serious targeted violence toward their schools. Both agencies reached similar conclusions that discouraged the development of a “school shooter profile,” arguing that there was no useful or consistent combination of characteristics that would reliably predict a student’s propensity for attacking classmates and teachers with a firearm. Interestingly, the FBI’s analysis did reveal the

tendency for almost all school shooters to communicate, or “leak,” directly or indirectly, violent threats or disturbing behaviors prior to their attacks (Allen et al.,2008). What did eventually come of these analyses was a recommendation by the United States Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education that school leaders adopt a threat assessment approach toward the prevention of targeted school violence (Allen et al., 2008).

School-based threat assessment is a deductive, behavior-based process conducted in response to an actual threat of violence made in the school setting (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). It is characterized by an identified victim or target, and specific to the context and actions of the person making the threat. The process usually happens in a dynamic and unstable environment, with a focus on identifying concerning behaviors and corresponding interventions to prevent a violent act from taking place. It’s crucial to recognize a school-based threat assessment process as a preventive, rather than predictive, response model (Mitchell & Palk, 2016), and is consistent with contemporary school initiatives like conflict resolution, character development, and positive behavioral supports (Cornell & Williams, 2012).

Literature Review

Threat Assessment Professional Development Training for K-12 Educators

School leaders unfamiliar with threat assessment need a process that is practical, efficient to implement, and capable of quickly determining which threats can be readily addressed as unremarkable or *transient*, since less serious threats are the preponderance of school-based threats of violence (Allen et al., 2008). In field test findings, 70% of threats addressed by a threat assessment process were identified as the less-serious transient threats, allowing school administrators to resolve them quickly with minimal need for school disciplinary consequences (Cornell, Sheras, Kaplan, McConville, Douglas, Elkon, McKnight, Branson, & Cole, 2004). In 2003, researchers at the University of Virginia collaborated with educators to develop a process school leaders could use in response to violent threats from students. Consistent with the requests of educators, the system was designed with a straightforward, initial assessment for threat seriousness, followed by a coherent decision tree to guide school actions toward resolving the threat. In more serious violent threats, further steps included a comprehensive safety assessment conducted by a multidisciplinary team, one that would include representatives of the education, mental health, and law enforcement fields (Allen et al., 2008).

Following field testing of the Virginia model for school threat assessment in 2001-2002, Cornell and Sheras (2006) published *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence*, a 145-page manual that served as a companion resource for a 1-day educator training workshop. One of the challenges posed by threat assessment training for educators, law enforcement officers, and other school safety stakeholders is the incredible demands on their time by myriad responsibilities and commitments to other school and community related mandates, making even a one-day workshop overly burdensome for many. Another challenge to implementation is the vast difference in school climates and context, even within the same community. School and law enforcement leaders who orient

toward zero-tolerance policies may have difficulty adjusting to or even accepting a threat assessment system that endorses more discretion and flexibility in threat responses. Simply put, zero-tolerance policies are not compatible with a threat assessment model.

The goal of reviewing the literature on school violence threat assessment is to find the most relevant concepts and practices, then develop an abbreviated professional development training module without a lot of theory or fluff, specifically for school leaders, law enforcement, mental health, and other education professionals. Ultimately, school safety is a leadership issue. Declining student test scores, while discouraging, can be forgiven by many parents. They will, however, be less forgiving if something harms their children that could have been prevented or managed better (Trump, 2011). Making threat assessment training more accessible to educational leaders is a worthwhile endeavor toward safer schools for everyone.

Shortening of training time and summarizing the need-to-know components of the school violence threat assessment process provides a more realistic and approachable training commitment, increasing the likelihood of attendance while respecting the heavy time constraints and obligations school leaders face. Condensation of the available literature into key components of the school violence threat assessment process reveals four core instructional themes relevant to abbreviated yet complete professional development training. These themes include: (a) general concepts of threat assessment; (b) threat assessment teams; (c) processes of threat assessment; and (d) documentation of the process. Supplemental information necessary to complete this training package should also include legal considerations and parity in administration of school discipline.

The Virginia Threat Assessment Model provides the most clearly refined, practical, and evidence-informed school threat assessment model available to K-12 school districts. A randomized controlled study of the Virginia model provided strong empirical support for the use of threat

assessment in K-12 schools, as evidenced by increased referral to counseling services for youth offenders who made violent threats, and fewer long-term student suspensions (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012). A retrospective study (Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009) concluded schools using the Virginia model reported less bullying among students, more willingness to seek assistance, and improved school climate compared to schools using other models or none at all.

Distinguishing the most salient, core components of this model will identify the need-to-know steps for abbreviated professional development training. These steps are logical, sequential, guided processes that can be efficiently followed with minimal preparation, training, or time, by overtasked school administrators. Supplementary worksheets, forms, and templates can be used concurrently with instruction to familiarize attendees with the threat assessment steps and documentation, using realistic threat-based scenarios. Ideally, this training would be conducted in a session 60 to 90 minutes in length, making more practical its presentation at professional educators' conferences and workshops.

Concepts of School Violence Threat Assessment

As a good school safety practice, school personnel must seriously consider all threats of school violence when they are first alerted. A protocol needs to be in place to manage and evaluate threats in a rational, balanced, and efficient manner. According to Kenneth Trump, author of *Proactive School Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning*, "The key is finding a balance between recognizing the red flags of potential violence that should raise educators' eyebrows while still exercising care and caution to avoid inappropriate labeling and misidentification of children" (2011, p. 153). Trump argues that aggressive and violent threats must be considered and understood within developmental and environmental contexts. A student yelling out, "I'm going to kill you," may represent lower levels of intent and capability when compared between an elementary playground and a high school cafeteria. Students must recognize that any threat of violence, even when they are not serious, is inappropriate

conduct in a school setting. Educators must recognize that, “A threat alone will not guarantee violence, nor does the absence of a threat guarantee that violence will not occur” (Trump, 2011, p. 172).

A threat assessment approach is a better way to consider the environment and context of violent threats, when compared to zero-tolerance policies. Educators may be uncomfortable adopting threat assessment practices. Some may prefer a checklist approach to addressing child and adolescent misbehavior, but by their very nature young peoples’ behaviors tend to be experimental and transitory, particularly among adolescents. Predictive models for adult behavior are notoriously inaccurate, even more so for children and teens (Trump, 2011).

Threat assessment is a decidedly *non-predictive model* for addressing school threats of violence. It’s a rational process focused on past and current behaviors, information gathered from the offender, victim, and witnesses, and careful assessment of the threat maker’s context and environment by a multidisciplinary team of education, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. Threat assessment is a system of steps focused on evaluating the seriousness of a threat and deciding what to do about addressing it to support a safe school environment. A sound threat assessment process will explore the mental health of a threat maker, their motivation for making a threat, and the existence of any plans to carry it out (Mitchell & Palk, 2016). The process shares commonalities with clinical assessment of suicidal risk, identifying means, motive, and method to classify the seriousness of threats (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O’Toole, & Vernberg, 2002).

In the comprehensive Virginia threat assessment model, a decision-making tree is designed to help quickly determine the severity of a threat as *transient* (not serious) or *substantive* (serious). Substantive threats are further assessed and categorized as *serious substantive* or *very serious substantive* threats. Each threat level has its own suggested protocols for decision making by school administrators, providing guidance toward best practices to address the threat (Cornell et al., 2006).

The threat assessment process continues for substantive threats, beyond the initial steps taken by the threat assessment team. Addressing the most immediate safety issues resulting from the threat must take priority, but at a certain point the team will consider how a student who has made a threat will be reintegrated back into the school setting or if appropriate, placement in an alternative learning setting (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). This part of the threat assessment process, aptly titled *follow-up*, may take place at once following the initial threat assessment, or after some time has passed.

A threat assessment timeline will depend on the seriousness of the threat, the need to add team members as consultation resources, and the immediacy of other needs by school administrators to stabilize and safeguard the school building (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Mental health services should be available to a student making a threat as soon as practicable, especially if the following behaviors have been observed or suspected: “Suicidal thoughts or attempts; attempts to cause the death or serious physical harm to another; intentional abuse of animals; setting fires; hallucinations or other delusions; specific plans, especially detailed ones, for committing violence” (Trump, 2011, p. 163). More than 75% of children and adolescents who committed school shootings threatened or attempted suicide at some point prior to their attack, with over half of them experiencing a history of depression, loss of a significant relationship, or perception of a personal life-setback (Twemlow et al., 2002).

In 2018, the United States Secret Service released *Enhancing School Safety Using A Threat Assessment Model*, a 25-page operational guide for preventing targeted school violence. While many of the guide’s recommendations are similar to the Virginia threat assessment model, it’s simplified, eight-step plan provides a more generalized overview of the core elements of an effective school violence threat assessment model, serving as a valuable supplement to existing or developing programs. These steps include: (a) establishing a multidisciplinary threat assessment team; (b) defining concerning and prohibited behaviors; (c) creating a central reporting system; (d) determining the threshold for law

enforcement intervention; (e) establishing assessment procedures; (f) developing risk management options; (g) creating and promoting safe school climates; and (h) conducting training for all stakeholders. Its conceptual focus provides a good starting point for school and law enforcement leaders, but it lacks the structural outlines, worksheets, decision making guidance, and case study examples of the Virginia model. Significant program development efforts would be necessary using the operational guide as a standalone resource, costing time and money school leaders may not have available.

School Violence Threat Assessment Teams

Every school should have its own multidisciplinary threat assessment team, consisting of core members from school administration, mental health, and law enforcement or security. This might typically be a principal or assistant principal, a school counselor and/or school psychologist, and a school resource officer. Ancillary members should include teachers, community based mental health professionals, case managers, social workers, law enforcement officials, and when appropriate, parents of the threat maker. The team's primary responsibility is to gather factual information about the threat, the person who made the threat, the context and environment of the threat, and any other information relevant to the threat (Pascopella, 2008).

Team members from varied professional backgrounds bring a wider perspective and scope of expertise to the investigative and assessment process. Education professionals have a keen sense of what works in a school setting, as well as direct knowledge of a student's behavior patterns. Law enforcement officials can provide expertise in the areas of questioning, investigatory techniques, criminal law, and obtaining search warrants. School and community based mental health professionals can spot mental health crises and assess family dynamics (Barton, 2008). Establishing close partnerships and collaboration between team members is critical to the threat assessment process. A

key guiding concept for assembling a team is, “Getting the right people at the right table at the right time” (Bennett, 2015, p. 4).

A threat assessment team should have a clear statement of mission that defines its role and the types of situations it will handle. It should be granted formal authority through school policy to conduct investigations into threats and related behaviors of concern, and follow standardized procedures to identify persons of concern, gather information, assess threat levels, and implement risk management plans to reduce threat levels (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Clear guidance should be given, in both the training of team members and school policy, that threat assessment investigation must emphasize corroboration of facts about a threat-maker’s behavior, and development of behavior patterns that indicate escalation toward carrying out an act of violence (Reddy et al., 2001). Team members’ mindsets must focus on making logical and informed assessments on the credibility and seriousness of a threat in the initial triage stage (Cornell & Williams, 2012), and whether the person making the threat has the motive, resolve, and resources to carry it out (Augustyniak, 2005).

School Violence Threat Assessment Process

Threat assessment consists of four key components: (a) learning of a person who may pose a violent threat; (b) gathering information about the threat maker from various sources; (c) determining if the person poses a threat of violence to others; and (d) planning and delivering an intervention to reduce the threat (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Every threat assessment process will begin with some form of “leakage.” This occurs when a student or other person reveals, intentionally or unintentionally, their feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may warn of an impending act of violence. Leakage in some form has been universally present in most cases of serious school violence. It’s one of the most critical warning behaviors of an adolescent’s intent to commit a violent act (O’Toole, 2001; Meloy & O’Toole, 2011).

The notion that a person suddenly snaps without warning and becomes a mass-killer is a myth. Research by the U.S. Secret Service on targeted violence indicates it's neither random nor spontaneous, but rather the product of understandable patterns of thinking and behavior (Reddy, Borum, Berglund, Vossekuil, Fein, & Modzeleski, 2001). The Federal Bureau of Investigation, in its phase-II study, *Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*, concluded that adolescent school shooters under 18-years-old were more likely to reveal concerning behaviors to teachers and friends than to family members (Silver, Simons, & Craun, 2018). Over all the active shooters studied, the authors identified an average of 4.7 concerning behaviors displayed to others prior to the killers' attacks, reinforcing the theory that people who are serious about committing acts of violence toward their schoolmates will almost always "leak" clues that should signal alarm and potentially be used to prevent a violent act.

Leakage may include efforts to recruit classmates and friends, to knowingly or unwittingly help with preparing for a violent act, for example, obtaining a firearm and ammunition. It could also represent a cry for help, symbolize inner conflict, or serve to boast about violent plans that others don't take seriously (O'Toole, 2001). Conduits of leakage are not limited to verbal communications. They may include notes, diaries, online communications, videos, social media posts, school assignments, graffiti, or other means. Common themes in leakage may include, "Violence, hopelessness, despair, hatred, isolation, loneliness, nihilism, or an "end of the world" philosophy" (Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldemann, & James, 2011, p. 262). In 81% of the school shootings researched by the United States Secret Service in 2000, at least one other person knew the shooter was planning or at least thinking about carrying out a school attack. In 93% of those cases, the attacker engaged in some sort of disturbing behavior that concerned others around them (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011).

Unrecognized or unacknowledged leakage short circuits violence prevention and intervention processes in schools. Students and other school staff untrained in recognizing concerning behaviors and communications lack the knowledge to tell someone who can intervene. Human rationalization, minimalization, or outright denial that leakage represents a real threat prevents and delays the information from reaching a trained school employee. When several people are aware of the leakage, the bystander or *Good Samaritan effect* makes it less likely that one person will take action to report threats or actions hinting at violent acts (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011).

The earlier leakage is identified and interpreted, the timelier and more effective a threat assessment response will be, emphasizing the importance of students and school personnel being at least somewhat familiar with what concerning behaviors are, in addition to positive school climates that encourage reporting without fear of retaliation or breach of confidentiality. The school violence threat assessment process is set in motion when someone hears of or witnesses a violent threat through leakage. It focuses on the behavior and communications of the threat maker, and the logical conclusions those facts support regarding the person's plans, ideas, and ability to cause harm (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

According to the collaborative work *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*, by the United States Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education (Fein, 2006), six underlying principles of effective threat assessment should be integrated into professional development training on all threat assessment models: (1) Targeted violence results from an understandable process of thinking and behavior; (2) Targeted violence stems from interaction with the person, situation, setting, and target; (3) An investigative and inquisitive mindset is critical; (4) Effective assessments are based on facts, not characteristics or traits; (5) An integrated systems approach should guide threat assessment investigations; (6) Every threat

should receive prompt attention. These principles are overarching mindsets school administrators will need to effectively carry out school violence threat assessments, regardless of the model they use.

Seven Steps of the Virginia Threat Assessment Model

Before initiation of a threat assessment process, school leaders should prioritize the immediate physical safety of students and staff (Stover, 2005). This will be dependent on the context of the violent threat and existing school crisis response protocols. A student making a verbal threat to “beat up” a classmate at recess will not likely rise to the same level of threat as a student with a hit-list, detailed maps of the school, and prior weapons offenses. If a threat rises to the level of immediate and imminent violence, securing the school building, notifying law enforcement, and containing the threat-maker will be paramount.

A seven-step decision tree guides the team through the threat assessment process (Cornell, 2011). In step one, the student or other person who made the threat is interviewed by the team leader, usually a school administrator, using a standardized set of questions. Further interviews are conducted with witnesses to the threat or behavior to further ascertain situational and environmental factors. Less concerned with the verbal content itself, the team leader focuses on the context of the threat. In step two, the team leader classifies easily resolved threats as transient, and more serious threats as substantive. Transient threats are more clearly identified as byproducts of expressed anger or frustration and dissipate quickly. Step three involves finding a resolution to the transient threat by making amends, without conducting a more comprehensive threat assessment. If there is any doubt about whether a threat is transient or substantive, it is treated as substantive.

If the team leader determines a threat is substantive, step four determines if the threat is serious or very serious. Differentiation of these levels is made based on the intended severity of injury to the victim. Assaulting by hitting or kicking is a serious substantive threat, whereas sexual assault, seriously

injuring, or killing someone is a very serious substantive threat. Any intention to use a dangerous weapon is generally classified as a very serious substantive threat.

In the event of a serious substantive threat, step five requires action of school officials to protect the potential victim through direct notification of the victim and their parents, among other preventative steps and interventions. Step six, taken if a threat is assessed as a very serious substantive threat, requires immediate protective action to protect the victim and thoroughly evaluate the threat-maker, leading to implementation of a written safety plan in step seven. Both steps five and six may likely include notification of law enforcement.

Cornell (2018) developed an updated five-step decision-making tree to act as a navigation guide for key threat assessment steps, as part of his Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG). Abbreviated professional development training should feature this decision-making tree and accompanying documentary forms for threat-makers and victims as important supplemental materials. Ideally, threat assessment team members who infrequently use the process can refer to these materials as a guide when they initiate a response to a school-based threat of violence.

School Violence Threat Assessment Documentation

Good threat assessment documentation is helpful – unless it's not. Documenting good decision-making processes can serve to justify those decisions later, based on the context in which they were made. Using care during the documentation process to preserve the rationale and thought processes for team decisions will help avoid shedding an unflattering light on the team's work in the event it's later questioned. Quality, defensible documentation should be fair, objective, reasonable, and timely (Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Rather than relying on notes, emails, and other means of recording the team's work, use of existing threat assessment templates and forms ensures clarity and uniformity of documentation, while minimizing the chance of missing important steps in the process (Cornell & Sheras, 2006).

Documentation of follow-up, interventions, and monitoring strategies to make sure threatening situations don't reemerge is sound threat management practice (Bennett, 2015).

Storage and dissemination of threat assessment documentation brings up some valid concerns related to the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). The commonly held misperception that school threat assessment teams cannot share vital safety information outside of the immediate team can be debunked by a better understanding of the health and safety exceptions to FERPA and HIPAA privacy requirements. If private information is shared in good faith in order to prevent an act of violence or other unsafe situation, the release of that information is lawful (Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Another concern may be the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which, while broad in its coverage, does not require a school or institution to, "Tolerate behavior that poses a direct threat to others, or that renders a student or employee not qualified to participate in the academic, residential, or work environment" (Nolan & Moncure, 2012, p. 336). In any event, prioritizing the immediate safety of the school occupants while making good-faith decisions, based on the best information available at the time, will always be a defensible course of action. When questions come up regarding the release of educational, health, or disability records as part of the threat assessment process, consultation with school district legal counsel is advised.

Legal Considerations

K-12 schools are generally expected to exercise due care in provide a learning environment that is reasonably safe from foreseeable acts of violence. If a school employee, either through act or omission, does not exercise reasonable care that proximally results in physical or emotional harm to employees or students, the school system may be negligent. Reasonable care is a duty expected of school administrators and other school employees based on their *special relationship* with students and

other persons in a school facility (*Keeping Your School Safe & Secure: A Practical Guide*, 2012). This is an important concept for school leaders to keep in mind when recognizing that there is always some level of duty to keep students and school employees safe from violent acts perpetrated by other students or third parties (Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Developing an evidence-informed school violence threat assessment process and implementing it with fidelity are key tasks to meeting the due care standard in providing a safe school environment. School leaders who ignore violent threats do so at their own peril.

While students do have First Amendment rights to freedom of speech at school, these rights do not extend to speech that would reasonably be expected to disrupt a safe and effective learning environment. In a Georgia case, *Boim v. Fulton County School Dist.*, 494 F.3d 978 (11th Cir. 2007), the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that school officials have a compelling interest in acting quickly to prevent school violence” (*Keeping Your School Safe & Secure: A Practical Guide*, 2012, p. 92). There is legal precedent to limit the freedom of speech rights enjoyed by students while at school or school events, particularly concerning violent threats.

Parity in Threat Assessment and School Discipline

One of the key advantages to threat assessment rather than zero-tolerance approaches is its less punitive nature. Strong and Cornell (2008) studied the implementation of the Virginia model in Memphis city schools, concluding that most of the students referred for threat assessment returned to school or continued their education in an alternate setting. Fewer students were subjected to long-term suspensions and only a handful were expelled, compared to numbers prior to threat assessment-based practices. They noted, however that students in special education who made threats of violence were overrepresented, four times higher than students in the general education setting. Students living with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and emotional disturbances were most likely to make threats at school. The authors noted promising results that supported further study of threat assessment, as well as

interventions that could potentially be included in individualized education plans for students in special education.

A statewide study of school-based threat assessment implementation in Virginia revealed a disproportionate number of African American students were referred for threat assessment, compared to their White, Asian, and Hispanic classmates, consistent with higher rates of school disciplinary referrals for Black students nationwide. Interestingly, there was no disparity of disciplinary outcomes when using threat assessment, such as suspensions, expulsions, and alternative placements, in the same comparison (Cornell, Maeng, Burnette, Jia, Huang, Konold, Datta, Malone, & Meyer, 2018). The most common predictive factors for school disciplinary consequences was assessment of a threat as serious and possession of a weapon (Cornell, Maeng, Huang, Shukla, & Konold, 2018). This warrants further study on the effect threat assessment may have on reducing racial disparities in school disciplinary sanctions, including exclusion.

Conclusion

Maintaining safe and effective learning environments is a primary duty of K-12 school administrators. Threats of violence disrupt school operations and promote unhealthy school climates. School leaders require effective, evidence-informed strategies to quickly respond to bona fide violent threats, while avoiding mislabeling or harshly punishing child and adolescent students who make the majority of school-based threats but pose no real danger. School-based threat assessment is a promising tool for school leaders, one that will allow them to objectively identify, investigate, and intervene in a collaborative, problem-solving method, rather than a punitive, zero-tolerance approach.

The Virginia Threat Assessment Model is an evidence informed intervention that can be efficiently presented to school administrators and other school safety stakeholders by abbreviating the training into four core themes: (a) general concepts of threat assessment; (b) threat assessment teams;

(c) processes of threat assessment; and (d) documentation. Additional training concepts should include legal considerations and parity in school discipline. Studies and field analyses of the Virginia model indicate its implementation can improve school climates, reduce bullying, suspensions, and expulsions, and increase likelihood of positive behavioral supports and interventions for students who lack emotional coping skills and frustration tolerance.

Training Manual

Instructor Preparation

This training manual includes all the necessary information to prepare and guide a professional instructor in delivering the content effectively and efficiently. Carefully reviewing the manual, rehearsing delivery, and gathering equipment and other supplies several days prior to a scheduled presentation is highly recommended. The instructor should arrive at the training venue with enough time to set up and test equipment, distribute handouts, and conduct a brief review of the presentation. For content the instructor is not comfortably familiar with, a careful review of the reference literature is recommended prior to delivery of the presentation. The instructor should arrange for and/or prepare the following equipment, materials, and training aids prior to a professional development training session:

- Audio-video equipment appropriate to the training venue, to include a reliable laptop computer, AC power adapter and outlet strip, local network Wi-Fi passwords, projector, screen, audio system, remote slide control/pointer, spare batteries, microphone, etc.
- Presentation PowerPoint, accessible at:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UyGaibUoqob9cwxLJMv9bfo4854yHfsd/view?usp=sharing>
- Course evaluation forms and pre/post assessments (Appendix A, pages 39-40).
- Supplemental training handouts (Appendix B, pages 41-66), such as threat assessment worksheets, evaluation forms, and other supporting materials.
- Sharable weblinks to threat assessment resources and instructor contact information.
- Alternative online survey and assessment links in lieu of printed pre and post-assessments and instructor evaluations (Kahoot, Survey Monkey)

Presentation and Training Manual

This presentation and training manual are designed to be used together, to provide an abbreviated professional development session on school violence threat prevention. The topics are logically and sequentially arranged to provide easily digestible content to familiarize K-12 educational leaders with best practices in school-based threats of violence. Much of the theory and research behind school-based threat assessment has been de-emphasized to focus instructional content into the most “need-to-know,” practical information. Training may run between 60-90 minutes, depending on local need, time constraints, and whether the practical threat assessment determination exercise (slides 21-24) will be included in the training session. This training manual is organized as a companion to the presentation slides and serves as an instructor guide and script.

Participant completion of this abbreviated training is considered a familiarization with the concepts of Dr. Cornell’s Virginia Model and updated Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) for school violence threat assessment, as well as other relevant research and best practices. It is not intended in any way to imply professional certification, licensure, or any other credential specific to threat assessment. This training should be provided to K-12 educational professionals at no-cost to them individually nor to their local educational agencies.

Presenter Slide Guide and Notes

Slide 1 - Title Screen

Adjust title screen as needed. Welcome and introduction of instructor; housekeeping comments: restrooms, exits, time of presentation, distribute classroom handouts, Wi-Fi password posted, if needed. Circulate sign-in roster, to include name, agency/district affiliation, position, email, and phone number.

Notes:

Slide 2 - School Violence Threat Assessment: Overview & Training Objectives

Briefly describe what will be covered in the training overview. If the practical exercise will not be part of the training, change the training duration time to 60-minutes. Review the training objectives.

Notes:

Slide 3 – Knowledge Pre-Assessment

The nine-question knowledge pre-assessment can be completed on paper (Appendix A) or via online platform, like Survey Monkey or Kahoot, in about 4-5 minutes. Consider having both options available and be sure to keep records on participants scores. Review questions and correct answers before proceeding.

Online Link/Notes:

Slide 4 - Introduction

Main points:

- Public perception, even educator perception, is influenced by media coverage of school violence; contrary to widespread belief, *acts of school violence are rare, although threats of violence are quite common*
- We need to be better at identifying and separating mild threats from more serious ones, rather than taking a *one-size-fits-all* approach
- Violence prevention is always better than reacting to violence

- Threat assessment is a *preventive and collaborative* approach toward preventing school violence, and is better for several reasons (see sub-points on slide)

Notes:

Slide 5 - Video: Waseca, MN, May 2nd, 2014 (2:43)

When very serious threats of violence do exist, what systems do our schools have in place to evaluate and act to prevent violence? What signs or concerning behaviors might exist that go noticed or unnoticed? (**Show video**)

- If you were a school official who received the citizen tip, what would your next steps be?
- If the citizen tip had not been reported to the Waseca Police, how else do you think could this have been prevented?
- Mention the concept of *leakage* and how perpetrators of school violence typically broadcast their intentions to do harm prior to an attack.

Notes:

Slide 6 - Concepts of School Violence Threat Assessment

Although most threats of school violence are not accompanied by the intent and capability to carry them out, educators still need to take them seriously. Threat assessment is a:

- *Rational, balanced, and efficient process* that considers the *developmental level* of the student and *environmental factors*. This is in direct contrast to so-called *Zero-Tolerance* policies.
- We know children and adolescents are *transitioning* in their identities and do frequently act out in ways contrary to their baseline behaviors. We may see this as *experimentation*.

Notes:

Slide 7 – Concepts of School Violence Threat Assessment

Threat assessment is a *preventive*, rather than predictive model. Human behavior is very difficult to predict. Both the FBI and US Secret Service discouraged the development of a “*school shooter profile*,” arguing there was *no consistent combination of characteristics that would reliably predict a student’s propensity toward targeted school violence*.

- This is a rational process that focuses on behaviors, past and current
- We gather information from several sources
- We consider the offenders context and environment

Our focus is on an organized, multidisciplinary, and collaborative process to determine the seriousness of a threat, and how to respond to it.

Notes:

Slide 8 - Threat Assessment Considers

The main questions we ask in this process are:

- *What is the mental health status of the offender?*
- *What is their motivation for making the threat?*
- *Do they have plans to carry out the threat?*

The School Threat Assessment Decision Tree helps guide the threat assessment process in a logical and stepped manner, making your assessment process clearer and easier. This is very similar to a suicide risk assessment.

Notes:

Slide 9 – Leakage: “Every Threat Assessment Starts Here”

What makes threat assessment so effective is the concept of *leakage*. Targeted violent acts in schools almost never happen in a vacuum, and they rarely happen spontaneously. Leakage is when an offender intentionally or unintentionally *reveals their feelings thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that*

may warn of an act of violence. It's almost universally present in cases of serious school violence and is one of the most critical warning behaviors.

- Targeted violence is the product of understandable patterns of thinking and behavior (U.S. Secret Service).
- School shooters under 18-years old were more likely to reveal concerning behaviors to friends and teachers than to their parents (Federal Bureau of Investigation).
- School shooters displayed an average of 4.7 concerning behaviors prior to a school attack.

Notes:

Slide 10 - Video: Leakage – What was Missed? (4:55)

Please watch and listen for leakage or opportunities for detection in this story out of Colorado (play video) What did you see or hear?

- *“Talk about doing a lot of harm and sadness.”*
- *“F Society” on side of car. Similarities to Columbine killers? Others?*

How do you think a threat assessment process might prevent acts of school violence like this?

Notes:

Slide 11 - Threat Assessment Team

Every school should have a designated assessment team, representing at minimum administration, mental health, and law enforcement or security. Typically, this will be a principal, counselor, and school resource officer as core members. Depending on the threat level and student needs, this could expand to include case managers, teachers, community-based mental health providers, even parents. A diverse team will bring wider perspectives to assessment and decision making.

Team responsibilities include **gathering factual information relevant to the threat**, the threat maker, the context of the threat, and the environment it was made in. Close partnerships and collaboration are critical to an effective threat assessment.

Assessment teams need to have a clear statement of mission and the authority through school policy to investigate and make decisions. **The teams primary responsibility is corroboration of facts** about a threat maker's behavior and indications of escalation toward carrying out an act of violence.

Notes:

Slide 12 - Threat Assessment Process

The threat assessment process starts when we are alerted to a violent threat, usually through leakage.

This is a deductive, fact finding process focused on the offending student's behavior and communication. We are primarily concerned with the threat maker's plans, ideas, and their capability to harm others. **Keep in mind this is NOT an effort at predicting** whether or not a violent act will happen – we can't accurately predict human behavior. This is a **preventive process**. We are determining the nature of the threat and what we need to do to prevent it from happening.

Notes:

Slide 13 – Six Underlying Principles of Threat Assessment

To assess violent threats well, we need to keep these underlying six principles in mind:

- As crazy as we may think their rationale is, we need to consider the threat maker's beliefs as an understandable process. There's always a reason "why" the threat happened and the resulting behavior, as irrational as it may be to us.
- All threats and violent acts include interactions between people, circumstances, a setting, and a target.
- We need to approach every assessment objectively, with curiosity and an open mind.

- We must stay focused on the facts we know, not speculation about characteristics or traits.
- A systems approach will be more effective – this means interdisciplinary collaboration and consideration of environment and context.
- We must act promptly with any threat that comes to our attention.

Notes:

Slide 14 – CSTAG Step 1 – Evaluate the Threat

**Refer to the Threat Assessment and Response Protocol form in the handout*

This is arguably the most crucial step in the assessment process, as it will shape the rest of your threat assessment work. Primarily, when you are alerted to a threat your most immediate concern is the safety of your building occupants. Take protective action when necessary and isolate the threat maker in the more serious threats. Don't hesitate to contact law enforcement for help if the threat involves serious bodily injury or a weapon.

Step 1 involves gathering information through an initial investigation. This will include interviews of several people. The time you invest in this stage is well spent. If the threat turns out to be transient or a “non-threat,” you can stop here. In many cases, this is where you will conclude your threat assessment process. Use your School Threat Assessment Decision Tree (p. 42) to guide your investigation.

Notes: Citation – Cornell, 2018 – Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)

Slide 15 – CSTAG Step 2 - Attempt to Resolve as Transient

When you determine a violent threat has occurred, step 2 is as far as most threat assessments will go.

Threats of violence are common in schools, while acts of violence are relatively rare. If the threat maker was expressing frustration, anger, or humor, and has no intent to cause harm, **consider the threat transient** and add services as needed. When in doubt about the student's intentions,

genuineness, sorrow, or willingness to repair the situation, move on to step 3 and consider the threat substantive. You can always return to step 2 – transient – if circumstances change.

Notes:

Slide 16 – CSTAG Step 3 - Respond to Serious or Very Serious Substantive Threat

Substantive threats include intent to do harm. These are categorized into *serious* and *very serious* substantive threats. Serious substantive threats include fighting, hitting, beating up, or other physical violence that does not imply serious bodily injury, sexual assault, or use of a weapon. Very serious substantive threats include use of a weapon, serious bodily injury, rape, and killing. In all threats, do the following: **protect potential victims**, including **warning them and their parent(s)**; look for ways to **resolve the conflict**; use **school discipline** when appropriate; and **refer for services**. This is when your threat assessment team will be vital for service referrals.

Notes:

Slide 17 – CSTAG Step 4 – Conduct Safety Evaluation for Very Serious Substantive Threat

This is the worst-case threat assessment – implied use of a weapon, serious bodily injury, raping, or killing. The priority will be stabilizing the school building and isolating the threat maker in a supervised, secure area. It would be wise to notify law enforcement and request assistance, as this may lead to a criminal investigation and charges. Don't spend too much time investigating at the outset. If you are reasonably confident the threat is very serious, halt the assessment process and contain the situation, immediately. Once the threat maker is sent home or with law enforcement, you have more time to assemble your team, take a deep breath, and resume your threat assessment process. This may include referral of student for mental health screening/risk assessment; alternative placement and/or suspension, pending expulsion in some cases; police criminal investigation; student/staff interviews; safety plan development; IEP/504 review and further assessment if the student receives services.

Slide 18 – CSTAG Step 5 – Implement and Monitor Safety Plan

A safety plan will be used for school reintegration of the student offender. The threat assessment team will work together to craft a plan that will include various levels of support, in some ways like a tier-3 MTSS plan. In some cases, the student and parent(s) may also contribute to the plan. In all cases, the plan will be communicated to the student and parent prior to returning to school and monitored by a designated school representative for effectiveness and revisions. Sometimes these safety plans will require a mental health risk assessment prior to readmission to school. Be sure to consult with your district's legal counsel for guidance on this, as mandated risk assessments could become the fiscal responsibility of the school district. A sample risk assessment with questionnaires is included in your handout. Mental health risk assessments are typically conducted by specially trained clinical mental health professionals and fall outside the training and qualifications of most school counselors.

Notes:

Slide 19 - Follow-Up and Documentation

Careful and accurate recordkeeping is vital to defending and justifying your team's decisions throughout the threat assessment process. It's a way to preserve the reasoning and thought processes that went into the assessment. Be sure your documentation is fair, objective, reasonable, and timely. One of the questions that is often asked is, "Where do we keep these records?" That depends on the guidance you receive from your legal counsel. Keep in mind that all records included in a student's academic record are subject to FERPA and reviewable by students and parents.

Notes:

Slide 20 – Break – 5 Minutes

Be firm on the break, as you will have limited time to cover all the content. Set an exact time for participants to be back in their seats.

Slide 21 – Evaluating Threat Severity – Practical Exercise

Let's use our School Threat Assessment Decision Tree to assign threat levels. You will have three scenarios to consider in the next slides. Read the scenario, consider the questions, and use your handouts to decide how you would handle each situation. Ready?

Notes:

Slide 22 – Scenario 1

Please read the scenario and answer the questions. You have 5 minutes. (Use a timer to keep time)

When time is up, call “time” and open for discussion by group or individual. Start with threat classification, then what actions might come next. Keep an eye on your time.

Notes:

Slide 23 – Scenario 2

Next scenario, you have 5-minutes. (Use a timer to keep time)

When time is up, call “time” and open for discussion by group or individual. Start with threat classification, then what actions might come next. Keep an eye on your time.

Notes:

Slide 24 – Scenario 3

Next scenario, you have 5-minutes. (Use a timer to keep time)

When time is up, call “time” and open for discussion by group or individual. Start with threat classification, then what actions might come next. Keep an eye on your time.

Notes:

Slide 25 - Legal Considerations

As educators, we have a duty to protect others within our facilities under the legal concept of *special relationship*. This is true as it pertains to protecting students and staff from foreseeable acts of violence.

Adopting a school violence threat assessment process is considered a *best practice* and when

implemented with *fidelity and good faith*, meets a *standard of reasonable care*. We cannot predict or react to events that are not “foreseeable,” but we certainly have a compelling interest in preventing acts of violence we have prior warning about. Case law supports this legal requirement, as per *Boim v. Fulton County School District* which addresses limitations on freedom of speech of students at school. Case law summary is in the participant handout, Appendix B.

Notes:

Slide 26 - Parity in School Discipline

Something to consider is the less punitive nature of a threat assessment approach, in comparison to zero tolerance school discipline policies. Several studies have concluded that when threat assessment is used, there is no disparity of disciplinary outcomes - but there needs to be more research to corroborate that data. Current data supports the fact that African American students are disproportionately disciplined in comparison with students of other races, and students receiving special services are overrepresented as students who make violent threats, particularly those with ADHD and ED. What we can reasonably conclude is that because threat assessment is a deductive, objective process that focuses on facts rather than traits and characteristics, school discipline is more consistently applied to threat makers.

Notes:

Slide 27 - Knowledge Post-Assessment

The nine-question knowledge post-assessment can be completed on paper (Appendix A, p. 39)) or via online platform, like Survey Monkey or Kahoot, in about 4-5 minutes. Consider having both options available and be sure to keep records on participants scores. Review questions and correct answers before proceeding.

Online Link/Notes:

Slide 28 - Course Evaluation and Instructor Contact

Ask attendees to fill out a paper or online course evaluation before leaving. Collect post-assessments, course evaluations, and attendance roster. Thank attendees, offer instructor contact information for questions and/or future training requests.

Notes/evaluation link:

Slides 29-30 – Reference Slides

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Appendix A

School Violence Threat Assessment – Knowledge PRE/POST Assessment

Name: _____ Date: _____

School/Agency: _____ Position/Title: _____

1. School violence threat assessment is a _____ process.
 - a. Predictive and collaborative
 - b. Preventive and collaborative
 - c. Conclusive and predictive

2. At minimum, a school threat assessment team should consist of _____.
 - a. Administrator, school mental health specialist, case-manager
 - b. Administrator, parent/guardian, teacher
 - c. Administrator, school mental health specialist, law enforcement/security

3. Most violent threats in schools are _____.
 - a. Likely to be carried out
 - b. Maladaptive responses from children/adolescents who lack essential skills
 - c. Made by children/adolescents who intend to and are fully capable of carrying them out

4. Zero-tolerance school discipline policies have been shown through research to be effective in making schools safer.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Schools can use traits and behaviors to accurately “profile” and predict which students will commit acts of violence toward other students and school staff.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. In field test findings, ____ of threats addressed through a threat assessment process were identified as less serious, transient threats that could be resolved quickly with minimal need for disciplinary consequences.
 - a. 30%
 - b. 52%
 - c. 70%

7. In ___of researched school shootings, at least one other person knew the attacker was planning or thinking about the attack. In ___of those cases, the attacker displayed disturbing behavior that concerned others around them.
 - a. 70%; 61%
 - b. 81%; 93%
 - c. 99%; 82%

8. The basic steps of a school threat assessment process are _____.
 - a. assess, convene, act, document, follow-up
 - b. evaluate threat, attempt to resolve as transient, respond to substantive threat, conduct safety evaluation for very serious substantive threat, implement and monitor safety plan
 - c. alert, assess, act, follow-up, record

9. Targeted school violence results from _____.
 - a. Bad parenting and/or lack of discipline at home
 - b. Mental illness and/or other childhood trauma
 - c. An understandable process of thinking and behavior

Course and Instructor Evaluation Form

School Violence Threat Assessment Professional Development Training

Your honest and sincere evaluation of this course helps ensure that our programs are of the highest caliber and that they meet and exceed your training needs. Thank you!

Date: _____ Location: _____

Instructor(s): _____ Your Position/Title: _____

Rating Scale: 5 Outstanding
 4 More than satisfactory
 3 Satisfactory
 2 Less than satisfactory
 1 Poor
 NA No opinion/not apply

Materials:	1. Printed materials were well organized	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	2. Printed materials were complete	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	3. Printed materials were readable (printed well)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	4. Visual materials were related to course	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	5. Visual materials were in appropriate quantity	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	6. Visual materials were of good quality	5	4	3	2	1	NA

Course:	7. Covered subjects I thought it would	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	8. Was a reasonable length	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	9. Contributed to my knowledge and skills	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	10. Related to my needs	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	11. Was worth recommending to others	5	4	3	2	1	NA

Instructor(s):	12. Related course materials to class needs	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	13. Knew subject thoroughly	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	14. Encouraged class participation	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	15. Made course requirements and objectives clear	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	16. Stayed on subject	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	17. Answered questions completely	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	18. Tolerated differences of opinion	5	4	3	2	1	NA

Facility:	19. Minimal distractions	5	4	3	2	1	NA
	20. Overall comfort	5	4	3	2	1	NA

Suggestions:	<i>How could the instructor(s) improve class delivery?</i>
	<i>How could the course content or structure be improved?</i>
	<i>What did you find of most value in this course?</i>

Appendix B

Handouts/Forms for the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

Available at <https://www.schoolta.com/s/Forms-for-Comprehensive-School-Threat-Assessment-Guidelines-8-9-19.docx> as part of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines: Intervention and Support to Prevent School Violence (Cornell, 2018).

What is the purpose of these forms?

These forms are used to conduct a threat assessment, as explained in the manual, *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines: Intervention and Support to Prevent Violence*¹, or other training resources.

Do I conduct a threat assessment for all threats?

No. It is not feasible or necessary to conduct a formal assessment for clearly insignificant behavior such as playful bantering or joking. Conduct a threat assessment if there is some reason to be concerned about the behavior. When in doubt about a threat, conduct a threat assessment.

Do I use all these forms for every threat assessment case?

No. Transient cases are documented with only a few pages (Threat Report, Interview(s), Key Observations, Threat Response), whereas only very serious substantive threats are likely to use all of the forms. *In large samples, approximately 75% of cases are transient and fewer than 10% are very serious substantive threats.*

Do I complete every section of each form?

No. These forms are intended as guidelines to help you consider the most likely aspects of a case, but you will use your judgment as to what is appropriate for your assessment and intervention.

Who completes the forms?

Threat assessment is a team process and can be documented by any member of the team. A transient threat might be handled by just one team member (preferably in consultation with at least one other team member), whereas a substantive threat will likely engage several team members.

Can I modify these forms?

Yes, within reasonable limits that do not significantly alter the CSTAG process. Be sure that changes are approved by your school system. Some school systems will modify the terminology (e.g., ‘safety screening’ versus “mental health assessment”) or make other adjustments. For example, some schools systems add a place to document who carries out each step of the assessment or add a form to track changes when a student receives ongoing services. Schools can use online versions of these forms, too.

If a threat is resolved, do I change the threat classification to “no threat”?

No. The threat classification reflects your initial assessment and guides your next steps, regardless of how the threat is resolved. Occasionally, the threat classification might change if you find, for example, that a transient case is more serious than you thought and should be changed to a substantive threat. The resolution of a threat should be recorded in the Case Plan section.

Should I document transient threats?

Yes. If a student later carries out a threat that was previously judged to be transient, you will want documentation to show that you made a defensible effort to assess the threat. If a student makes multiple threats, documentation will provide a useful perspective.

Where should I file these forms?

Follow the guidance of your school system to determine where you file records. Some school systems choose to file some, or all of the threat assessment forms in the student's educational record and others choose to file some or all of the forms outside of the educational record. Any information placed in the student's educational record is subject to FERPA restrictions.

(Cornell, 2018)

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL®

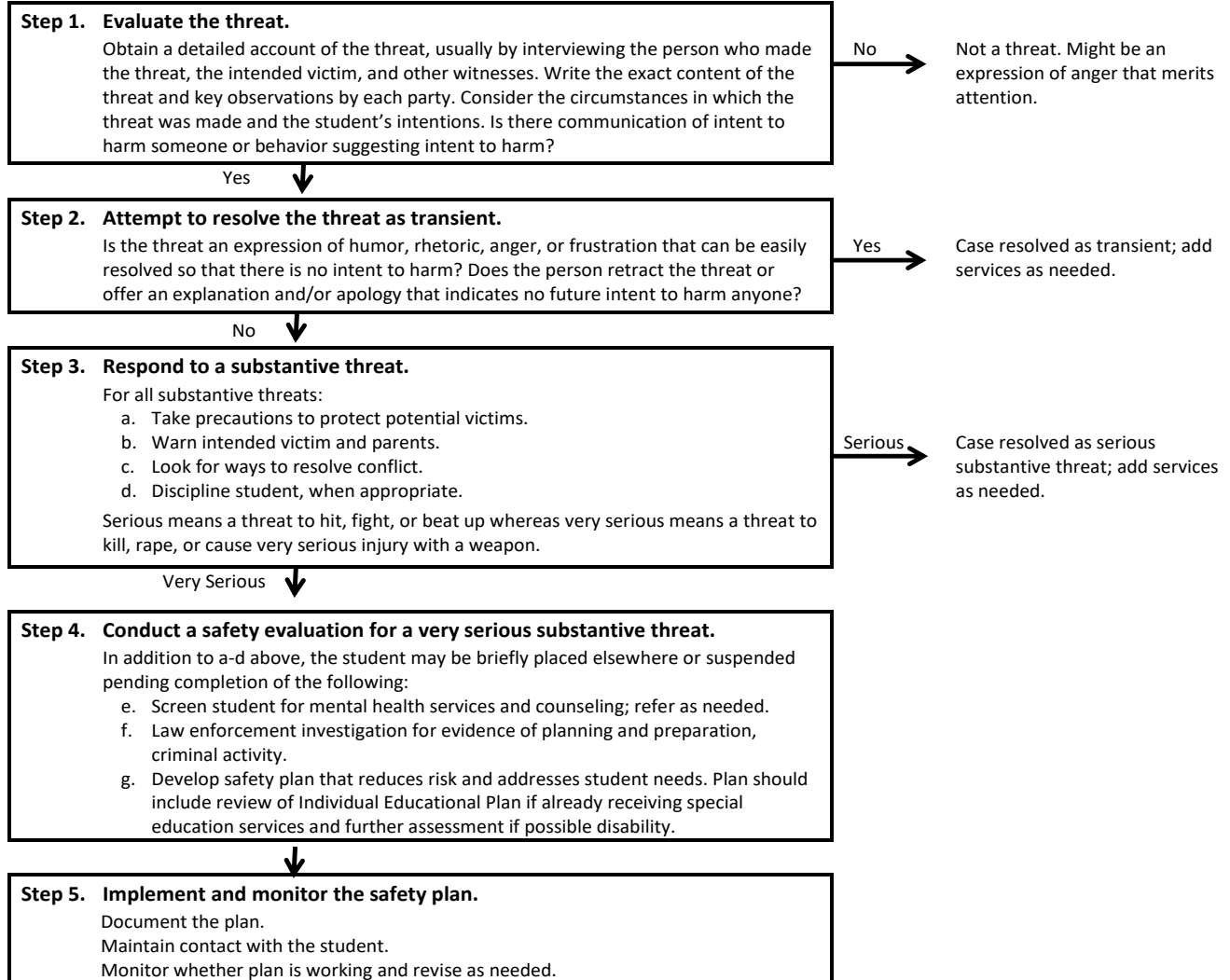
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

OVERVIEW

A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or expressed in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other digital means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat. Threats may be implied by behavior that an observer would reasonably regard as threatening, planning, or preparing to commit a violent act. When in doubt, treat the communication or behavior as a threat and conduct a threat assessment. Threats that are not easily recognized as harmless (e.g., an obvious joke that worries no one) should be reported to the school administrator or other team members. The administrator or another team member makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. The student, targets of the threat, and other witnesses should be interviewed to obtain information using this protocol. A *transient* threat means there is no sustained intent to harm and a *substantive* threat means the intent is present (or not clear) and therefore requires protective action. This form is a guide for conducting a threat assessment, but each case may have unique features that require some modification.

A threat assessment is not a crisis response. If there is indication that violence is imminent (e.g., person has a firearm at school or is on the way to school to attack someone), a crisis response is appropriate. Take immediate action such as calling 911 and follow the school crisis response plan.

School Threat Assessment Decision Tree*



(Cornell, 2018)

THREAT REPORT		
<p>A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or communicated in some other form, such as via text message or email. Threats may be explicit or implied, directed at the intended target or communicated to a third party. Behavior that suggests a threat such as weapon carrying, fighting, or menacing actions should be investigated to determine whether a threat is present.</p> <p>The process is designed for assessment of threats to harm others and is not intended for individuals who have only threatened to harm themselves. Only a small percentage of cases require both threat assessment and suicide assessment, and in those cases, the team should supplement this form with their choice of a standard suicide assessment protocol.</p>		
Name of person reporting threat:		Date/time threat reported:
Affiliation of person reporting threat: <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other:		
Name of person receiving the report:		
INCIDENT or BEHAVIOR OF CONCERN		
Name of person making threat:		Date/time threat made:
Affiliation of person making threat: <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Current <input type="checkbox"/> Former
Identification: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female Age: Grade, if student: School program, if student:		
Emergency Contact:		Relationship:
Home Address:		Phone:
Location threat occurred: <input type="checkbox"/> School Building or Grounds <input type="checkbox"/> School Bus/Other Travel <input type="checkbox"/> School-Sponsored Activity <input type="checkbox"/> Digital communication such as text or post <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		
Summary of the incident or threat. What was reported? Include who said or did what to whom. Who else was present?		
ASSESSMENT FINDINGS (All sources are not needed in most cases.)		
Sources of Information	Was information reviewed?	Relevant Findings (use additional pages as needed)
Prior threats	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Prior discipline incidents	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Academic records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Special education records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Other records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Records from other schools	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Records from outside agencies (e.g., social services or mental health)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Law enforcement records (criminal history, contacts, firearms purchases, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Employment records (grievances, disciplinary actions, Title IX, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	

(Cornell, 2018)

KEY OBSERVATIONS		
These items can help assess whether a threat is transient or <u>substantive</u> , but must be considered in the broader context of the situation and other known facts. Regard these items as a checklist to make sure you have considered these aspects of the threat, but they are not to be summed or used as a score.		
Threat is likely to be less serious:		
1. Subject admits to threat (statement or behavior).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
2. Subject has explanation for threat as benign (such as joke or figure of speech).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
3. Subject admits feeling angry toward target at time of threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
4. Subject retracts threat or denies intent to harm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
5. Subject apologetic or willing to make amends for threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
6. Subject willing to resolve threat through conflict resolution or some other means.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
Threat is likely to be more serious:		
7. Subject continues to feel angry toward target.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
8. Subject expressed threat on more than one occasion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
9. Subject has specific plan for carrying out the threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
10. Subject engaged in preparation for carrying out the threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
11. Subject has prior conflict with target or other motive.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
12. Subject is suicidal. (Supplement with suicide assessment.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
13. Threat involved use of a weapon other than a firearm, such as a knife or club.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
14. Threat involves use of a firearm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
15. Subject has possession of, or ready access to, a firearm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
16. Subject has or sought accomplices or audience for carrying out threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
17. Threat involves gang conflict.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
18. Threat involves peers or others who have encouraged subject in making threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
Other relevant observations		

THREAT CLASSIFICATION				
Date of initial classification:	<input type="checkbox"/> Not a threat	<input type="checkbox"/> Transient	<input type="checkbox"/> Serious Substantive	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Serious Substantive
Date of change in classification, if any:	<input type="checkbox"/> Not a threat	<input type="checkbox"/> Transient	<input type="checkbox"/> Serious Substantive	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Serious Substantive
Reason for change:				

(Cornell, 2018)

OBSERVATIONS SUGGESTING NEED FOR INTERVENTION		
This is an optional form used as needed for intervention planning. Here are some factors to consider in identifying possible interventions to assist the subject and reduce risk. These items are not summed or scored. Use the term "partially" as appropriate to the category to mean the condition is moderate or not clearly present.		
1. History of physical violence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
2. History of criminal acts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
3. Preoccupation with violence, violent individuals, or groups that advocate violence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
4. Preoccupation with mass shootings or infamous violent incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
5. History of intense anger or resentment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
6. Has grievance or feels treated unfairly.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
7. Feels abused, harassed, or bullied.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
8. History of self-injury or suicide ideation or attempts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
9. Has been seriously depressed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
10. Experienced serious stressful events or conditions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
11. Substance abuse history.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
12. History of serious mental illness (symptoms such as delusions or hallucinations).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
13. Might or does qualify for special education services due to serious emotional/behavioral disturbance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
14. Prescribed psychotropic medication.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
15. Substantial decline in level of academic or psychosocial adjustment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
16. Lacks positive relationships with one or more school staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
17. Lacks supportive family.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
18. Lacks positive relationships with peers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
19. Other factors that suggest need for intervention.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	

(Cornell, 2018)

THREAT RESPONSE		
Use additional pages as needed. This is a list of common actions taken in response to a threat. Each case may require a unique set of actions. Add date and signature of person taking action if appropriate. Note if action was recommended but for some reason not completed (e.g., parent refusal).		
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Increased contact/monitoring of subject	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Reprimand or warning	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Parent conference	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Student apology	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Contacted target of threat, including parent if target is a minor	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Counseling (note number of meetings)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Conflict mediation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Schedule change	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Transportation change	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Mental health assessment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Mental health services in school	
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Mental health services outside school	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Assess need for special education services	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Review of Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students already receiving services	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15. 504 plan or modification of 504 plan.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Behavior Support Plan created or modified	
<input type="checkbox"/>	17. In-school time out or suspension	
<input type="checkbox"/>	18. Out-of-school suspension (number days)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	19. Referral for expulsion	
<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Other disciplinary action	
<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Change in school placement (e.g., transfer, homebound instruction)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Services for other persons affected by threat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	23. Law enforcement consulted	
<input type="checkbox"/>	24. Legal actions (e.g., arrest, detentions, charges)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	25. Other actions	

CASE PLAN	
This section can be used to describe the plan for any case and should be completed as Step 5 in cases of a very serious substantive threat.	
Case Resolution or Safety Plan	Date
Describe how case was resolved, including any plan for further actions. List persons responsible for each component of plan.	
Follow-up or Revision of Plan	Date
Describe current status of plan and any revisions. List persons responsible for each component of revised plan.	

(Cornell, 2018)

<p>MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines[®]</p>
<p>A mental health assessment is usually conducted in cases involving a very serious substantive threat. The purpose of the mental health assessment is to maintain the safety and well-being of the student and others. Therefore, the assessment has two objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Treatment and referral needs.</i> Assess the student’s present mental state and determine whether there are urgent mental health needs that require attention, such as risk of suicide, psychosis, or rage. Beyond these immediate needs, consider whether there are other treatment, referral, or support needs. 2. <i>Threat reduction.</i> Gather information on the student’s motives and intentions in making the threat <u>in order to</u> understand why the threat was made and identify relevant strategies or interventions that have the potential to reduce the risk of violence.

Subject Interview (Person who made threat or engaged in threatening behavior)

Subject Name		See records and additional information obtained by threat assessment team to supplement this assessment.
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview

Usually the interview can begin by asking “Do you know why I want to talk to you?” and after the subject has responded, “Let me explain the purpose of our meeting today.” Use these questions as a guide to interview the person making the threat. Ask other questions as appropriate. Try to use open-ended questions rather than leading questions. Adjust spacing below as needed.

Review of threat

1. What happened that made others worried that you wanted to harm someone? What exactly did you say or do that made them worried? What did you mean by that?
2. I know you must have had reasons to say (or do) that; can you explain what led up to it?
3. How would you do it? (carry out the threat) (Probe for details of any planning or preparation.) Where did the idea come from?
4. What could happen that would make you want to do it? (carry out the threat)
5. What would happen if you did do it? (review both effects on intended victims and consequences for student)
6. What do you think the school should do in a situation in which a person makes a threat like this?
7. What were you feeling then? How do you feel now?
8. How do you think (the person threatened) felt?

Relationship with intended victim(s)

1. How long have you known this person?
2. What has happened in the past between you and this person?
3. What do you think this person deserves?
4. Do you see any way that things could be improved between you and this person?

(Cornell, 2018)

Family support

1. Whom do you live with? Are there family members you don't live with? Have there been any changes in the past year?
2. Whom in your home are you close to?
3. How well do your parents/guardians know you?
4. Where do you go after school? Where are your parents/guardians at this time? How much do they keep track of where you are or what you are doing?
5. How strict are your parents/guardians? What do they do if you do something they don't want you to do? When was the last time you got in trouble with them? What was the worst time?
6. How will your parents/guardians react (or how did they react) when they found out about this situation?

Stress and trauma

1. What kinds of things have been going on with you lately? What sorts of things have you worried about?
2. How has your school work been going lately? Are there things you have been worried about with your school work? Other things at school?
3. What is the worst thing that has happened to you lately? Have any other bad things happened? Is there something you regret or wish you could change?
4. Have there been any changes in your family? Has anyone been sick, moved away, or had anything bad happen to them?
5. Do you have any family members in jail or prison?
6. Do you take any medication?
7. Have you been involved in any counseling?

Mood

1. What has your mood been like the past few weeks? Have you felt down or depressed at times? How bad has it been? (Be alert for statements of pessimism and hopelessness that might indicate suicide risk. If there are indications of suicidal thoughts or feelings, there should be a more extensive evaluation of suicide risk. If necessary, develop a plan for protecting the student and making appropriate referrals.)

2. Have you felt nervous or anxious? Irritable or short-tempered? How bad has it been?

3. Have you ever felt like life wasn't worth living? Like maybe you would kill yourself?

4. Have you ever done something to hurt yourself on purpose? Ever cut yourself on purpose?

5. Have you had any problems with your sleep? Appetite? Energy level? Concentration?

6. Have you been taking any medication to help with your mood or for any other reason?

Psychotic symptoms

Ask a few probe questions and follow up if there is any indication of delusions or hallucinations. Phrase questions appropriate to student's age and understanding.

1. Have you had any unusual experiences lately, such as hearing things that others cannot hear or seeing things that others cannot see?

2. Have you felt like someone was out to get you or wanted to harm you? Have you had any other fears that seem strange or out of the ordinary?

3. Do you have any abilities or powers that others do not have, such as ESP or reading minds?

4. Have you felt numb or disconnected from the world, or like you were somehow outside your body? █

Note and inquire about any other symptoms of mental disorder.

Weapons

Ask about any weapons mentioned in the threat. As an example, these questions concern a threat made to stab someone.

1. You said that you were going to stab (name of victim). What were you going to stab him with?
2. Do you have a knife? What kind of a knife is it? (Or, how would you get a knife?)
3. Have you ever had to use a knife with someone? What happened?
4. What do you think would happen if you did use a knife with (name of victim)?

Access to firearms

Ask about firearms in all cases, even if no firearm was mentioned. If the threat involved a knife, bomb, or other weapon, ask about that weapon, too.

1. Do you have a gun?
2. Are there guns in your home? Have you ever used a gun for hunting or target shooting?
3. If you wanted a gun, how would you get one?
4. What do you think you might do if you had a gun?
5. Have you ever had to use a gun with someone? Have you ever thought about using a gun with someone?

Aggressive behavior

1. Do people treat you fairly? Who has been unfair with you lately? When people treat you unfairly, what do you do about it?
2. When you get angry, what do you do? Has your temper ever gotten you into trouble?
3. Do you get into fights? When was the last time? What happened?
4. Have you ever threatened to harm anyone before?
5. Have you thought about what it would be like to hurt someone really bad? Have you written any stories or made any drawings that are violent?
6. Have you ever set fire to things?
7. Have you damaged your own property or someone else's property?
8. Have you ever intentionally hurt an animal?

School discipline

1. When was the last time you got into trouble in school? What happened?
2. Have you ever been suspended or expelled?
3. Have your parents ever been called to school because of your behavior?
4. Do you ever cut school or certain classes?
5. Do you feel that the rules at this school are fair? What has been unfair?

Delinquent behavior

1. Have you been in trouble with the law or with police before? What happened?
2. Have you ever gone to juvenile court? What was it about?
3. Have you done things that could have gotten you arrested or in trouble with the law? What was the worst thing? What else?
4. Do you drink beer, wine, or other alcohol? Have you ever? How often do you drink? When was the last time? Tell me about it.
5. Do you smoke marijuana? Have you ever? How often? When was the last time?
6. Have you used any other drugs? How often? When was the last time? Tell me about it.

Exposure to violence

1. Do you see or hear of violence in your neighborhood?
2. Do you know anyone who was shot, stabbed, or beat up real bad?
3. Do people argue much at home? Does anyone get physically aggressive?
4. What kind of movies do like? What kind of video games do you enjoy playing? What are your favorite Internet sites?
5. Ask the student about his/her reactions to any recent acts of violence or to any highly publicized school shootings.

Bullying

Bullying is broadly defined and may include teasing, social exclusion, or other forms of humiliation in addition to physical threats of violence. The student may not use the term "bully," and may be reluctant to admit being the victim of bullying behavior, so be prepared to rephrase questions and probe for victim experiences.

1. Is there anyone who has threatened you recently? Is there anyone who makes you feel afraid? (Ask about sexual threats if appropriate to situation.)
2. Is there anyone who has teased you or picked on you recently? Is there anyone who has beat you up or pushed you around? How about at home?

In response to any positive answer, follow up for more information: How often does it happen? What have you tried to do about it? Did you let any adult know about this, and if so, what happened? Be alert to statements indicating that a bullied student feels like there is no solution to the problem or is contemplating revenge.

Peer relations

1. What are your friends like? Have you had any trouble with your friends lately? Who is your best friend?
2. How would your friends describe you?
3. Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? (Keep in mind that the student might not be heterosexual, and there may be concerns in this area.) How are things going with him/her? Did you have one before? What happened in that relationship?
4. Do you have friends who get in trouble?
5. Have you ever joined a gang? Been part of a group like a crew, clique, posse, or mob?
6. Do any of your friends know about (refer to threat situation?) What did they say about it? Anyone who feels the same way you do?

Coping

1. How do you like to spend your free time?
2. What kinds of things do you do well?
3. What are your hobbies and interests? What do you enjoy doing?
4. Can you think of a problem you faced in the past that worked out okay? Can you think of a problem that you solved? Can you think of a time when you went to someone about a problem and that person was able to solve it?
5. What are your plans for the future? What would you like to do when you finish school?
6. What could we do that would help with (refer to the problem that led to the threat)?

Parent/Guardian Interview

Parent Name		Relationship to Student
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview
<p>Understandably, parents may feel apprehensive, guilty, or defensive when being interviewed about their child’s behavior. It is important that the interviewer find ways to convey respect for the parent, starting from the initial contact and throughout the interview. Also, it should be evident that the interviewer is interested in understanding and helping the parent’s child; otherwise, the parent may regard the interview as an investigation designed to uncover evidence of wrongdoing by the student or incompetence by the parent. Overall, the interviewer should make every effort to engage the parent as an ally. Emphasize the common goal of helping their child to be safe and successful in school.</p> <p>Parent knowledge of the threat</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you (the parent) know about the threat? 2. Have you heard your child (or use child’s name) talk about things like this before? 3. Are you familiar with (the intended victim)? (Ask about the child’s history with the intended victim—previous relationship and interactions.) 4. (Ask questions to determine if the child has the means to carry out the threat, such as access to firearms.) 5. What are you planning to do about the threat? (Is the parent willing to work with the school to develop a plan to assure the threat will not be carried out and that the student’s needs are addressed?) <p>School adjustment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has your child ever been suspended or expelled from school? 2. Have you ever met with the school (teacher, counselor, principal) about concerns in the past? What happened, what was going on, what was the outcome? 3. Has your child ever needed special help in school? Ever been retained? 4. Has your child ever been tested in school? 5. How does your child like school? 6. How often does your child do homework? 7. What are your child’s teachers like? 		

(Cornell, 2018)

Parent/Guardian Interview, P. 2**Family relationships and current stressors**

1. Who lives in the home?

2. Are there any important events that have affected your family/child? Ask about any recent or pending changes, such as:
 - Move, divorce/separation, losses
 - Financial status, employment changes for parents
 - Others in home involved with court or the law

3. Who does your child share concerns with? Who is he/she close to?

4. How well does he/she get along with parents? Siblings? Type of conflicts, over what, how resolved?

5. How does your child show anger toward you and other family members?

6. What does your child do after school? Who supervises? What time is your child supposed to be home at night?

7. What responsibilities does your child have at home?

8. Does your child follow rules? What are the consequences for not following the rules?

Peer relations and bullying

1. Has your child reported being teased, intimidated, rejected, or bullied in some other way? (If so, what has the parent done in response?)

2. Who are your child's friends? Are you pleased or displeased with your child's choice of friends?

3. How much is the child influenced by peers? Are there any examples of your child doing something to please peers that got him or her into trouble?

Parent/Guardian Interview P. 3**Delinquent behavior**

1. Has your child been in trouble with the law or with police before? What happened?
2. Has your child ever gone to juvenile court? What was it about?
3. Has your child done things that could have gotten him or her arrested or in trouble with the law? What was the worst thing? What else?
4. Does your child drink beer, wine, or other alcohol?
5. Does your child smoke marijuana?
6. Has your child used any other drugs?

History of aggression

1. How does your child handle frustration?
2. When your child gets angry, what does he/she do?
3. Has your child gotten into fights in the past? When, where, with whom?
4. Has your child's temper ever gotten him/her into trouble?
5. Has your child ever hit you or other family members?
6. Has your child destroyed his or her own things, or someone else's property?
7. Does your child have any pets? Has he/she ever intentionally hurt the pet or some other animal?

Access to weapons

1. Do you have a gun in your home? Does your child have access to firearms through friends, relatives, or some other source?
2. Does your child have access to weapons other than firearms, such as military knives, martial arts weapons or some other kind of weapon?
3. Has your child ever talked about using a weapon to hurt someone? Ever gotten into trouble for using a weapon, carrying a weapon, or threatening someone with a weapon?
4. What can you do to restrict your child's access to weapons?

Parent/Guardian Interview, P. 4**Exposure to violence**

1. Has your child ever been a victim of abuse?
2. Is your child exposed to violence in the neighborhood?
3. Do people argue much at home? Has there been any physical aggression at home?
4. What kinds of movies, video games, internet sites does your child like? Any parent restrictions? Level of supervision? Child's response?

History

1. Ask about any delays in cognitive, motor, language development. How old was your child when he/she started to walk, talk?
2. Has your child ever had a problem with bedwetting? When, how long? Was anything done for this?
3. Has your child ever been hospitalized? Had any serious illnesses?
4. Has your child had any recent medical treatment? Taking any medications? Obtain diagnoses and medications. Ask for a release.

Mental health

1. Does your child have problems paying attention? Does your child follow directions without repetition and reminders? Does your child complete activities on his/her own? Does your child say things without thinking? Surprised by the consequences of his/her actions?
2. What has your child's mood been like the past few weeks?
3. Has your child been unusually nervous or anxious? Irritable or short-tempered? How bad has it been?
4. Has your child had problems with sleep? Appetite? Energy level? Concentration?
5. Has your child ever talked about hurting himself or herself? Have you ever been concerned that he/she might be suicidal?
6. Have there been any times when your child seemed to be hearing things that weren't there? Has he/she said things that didn't make sense or seemed to believe in things that weren't real?
7. Has your child ever seen a counselor or therapist? Ever taken medication for his/her behavior or mood?
8. Has your child had any involvement with other agencies/programs in the community?

(Cornell, 2018)

Teacher/Staff Interview, P. 1

Name of Person Interviewed		Relationship to Student
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview
<p>Academics</p> <p>1. How is this student doing academically? Has there been any change in recent weeks?</p> <p>2. What are this student's verbal skills? How well can he or she express himself/herself in words?</p> <p>3. Has this student been considered for special education or placed in special education? What kinds of difficulties does the student have? If a student is receiving special education services, ask about the problem behaviors that are regarded as part of his or her disability.</p> <p>Teacher knowledge of the threat</p> <p>1. What do you know about the threat?</p> <p>2. Have you heard this student talk about things like this before?</p> <p>3. What have other students told you about this incident?</p> <p>4. Is there another teacher or staff member who might know something about this?</p> <p>Student's peer relations</p> <p>1. How well does this student get along with other students?</p> <p>2. Who are the student's friends?</p> <p>3. Are there students who do not get along with this student?</p> <p>4. Have there been other conflicts or difficulties with peers?</p> <p>5. Has this student ever complained of being bullied, teased, or treated unfairly by others?</p>		

(Cornell, 2018)

Teacher/Staff Interview, P. 2**Depression**

1. Have there been any apparent changes in the student's mood, demeanor, or activity level? Seemed withdrawn or apathetic?
2. Has the student expressed any attitudes that could imply depression, such as expressions of hopelessness or futility, inadequacy or shame, self-criticism or worthlessness?
3. Has this student shown an increase in irritability or seemed short-tempered?

Discipline

1. What kinds of discipline problems have you experienced with this student?
2. How does this student respond to being corrected by an adult?
3. What are the student's emotional responses to being disciplined?

Aggression

1. How does this student express anger?
2. Does this student seem to hold a grudge? Seem resentful?
3. Has this student done anything that expresses anger or aggression, or has an aggressive theme in written assignments, drawings, class projects, etc.?

Parents

1. Have you had any contact with this student's parents? What happened?

Mental Health Assessment Report Template

Identifying Information

Give the student's name, gender, age, grade, school, and other relevant identifying information.

Reason for Referral

State that this evaluation was requested by the school principal because the student made a threat of violence that was judged to be a very serious, substantive threat. Describe the threat, including the exact statement or threatening behavior, and where and when it took place.

Sources of Information

Describe or list the sources of information used in this report, including information from team interviews with the student, witnesses, and parents, as well as any relevant records or psychological tests.

Major Findings

Describe how the child presented and any important aspects of his or her mental state, including any indications or markers of mental disorder requiring further evaluation or referral. Identify any stresses, conflicts, or unmet needs that affect the child's functioning or bear on the threat incident.

Review the child's understanding of the threat and its meaning from his or her perspective. Note whether the child has a history of violent or aggressive behavior, and any findings from the assessment that raise concerns about the child's potential for violence, such as access to firearms, peer encouragement to fight, drug use, or inadequate home supervision.

Conclusions

In general, the mental health professional should not be expected to make a definitive statement that a child is or is not dangerous; such statements go beyond current knowledge in the field of risk assessment. The report may identify risk factors and protective factors, and express concerns where there appear to be compelling risk factors.

The report should present recommendations aimed at reducing the risk of violence, and they might convey the degree of concern about the potential for violence in general terms, recognizing that a precise measure of risk is not feasible. In all cases, the goal is to reduce the risk of violence rather than to predict violence.

Recommendations may include a wide range of strategies but should address both any immediate safety needs to protect potential victims and broader efforts to resolve conflicts or problems that precipitated the threat.

There are two basic types of recommendations. First are recommendations for school behavior support, which are actions to be taken at school. The report should identify any signs of disability that would indicate the need for further assessment, child study, or special education evaluation. Second, if appropriate, the report may propose other recommendations for the parents to consider implementing outside of school, such as seeking community-based services for their child.

(Cornell, 2018)

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLAN

For behavior interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others
Confidential - For Teacher/Staff Use Only
 See: www.pent.ca.gov for downloadable forms

This BIP attaches to: IEP date: _____ 504 plan date: _____ Team meeting date: _____
 School Safety plan/Threat Assessment form: date: _____

Student Name _____ **Today's Date** _____ **Next Review Date** _____

1. The behavior impeding learning is *(describe what it looks like)* _____
2. It impedes learning of self or others because _____
3. The need for a Behavior Intervention Plan early stage intervention moderate serious extreme
4. Frequency or intensity or duration of behavior _____
 reported by _____ and/or observed by _____

PREVENTION PART I: ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND NEEDED CHANGES

5. What are the predictors for the behavior? *(Situations in which the behavior is likely to occur: people, time, place, subject, etc.)* _____
6. What supports the student using the problem behavior? *(What is missing in the environment/curriculum or what is in the environment curriculum that needs changing?)* _____

Remove student's need to use the problem behavior

7. What environmental changes, structure and supports are needed to remove the student's need to use this behavior? _____

Who will establish? _____

Who will monitor? _____

ALTERNATIVES PART II: FUNCTIONAL FACTORS AND NEW BEHAVIORS TO SUPPORT

8. Team believes the behavior occurs because: *(Function of behavior in terms of obtaining, protesting, or avoiding something)* _____
- Support an alternative behavior that meets same need**
9. What team believes the student should do instead of the problem behavior? *(How should the student escape/protest/avoid or get his/her need met in an acceptable way?)* _____
10. What teaching strategies/curriculum/materials are needed to teach the alternative behavior? _____

By whom? _____

How frequent? _____

11. What are reinforcement procedures to use for establishing, maintaining, and generalizing the new behavior(s)?

Selection of reinforcer based on:

- reinforcer for using replacement behavior
- reinforcer for general increase in positive behaviors

By whom?

Frequency?

REACTIONS PART III: STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO PROBLEM RECURRENCE

12. What strategies will be employed if the problem behavior occurs again? (Prompt student to switch to the replacement behavior, review negative consequences of undesirable behavior)

Personnel?

OUTCOME PART IV: BEHAVIORAL GOALS

13. Behavioral Goal(s)

- The above behavioral goal(s) are to:
- Reduce frequency of problem behavior
 - Increase use of replacement behavior
 - Develop new general skills that remove student's need to use the problem behavior

Conclusions

- Are curriculum accommodations or modifications also necessary? Where described: Yes No
- Are environmental supports/changes necessary? Yes No
- Is reinforcement of alternative behavior alone enough (no new teaching is necessary)? Yes No
- Are both teaching of new alternative behavior AND reinforcement needed? Yes No
- This BSP to be coordinated with other agency's service plans? Yes No
- Person responsible for contact between agencies

COMMUNICATION PART V: COMMUNICATION PROVISIONS

14. Manner and frequency of communication, all participants:

Between?

Frequency?

PARTICIPATION PART VI: PARTICIPANTS IN PLAN DEVELOPMENT

- Student:
- Parent/Guardian:
- Educator and Title:
- Educator and Title:
- Educator and Title:
- Administrator:
- Administrator:
- Other:
- Other:

Court rules against student who wrote violent dream story (Free speech rights in school)

[August 3, 2007](#) [Judy Wang](#)

GEORGIA — A federal appeals court [ruled](#) July 31 against a Fulton County student who claimed that her school violated her free-speech rights when it punished her for writing about a dream in which a student shoots a math teacher.

Rachel Boim, then a ninth grader at Roswell High School, was suspended and nearly expelled in October 2003 for keeping a journal with the violent entry. A federal judge in Atlanta dismissed Boim's First Amendment lawsuit last year because, the decision reads, her writing was "sufficiently disturbing" to merit discipline. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals also agreed with the school and cited the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in *Morse v. Frederick* in its ruling.

According to court documents, Boim's notebook was discovered when she was caught passing it to another student during class. The teacher confiscated the notebook and found that, under a divider labeled "Dream," Boim had written about shooting a male math teacher.

"I stand up and pull the gun from my pocket. BANG the force blows him back and every one in the class sit [*sic*] there in shock," she wrote.

The teacher reported the notebook to Fulton County School District officials, who expressed concern that the student's writing constituted a threat against her male math teacher. The school suspended Boim and attempted to expel her, but the Fulton County Board of Education overturned the expulsion on an appeal by Boim. The Boim family filed suit two years later to take the suspension off Boim's record, arguing that the school's actions violated the First Amendment. But the district court found that the school was within its rights, prompting the family to appeal to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's decision that the Fulton County School District's concerns were justifiable by referring to violent incidents on school grounds, such as the Columbine High School and Virginia Tech University shootings. The appeals court ruling, authored by Judge Joel F. Dubina, notes that there had been at least 10 student perpetrated shootings at U.S. schools in the eight years prior to Boim's suspension, citing statistics from Wikipedia, an online user-created encyclopedia, and an article posted on CNN.com.

The decision cites the student speech standard established by the 1969 Supreme Court decision in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, arguing that Boim's speech could create a "substantial disruption" in the school. The decision also cites *Morse*, in which the Supreme Court upheld a school's right to punish a student for hoisting what it interpreted as a banner advocating illegal drug-use, to conclude that, "the same rationale applies equally, if not more strongly, to speech reasonably construed as a threat of school violence."

"There is no First Amendment right allowing a student to knowingly make comments, whether oral or written, that reasonably could be perceived as a threat of school violence, whether general or specific, while on school property during the school day," the court opinion said.

"As we feared," said Student Press Law Center Executive Director Mark Goodman, "Courts are using *Morse* as authority to justify acts of censorship far beyond the circumstances of that ruling."

Judge Susan H. Black wrote in a concurring opinion in *Boim v. Fulton County School District* that stated the court's decision could have been decided under the *Tinker* standard alone.

Although she lost in the appeals court, Boim can continue the two-year-old case by asking for a rehearing by the full 11th Circuit or by appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court, if she chooses.

Carol Callaway, an attorney for the school district, said she is pleased that the court upheld a school official's right to act in the school's best interests in light of a "perceived threat." She said she is unsure

whether the Boim family will continue the lawsuit. Boim's attorney, Don Keenan, could not be reached for comment. Boim wrote for her school's student newspaper, *The Sting*.

For More Information:

Boim v. Fulton County Sch. Dist., No. 06-14706-JJ, 2007 WL 2177677 (11th Cir. July 31, 2007).