Violence Prevention in Schools

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Overview

1. Fears vs facts about school safety
2. Threat assessment
3. Bullying and school climate

“25 shootings at or near schools”

- Man shot in a school parking lot at night
- School van struck by a bullet while driving through city
- Students shot while walking down street near their school (3 cases)
- Intoxicated man found alone shooting air rifle at geese in a football field

Source: http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence06-07.html

How many shootings occur in the United States?

- 80+ people are killed every day by firearms in the United States
- 30,000 deaths per year
- 68,000 injuries per year
- ?? shootings without injury

Source: National Vital Statistics Reports, 54 (10), 2006
Don’t be misled by false trends
With 80+ people killed every day, it is possible to find numerous pseudo-trends.

For every problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong. H.L. Mencken

Fear-based Reactions to Shootings
Prevention cannot wait until the gunman is at the door.

The Expansion of Zero Tolerance
From No Guns to
- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

No Accidental violations

The disconnect between youth violence and school safety practices

- 4 Kindergarten students suspended for playing cops and robbers during recess.
- New Jersey district zero tolerance policy resulted in 50 suspensions in 6 weeks, mostly in kindergarten and 3rd grade for verbal threats.
- 8 yr old suspended for pointing a chicken finger at a teacher, saying pow-pow
- 10 yr old expelled for a 1” GI Joe toy gun
- 14 yr old convicted of felony for e-mail threat
- 17 yr old arrested & expelled for shooting a paper clip with a rubber band

Nervous Officials No Longer Ignoring Threats by Students
Around the Country, Children Are Being Arrested
**Key Point**

Zero tolerance is not needed for student threats of violence. Threat assessment is a more flexible and effective alternative.

**Zero tolerance is not effective.**
Suspension associated with poorer outcomes for students.

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**Schools are not violent places.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<td>10,079</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highways/Roads</td>
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**School violence is not increasing.**

![Graph showing crime per 1,000 students from 1994 to 2005](image)

<table>
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<tr>
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Indicators of school crime and safety: 2007

**Juvenile violence is not increasing**

<table>
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<td>Homicide</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2560</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>1,013</td>
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FBI Uniform Crime Reports

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"...transferring juveniles to the adult justice system generally increases, rather than decreases, rates of violence among transferred youth."
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Why the decline in juvenile violence?

- Increased law enforcement efforts including community policing and efforts to reduce crack dealing and juvenile access to guns
- Increased mental health efforts, including school-based and after-school programs to supervise, mentor, resolve conflicts in youth

Reviewed 221 studies of diverse school-based violence prevention programs
Average effect size = .25 for demonstration programs, which would reduce fighting 50% in a typical school

Numerous Effective Programs

- Anger management
- Bullying prevention
- Conflict resolution
- Family therapy
- Parenting skills
- Problem-solving
- Social competence
- Substance abuse resistance
- Etc.

Routine practice programs much less effective than demonstration programs (ES .10 vs .25)
Need to study routine school practices.

School homicides are not increasing.

Homicides on school grounds during school day

Cases identified from records of the National School Safety Center.

Students are not at high risk of being killed at school.

1999 Selected Causes of Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Cases</th>
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<tr>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>9779</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>2525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>1757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart disease</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flu &amp; pneumonia</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School homicide</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ages 5 to 19
What is the likelihood of a student committing a homicide at your school?

- 93 student homicides cases in 10 years = 9.3/year (1992-93 to 2001-02)
- 119,000 schools
- 119,000 ÷ 9.3/year =
- 1 case every 12,796 years

FBI Recommends Against Profiling

“One response to the pressure for action may be an effort to identify the next shooter by developing a “profile” of the typical school shooter. This may sound like a reasonable preventive measure, but in practice, trying to draw up a catalogue or “checklist” of warning signs to detect a potential school shooter can be shortsighted, even dangerous. Such lists, publicized by the media, can end up unfairly labeling many nonviolent students as potentially dangerous or even lethal. In fact, a great many adolescents who will never commit violent acts will show some of the behaviors or personality traits included on the list.” (FBI report pp 2-3)

What is Criminal Profiling?

Multiple terms and definitions

1. Retrospective profiling
   - Crime has occurred
   - Analysis of crime scene
   - Infer characteristics of offender

2. Prospective profiling
   - No crime has occurred
   - Checklist of possible characteristics
   - Speculate about future behavior

APA Warning Signs Brochure

If you see these immediate warning signs, violence is a serious possibility:

1. Loss of temper on a daily basis
2. Significant vandalism or property damage
3. Increase in use of drugs or alcohol
4. Increase in risk-taking behavior
5. Detailed plans to commit acts of violence
6. Announcing threats or plans for hurting others
7. Enjoying hurting animals
8. Carrying a weapon

Federal Warning Signs

1. Social withdrawal
2. Excessive feelings of isolation
3. Excessive feelings of rejection
4. Belief victim of violence
5. Feelings of being picked on & persecuted
6. Low school interest/poor academic performance
7. Violence in writings/drawings
8. Uncontrolled anger
9. Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behavior
10. History of discipline problems
11. Past history of violent and aggressive behavior
12. Prejudice for differences and prejudicial attitudes
13. Drug use and alcohol use
14. Affiliation with gangs
15. Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
16. Serious threats of violence
Profiling does not work.

- School shootings are too rare.
- Profiles make false predictions.
- Profiles generate stereotypes.
- Profiles don't solve problems.

Why is snitching so reviled?

**Snitch:** blabbermouth, canary, fink, narc, rat, sneak, squealer, stoolie, stoolpigeon, tattletale, etc.

Teach students to distinguish snitching from seeking help

**Snitching:** informing on someone for personal gain  
**Seeking help:** attempting to stop someone from being hurt

FBI Recommendations on School Violence

“Although the risk of an actual shooting incident at any one school is very low, threats of violence are potentially a problem at any school. Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational, and standardized method of evaluating and responding to threats is critically important.”

(FBI report p 1)

Secret Service/DOE Recommendations:

- Create a planning team to develop a threat assessment program.
- Identify roles for school personnel.
- Clarify role of law enforcement.
- Conduct threat assessments of students who make threats of violence.

Session 2
Threat Assessment

1. Decision-tree process and team approach
2. Transient threats of violence
3. Substantive threats of violence
   - Serious
   - Very Serious

Download at: www.secretservice.gov
Threat Assessment

1. **Identification** of threats made by students.
2. **Evaluation** of seriousness of threat and danger it poses to others, recognizing that all threats are not the same (e.g., toy guns are not dangerous).
3. **Intervention** to reduce risk of violence.
4. **Follow-up** to assess intervention results.

Goals

1. Prevent violence.
2. Reduce suspensions.
3. Address bullying and other peer conflicts before they escalate.
4. Improve student trust in staff.

**Key Point**

_Threat assessment is not designed to determine whether a student has MADE a threat, but whether a student POSES a threat._

Team roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal or Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Leads team, conducts Step 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Resource Officer</td>
<td>Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Staff</td>
<td>Team member to conduct mental health assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(School counselors, psychologists,</td>
<td>Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social workers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not required to serve on team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers, aides, other staff</td>
<td>Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No Magic Formula or Crystal Ball

There is no formula, prescription, or checklist that will predict or prevent all violent acts. School authorities must make reasoned judgments based on the facts of each individual situation, and monitor situations over time.
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What is a threat?

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone.

Threats may be spoken, written, or gestured.
Threats may be direct or indirect, and need not be communicated to the intended victim or victims. ("I’m going to get him.")
Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise. ("I forgot my knife was in my backpack.")
When in doubt, assume it is a threat.

What did the students threaten to do?

Hit/Beat Up 77
Kill 27
Shoot 24
Cut/Stab 18
Vague 32
Other/Bomb 10

N = 188 cases

Not Covered by Guidelines

The Guidelines do NOT cover:
- Threats to damage property
- Threats made by non-students
- Fights or misbehavior that does not involve a threat
- Slurs, insults, verbal abuse that does not involve a threat to physically harm someone
Other school policies apply to these situations.

Grade Levels for 188 Student Threats of Violence

A primary goal of threat assessment is to prevent violence.

Just screaming or having a tantrum is not a threat. The question is whether the student expresses intent to harm someone.
Violence Prevention in Schools
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

Continuum of Threats
- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

Step 1. Evaluate the threat.
- Obtain an account of the threat and the context from the student and witnesses.
- Write down the exact threat.
- Obtain student’s explanation of the threat’s meaning and his/her intentions.
- Obtain witness perceptions of the threat’s meaning.

Document your evaluation.

Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

Threat is seriously transient.

Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

Threat is very serious.


Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

Typical Questions
1. Do you know why I wanted to talk to you?
2. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
3. What exactly did you say and do?
4. What did you mean when you said/did that?
5. How do you think [person threatened] feels about what you said?
6. What was the reason you said that?
7. What you going to do now?

Witness Questions
1. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
2. What exactly did [student who made threat] say and do?
3. What do you think he/she meant?
4. How do you feel about what he/she said?
5. Why did he/she say that?

All threats are not the same.
“I could just kill you for that!” (laughing)
“I’m gonna kick your butt.”
“There’s a bomb in the school.”
“Wait until I get my gun!”
“Let’s really make them pay for what they did.”

Context matters...
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

Step 2. Transient or Substantive?
- Determine whether the threat is transient or substantive.
- The critical issue is not what the student threatened to do, but whether the student intends to carry out the threat.
- When in doubt, treat a threat as substantive.

Transient threats
- Often are rhetorical remarks, not genuine expressions of intent to harm.
- At worst, express temporary feelings of anger or frustration.
- Usually can be resolved on the scene or in the office.
- After resolution, the threat no longer exists.
- Usually end with an apology or clarification.

Substantive threats
- Express intent to physically injure someone beyond the immediate situation.
- There is at least some risk the student will carry out the threat.
- Require that you take protective action, including warning intended victims and parents.
- May be legal violations and require police consultation.
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

Substantive threats: Factors to consider
- Age of student
- Capability of student to carry out the threat
- Student's discipline history
- Credibility of student and willingness to acknowledge his or her behavior
- Credibility of witness accounts
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

Presumptive indicators of substantive threats
- Specific, plausible details. ("I am going to blast Mr. Johnson with my pistol.")
- Threat has been repeated over time. ("He’s been telling everyone he is going to get you.")
- Threat reported as a plan ("Wait until you see what happens next Tuesday in the library.")
- Accomplices or recruitment of accomplices.
- Physical evidence of intent (written plans, lists of victims, bomb materials, etc.)

Case examples: Transient or substantive threat?
1. Two elementary students to throw paper wads pretending to bomb one another.
2. Two middle school students get in a shoving match. One says, "I’m gonna bust you up."
3. A boy turns in an English essay that describes an especially violent scene from a war.
4. Two students get into a fight. After they are separated, both are sullen and quiet.
5. A student says he is being bullied. He was warned that if he told anyone, they would beat him up.
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Step 1. Evaluate Threat.
Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.
Step 3. Respond to transient threat.
Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.
Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.
Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

Transient Threats

Threat Reported to Principal
Step 1. Evaluate Threat.

Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.

• Threat is clearly transient
• Threat is substantive

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

• Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action.
• Student may need to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

• No need to take safety precautions.
• See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology, making amends.
• Provide counseling and education where appropriate.
• Administer discipline if appropriate.

Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

Key Point

Students DO NOT have to be suspended for making a threatening statement.
Many threats can be resolved without suspension.

Transient Case Steps

Step 1. Evaluate the threat.
• Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses.
• Write down the exact content of threat and statements by each party.
• Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student’s intentions.

Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.
• Consider criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
• Consider student’s age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

• Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action.
• Student may need to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

Who made transient threats?

Threat assessment and discipline are separate processes.
A threat that requires serious disciplinary consequences (such as a bomb threat) might not be a serious (substantive) threat.
Transient versus substantive threats

Substantive Threats 30%
Transient Threats 70%

Step 4. Serious or very serious substantive threat?

- Substantive assault threats are classified serious. ("I’m gonna beat him up.")
- Substantive threats to kill, rape, or inflict very serious injury are classified very serious. ("I’m gonna break his arm.")
- Substantive threats involving a weapon are classified very serious.

Who made substantive threats?

Substantive Case Steps

Step 1. Evaluate the threat.
- Interview the student who made threat and any witnesses.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made, the student’s intentions, and the victims’ interpretations of the threat.

Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.
- Does the student express remorse and retract the threat?
- Is the student willing to make amends or resolve the conflict?
- What is the student’s history of discipline problems?

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

Step 4. Decide whether the threat is serious or very serious.
- Did this threat involve a weapon, or a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury?

Step 5. Respond to the serious substantive threat.
- Take protective action by notifying parents of perpetrator and victims.
- Take disciplinary action consistent with school policy.
- Identify any other student support or intervention needs.

Serious Substantive Threats

Step 1. Evaluate Threat.
Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.
Step 3. Respond to transient threat.
Step 4. Decide if substantive threat is serious or very serious.
Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.
Step 7. Follow up on action plan.
How many student threats?

15 (8%) Very serious
42 (22%) Serious
131 (70%) Transient

188 Total threats reported
16,434 Students

Very Serious Substantive Threats

Step 1. Evaluate Threat.
Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.
Step 3. Respond to transient threat.
Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.
Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

Key Point

In a threat assessment, we try to determine why a student made a threat, and therefore how we can prevent the threat from being carried out.

Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8th Grade John

- 8th grade John reported by another student to have a hit list.
- Tells former girlfriend, “I’m gonna get even with you and all your friends by blowing you all away with a shotgun.”
- John denies hit list or threatening statement. Later acknowledges anger at several classmates and at Alice, his former girlfriend.

Immediate responses to a Very Serious Substantive Threat

- Take precautions to protect potential victims.
- Consult with law enforcement promptly.
- Notify intended victim and victim’s parents.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Begin Mental Health Assessment.
- Determine safety during suspension.
Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8th Grade John

- Principal contacted SRO. They inquire about John’s access to firearms.
- Parents summoned to school. John is suspended, referred for evaluation.
- Parents of victims are informed of threat, reassured about school’s actions.

Law Enforcement Investigation of Very Serious Substantive Threats

- Interview suspects and witnesses.
- Conduct searches for weapons and other evidence of planning.
- Serve as a resource for students with fears or information to share.
- Take appropriate protective action.

Mental Health Assessment

- Not a prediction model.
- Identify any mental health needs.
- Identify reasons why threat was made.
- Propose strategies for reducing risk.

Key Point

Our mental health assessments are not designed to PREDICT violence, but to find ways to PREVENT violence.

Mental Health Assessment

- **Who** – school staff member who is a mental health professional
- **When** – as soon as possible after a very serious threat
- **How** – Modify questions as clinically appropriate, use as much existing information as possible, concentrate on risk of violence

Sources of information for mental health assessment

Mental health professional will interview:

- Student
- Intended victim/witnesses
- Student’s parent
- School staff who know student (including SRO, school counselor, teachers)
- Outside professionals who know student
Mental Health Assessment FAQ’s

- **Parental Permission?** – not required in emergency, but otherwise necessary
- **Testing?** – use if clinically indicated, to supplement interviews
- **External evaluations?** – Not a substitute for evaluation by trained school staff

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**Key Point**

Threat assessments do NOT require referral to a mental health professional outside the school. Outside referrals are optional. Inside professionals have essential inside knowledge.

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**Student Interview**

- Review of threat and relationship with victim
- Stress and situational factors, family support
- Mental health symptoms (depression, psychosis, severe anxiety, or suicidality)
- Access to firearms
- Previous aggressive and delinquent behavior, exposure to violence
- Peer relations and social adjustment
- Coping and strengths
- Bullying and victimization experiences

**Beginning the student interview**

- “Do you know why I wanted to meet with you today?”
- Explain purpose of interview to understand what happened, why it happened, and what should be done to resolve the problem.
- Information will be shared with school staff who will be deciding what to do about the problem. No promise of confidentiality.
- This is the student’s opportunity to tell his/her side of the story and have a voice in what is decided.

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**Key Point**

Interviews conducted as part of a threat assessment are NOT confidential.

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**Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8th Grade John**

- John describes feeling rejected by Alice, teased by other boys.
- John admits hit list. Denies intent to hurt anyone. “They was messing with me and I was messing back.”
- John is willing to attend mediation sessions.
Parent interview

- Parent knowledge of threat
- Current stressors, family relations, childhood history
- Recent behavior and mental health
- School adjustment
- Peer relations and bullying
- History of aggressive and delinquent behavior, exposure to violence, access to weapons
- Willingness to assist in a safety plan
- Parent attitude toward school and Law enforcement

Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8th Grade John

- John's mother reports that John was treated for depression, stopped his medication a few months ago.
- John is stressed over parental separation and conflict.
- John does not have history of violence, does not have ready access to firearms.

Teacher/Staff Interviews

- Academics
- Teacher knowledge of threat
- Student's peer relations
- Depression and/or suicidality
- Discipline
- Aggression

Mental Health Assessment Report Template

**Identifying Information**

Give the student's name, 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 the principal, interviews with the student and witnesses, any parent interviews, and any psychological tests or scales administered.

**Major Findings**

Describe how the child presented and any important aspects of the child or her mental state, including any indications of mental disorder. 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 the child's perspective. Note whether the child has a history of violent or aggressive behavior, and any findings from the assessment that raise concern about the child's potential for violence, such as access to firearms, peer encouragement to fight, drug use, or inadequate home supervision.

**Recommendations**

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. More importantly, the report should present recommendations for reducing the risk of violence, and it is the source of these recommendations that will greatly impact students and families of students about the potential for violence. In discussing the recommendations with students, it is important to focus on the 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.

Behavior Support Plan

For use with:
- IEP
- 504 plan
- Any student

Step 7. Follow up with action plan.

- Determine action plan to reduce risk of violence.
- Identify appropriate interventions for student.
- Schedule follow-up contact with student to assess current risk and update plan.

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Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8th Grade John

- John returns to outpatient treatment. Parents recognize impact of their conflict on John.
- Dispute with boys is investigated. John attends mediation sessions with other students. Mutual apologies are given.
- John meets with SRO, agrees to report further problems to him. School counselor establishes relationship.

Threat Documentation Form

Communication and Problem Solving

Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach that requires communication and cooperation among all parties.

This process must not be hindered by FERPA.

What can school officials disclose in an emergency situation?

“In an emergency, FERPA permits school officials to disclose, without consent, education records, including personally identifiable information from those records, to protect the health or safety of students or other individuals.”


Can school officials share their observations of students?

“FERPA does not prohibit a school official from disclosing information about a student if the information is obtained through the school official’s personal knowledge or observation, and not from the student’s education records.”


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Can school officials share their law enforcement unit records?

"Under FERPA, investigative reports and other records created and maintained by these 'law enforcement units' are not considered 'education records' subject to FERPA. Accordingly, schools may disclose information from law enforcement unit records to anyone...."


Landmark Threat Case: Tarasoff

The Duty to Protect Potential Victims of Violence

- 1969, UC Berkeley student Prosenjit Poddar fell in love with Tanya Tarasoff, but she rebuffed him.
- Despondent Poddar told psychologist that he would kill Tanya if he could not have her.
- Psychologist broke confidentiality to notify police, who interviewed and released Poddar.
- Over 1 month later, Poddar killed Tanya.
- Poddar pled insanity, but convicted and served 5 years for manslaughter, then deported.
- Tarasoff family sued University, police, and therapist.

Tarasoff v Regents of University of California, 1974, 1976

Tarasoff

The Duty to Protect Potential Victims of Violence

- 1974 and 1976 California Supreme Court decided that suits against University and police failed, but...
- **Psychologist found liable** for failing to do enough to protect Tarasoff. Did not warn her personally. Court said, "The protective privilege ends where the public peril begins."
- Called "the duty to warn" or the "the duty to protect."
- Many cases in other states support the duty to break confidentiality and take action to protect potential victims of violence. (For example, Colorado federal case involving Hinckley’s psychiatrist, Brady v. Hopper)

Tarasoff v Regents of University of California, 1974, 1976

What did the students threaten to do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hit/Beat Up</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kill</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoot</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut/Stab</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Bomb</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 188 cases

How did schools respond to 188 threats?

- **Suspend**: 94
- **Expel**: 3
- **Arrest**: 6

Follow-up interviews on student threats

- Interviews conducted with school principals at end of school year and again the following fall.
- Follow-up time periods averaged 148 days until end of school year.
- Four students did not return to school after the threat, 17 left within 30 days after threat.
Change in student’s behavior after the threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As rated by school principals, followed up after the school year. N = 176.*

Follow-up on student behavior after the threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carried Out Threat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Violence</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Violation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*According to school principals interviewed after approximately one year.*

Research Needs

- Controlled studies comparing schools with and without threat assessment.
- Research on threat context and student characteristics.
- More follow-up studies of threat outcomes.
- Identification of effective threat prevention efforts (e.g., bullying reduction).

Memphis Field-Trial

Memphis Public Schools resolved 209 threats in 194 schools, including 110 threats to kill, shoot, or stab.
- 5 permanent expulsions, 3 incarcerations
- Office referrals declined >50%
- No reports of any threats carried out

*Behavioral Disorders, 2008*

Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

- 95 high schools using the UVA threat assessment model
- 131 using locally developed models
- 54 not using threat assessment

*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*
Violence Prevention in Schools
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

Findings for Virginia Model Schools
- Less bullying and other victimization
- Greater student willingness to seek help
- Perceive adults as more caring and fair
- Fewer long-term suspensions

Controlled for school size, poverty, minority %, school security measures, and neighborhood violent crime.

School Psychology Quarterly, 2009

Session 3
Bullying

1. The impact of bullying
2. Definition of bullying
3. Response to bullying
4. School climate research
5. Legal issues
Impact of Bullying and Victimization

- Depression & anxiety (Troy & Sroufe, 1987)
- Victim status stable over time and correlated with increased anxiety and depression, especially in girls (Dona, et al., 2001)
- Bullying is correlated with impulsivity and depression (Rosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999)
- 70% of bullies identified in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 (Dewey, 1997)

Bullying can lead to suicide.

Common Myths about Bullying

- Bullying is a normal part of growing up.
- Bullying toughens kids up for a harsh world.
- Bullying is a passing phase.
- Stand up to a bully and he will stop.

What is bullying?

Bullying is the repeated use of one’s strength or status for the purpose of intimidating or injuring another person. A conflict between equals is not bullying.

Forms of Bullying

- **Physical**
  - hitting, shoving, grabbing
- **Verbal**
  - teasing, name-calling
- **Social**
  - spreading rumors, shunning or excluding
- **Sexual**
  - inappropriate comments and touching
- **Cyber-bullying**
  - use of internet

Cyber Bullying

Use of communications technology to threaten, humiliate or insult others

- Email
- Cell phones
- Internet chat
- Websites
- Videos
Violence Prevention in Schools
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Cyber Bullying

Why is cyber bullying so harmful?
- Lack of social norms
- Anonymity and distance facilitates disinhibition
- Lack of context and tone breeds misunderstanding
- Multiple parties can be easily involved
- Conflicts can easily escalate

Elementary School Survey
23 schools, grades 3-5
3,101 students

Victims of Bullying

Have you been bullied at school in the past month?

Middle School Survey
7 schools, grades 6-8
3,265 students

Victims of Bullying

Have you been bullied at least 1 time per week in the past month?

High School Survey
Fall 2009
6 schools, grades 9-12
3,186 students

Seeking Help for Bullying

Have you told anyone that you were bullied in the past month?

Peer Nominations – An Alternative to Self-Report

- Student self-report is vulnerable to exaggeration, misunderstanding, and denial.
- Peer nominations are also vulnerable, but more reliable.
- Peer nominations allow you to identify potential victims.

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Who is being bullied?
Help us stop bullying at this school.

Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. Physical bullying is when a student hits, kicks, grabs, or shoves you on purpose. Verbal bullying is when a student threaten or teases you in a hurtful way. Social bullying is when a student tries to keep others from being your friend or from letting you join in what they are doing. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight.

Based on this definition of bullying, write the names of any students who are the victims of bullying. You may write the name of any student at your school whom you know has been bullied at school during the past month.

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________

Bullying Assessment Flow Chart

Step 1: Interview the students

Interview all students involved in the incident.

What happened in the incident? How did it start? Did you know this was happening?

Was this possibly a crime? Yes

Contact the police.

Was the incident possible a crime? Yes

Get help and support. Get help and support from someone you trust. Contact your school counselor or another adult you trust.

When is bullying a crime?

- Assault
- Larceny
- Battery
- Robbery
- Extortion
- Thefts
- False Imprisonment
- Sexual Harassment
- Stalking
- Hazing
- Threats
European study by Olweus found that 60% of bullies have a criminal conviction by age 24, compared to 10% of controls.

Bullying can be prevented

1. Staff training on bullying.
2. Student and parent education about bullying and school policy.
3. Classroom instruction on bullying.
4. Identify victims and intervene.
5. Pre-post surveys to measure impact.

Burley Middle School

Virginia High School Safety Study

Who participated in the study?
296 of 314 schools (94%)
1. 7,431 ninth grade students
2. 2,353 ninth grade teachers
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**Bullying Climate Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying is a problem at this school.</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</td>
<td>29 71</td>
<td>29 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students here often get put down because of their race or ethnicity.</td>
<td>65 35</td>
<td>65 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New students are made to feel welcome here by other students.</td>
<td>30 70</td>
<td>30 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from different neighborhoods get along well together here.</td>
<td>28 72</td>
<td>28 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.</td>
<td>45 55</td>
<td>45 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at this school accept me for who I am.</td>
<td>19 81</td>
<td>19 81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Victimization**

This year in school have any of the following happened to you personally in the school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage to personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked and had to see a doctor.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked, but not serious enough to see a doctor.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received obscene remarks or gestures from a student.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was threatened in remarks by a student.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a weapon pulled on me.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Virginia High School Safety Study**

**School climate factors**

1. **Structure**
   - Rules are strictly enforced, but fair
2. **Support**
   - Teachers treat me with respect, willing to seek help from them.

**The school rules are fair.**

![Chart showing the percentage of students who agree with the statement](chart)

**Adults in this school want all students to do their best.**

![Chart showing the percentage of students who agree with the statement](chart)

**Virginia High School Safety Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 groups of schools</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Schools with least structure and support have the highest rates of bullying and student victimization.

Virginia High School Safety Study

Schools do not have to choose between “get tough” and “be supportive” policies, but should strive for both. However, rules must be enforced in a fair and consistent manner that respects and supports students.

School Liability: Davis v Monroe

Fifth grade girl was victim of sexual harassment over a 6 month period by a classmate who attempted to fondle her breasts, rubbed against her, and talked about getting in bed with her. Multiple complaints to teacher and principal produced no correction action. Police charged boy with sexual battery and he pled guilty.

Lower courts dismissed the complaint, finding that student-to-student harassment not covered by Title IX. In May, 1999 Supreme Court reversed the lower court opinion.

Sexual Harassment: Davis v Monroe Opinion

In May, 1999 Supreme Court ruled that a school board is liable under Title IX for student-to-student harassment if:
1. The sexual harassment was so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it deprived the victim of access to educational opportunities and benefits.
2. School authorities had knowledge of the harassment.
3. School authorities were deliberately indifferent to the sexual harassment.

(see www.streetlaw.org)

Liability for Bullying

Scruggs v Meriden Board of Education
U.S. District Court of Connecticut
- Middle school boy receiving LD services was bullied repeatedly, and eventually committed suicide
- Family sued superintendent, vice principal and school counselor
- Court found the school to be negligent and deliberately indifferent

LW v Toms River Regional School Board of Education
- New Jersey boy repeatedly teased about perceived sexual orientation in elementary and middle school (called “fagget” “gay” etc., physically bullied and threatened)
- Court cited Davis v Monroe in finding for plaintiff, awarded 50K
- School ordered to revise policies, train staff, implement bullying prevention program

Liability Protection

- Follow recognized standards.
- Make reasonable decisions. (Perfection is not required.)
- Maintain adequate documentation. (Post hoc records are inadequate.)
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Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

Training Workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virginia School Divisions</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albemarle</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleghany</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashland</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashland City</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashland County</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta County</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta County S.S.</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta County S.S.</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Threat Notification:
Take charge of the process!

- Immediately contact parents of all students who are involved.
- Safety trumps confidentiality. Share what is necessary to assure safety.
- Keep faculty and staff informed. They have the need to know.
- Consider sending a general letter of information to address rumors and fears.

Parent Notification:
Parents of threat victims

- FERPA does not prevent schools from notifying parents that their child has been threatened. In substantive cases, parents should be told the nature of the threat and the identity of the student who made the threat.
- Explain to the parents what steps have been taken to maintain the safety of their child (e.g., student disciplined, parents contacted, police notified) so they can judge what they must do.
- Remain in contact with parents to assure them that the school will maintain the safety of their child.

Parent Notification:
Parents of threat victims

- Build victim notification into the plan for a student’s return to school after making a threat.
- Consider requiring student to make an apology or explanation to the victim.
- Consider requiring student to let you disclose information to the parents of victims.
- Notify parents of a victim when a student is returning to school. Offer them reassurance, even if you cannot disclose confidential information.

Threat Notification:
Information for a general letter

- Acknowledge that a threat was made and describe the nature of the threat. (“A student called in a bomb threat this morning.”)
- The school is following its policy on threats. The police were contacted and are working with school authorities.
- Steps were taken to assure everyone’s safety. (“The school was searched and no bomb was found. The police are continuing their investigation to identify the person responsible for the call.”)
- Call us if you have any questions or concerns.

Documentation of Threats

1. Maintain quality of threat evaluation process
2. Document incidents and responses
3. Liability protection
4. Evaluate threat rates and trends
Violence Prevention in Schools
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

Evolution of a Threat Conspiracy

- 16-year-old initiates rumors of blowing up and shooting up his school “like Columbine.”
- Classmate decides to go along with the gag.
- Young neighbor spreads rumor to middle school.
- Middle school boy with no connection to any of the other boys pretends to be part of the plot.

Allegations

1. Communication in writing or by electronic message of a threat to kill or injure
2. Conspire to blow up 2 high schools
3. Conspire to murder others

Known Evidence

1. Website expressing regard for Columbine, photo holding a shotgun
2. Boasting about committing a school shooting
3. Statements to police about how to construct a bomb and how one might carry out a shooting, but no statement of clear intent or plan
4. Guns locked in a safe belonging to father of 15 year old

Court Disposition of a Threat Conspiracy

- Pled guilty, parents agree to send son to residential treatment out of state.
- Other boys acquitted and released.

Threat Education

- Threats are taken seriously.
  - Disruptive and frightening
  - School discipline
  - Criminal charges

Typical Threat 1

- An angry student says “I’m gonna kill you” to a classmate.
- What do you do?
Typical Threat 1

- On interview, the student says he has no plans to harm the classmate and that he just lost his temper. He offers to apologize.
- What kind of threat?

Typical Threat 2

- A student tells a friend that he is going to beat up Joe in the back parking lot after school today. The friend tells you.
- What do you do?

Typical Threat 2

- On interview, the student denies making such a statement. He says that what he does after school is his own business.
- What kind of threat?

Typical Threat 3

- A student sends an email threatening to “blow away the preps” at school. When interviewed, the boy says he has a right to free speech. He has a history of discipline problems and students say they are worried.
- What kind of threat?
- What do you do?

Typical Threat 3

- This threat is substantive because it cannot be easily resolved. It is very serious because it involves a threat to kill.

Typical Threat 4

- A 5th grader is being teased on a daily basis by several students on his school bus. One day he screams that he is going to shoot everyone on the bus.
- What kind of threat?
- What do you do?
Typical Threat 4

- A 5th grader is being teased on a daily basis by several students on his school bus. One day he screams that he is going to shoot everyone on the bus.
- This threat is transient if you are able to resolve it to your satisfaction. Otherwise, it must be regarded as a very serious substantive threat.

http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu
Figure 1. Decision tree for student threat assessment.

**Step 1. Evaluate threat.**
- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made threat, the recipient of threat, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact content of the threat and statements by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student’s intentions.

**Step 2. Decide whether threat is clearly transient or substantive.**
- Consider criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
- Consider student’s age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

- Threat is clearly transient.
- Threat is substantive or threat meaning not clear.

**Step 3. Respond to transient threat.**
Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action. Student may be required to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

**Step 4. Decide whether the substantive threat is serious or very serious.** A serious threat might involve a threat to assault someone ("I’m gonna beat that kid up"). A very serious threat involves use of a weapon or is a threat to kill, rape, or

- Threat is serious.
- Threat is very serious.

**Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.**
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying intended victim and victim’s parents.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Consider contacting law enforcement.
- Refer student for counseling, dispute mediation, or other appropriate intervention.
- Discipline student as appropriate to severity and chronicity of situation.

**Step 6. Conduct safety evaluation.**
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the victim and victim’s parents.
- Consult with law enforcement.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Begin a mental health evaluation of the student.
- Discipline student as appropriate.

**Step 7. Implement a safety plan.**
- Complete a written plan.
- Maintain contact with the student.
- Revise plan as needed.

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Interview all students involved in the incident.
For use by school administrators and staff. “What happened between you two?” “How did it start?” “Did you tell him/her to stop?” “Is there anything you did that might have contributed to this happening?”

Was this possibly a crime?
Was there physical contact or injury, use of a weapon, serious threat of injury, stalking, kidnapping or detainment, loss of property, or damage to property?
Yes
Contact law enforcement.
Let the SRO investigate and decide whether a crime has occurred.
Notify parents.
Let parents of the targeted student know that you have contacted the SRO or other law enforcement.

No

Was there aggression?
Physical aggression such as hitting, shoving or threatening injury; verbal aggression such as teasing or name-calling; social aggression such as spreading rumors and shunning.
No
Not bullying
Consider another infraction.

Was there dominance?
Was the aggressor stronger or dominant over the other? Was one side outnumbered?
No
Not bullying
Could be a fight or some other infraction.

Was there persistence?
Was there more than one incident or did the aggressor fail to stop when asked? Look for evidence of a repeated problem.
No
Not bullying
Consider another infraction. Would be bullying if behavior continues.

Respond to bullying.
1. Discipline aggressor for bullying, based on the seriousness and persistence of the behavior, in accordance with the school division’s policy and student code of conduct.
2. Educate and counsel all students, including bystanders, about bullying.
3. Suggest that the aggressor apologize and promise not to do it again.
4. Ask all students, “What could you do that would keep this from happening again?”
5. Ask all students, “Would you let me know if anything like this happens again?”
6. Monitor and follow-up to make sure that bullying does not recur.

Dewey Cornell, Virginia Youth Violence Project
http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia
Model Regulations for Conducting a Threat Assessment

I. PURPOSE
To establish procedures for conducting threat assessments in response to student threats of violence.

II. DEFINITIONS
A. A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, or gestured. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to an actual or prospective victim and regardless of whether the actual or prospective victim is aware the threat existing in any fashion, whether orally, visually, in writing, or electronically. A threat assessment is a procedure to identify potentially dangerous or violent situations and resolve them.

B. A transient threat is a threat that does not express a lasting intent to harm someone. A threat is transient only if it can be quickly and easily resolved and no longer exists.

C. A serious substantive threat is a threat that expresses a continuing intent to assault someone.

D. A very serious substantive threat is a threat that involves using a weapon or a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury to someone.

III. PROCEDURES
A. A threat assessment may be conducted if a student makes an explicit or implicit threat, or if the student’s behavior indicates that a threat is reasonably likely. The goal of the threat assessment is to provide assistance to the student being assessed, to support victims or potential victims, and to take appropriate preventive or corrective measures to maintain a safe and secure school environment. A threat assessment is not a disciplinary action, and is not a prerequisite to disciplinary action. Documents completed as part of a threat assessment may or may not be used in a disciplinary proceeding.

B. Student threats shall be reported to the school administrator (principal, assistant principal, or principal designee) if they cannot be easily and readily resolved by other staff. Criteria for reporting threats should include the age of the child and the context of the threat or remark.

C. The student who communicated the threat, the recipient(s) of the threat, and witnesses shall be interviewed to obtain specific information regarding the threat, in accordance with the Threat Assessment Guidelines. The Guidelines can be found at <address>

D. When a threat is reported to the school administrator, the administrator makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. If it can be determined that the threat is a transient threat and has been resolved, the Threat Assessment Documentation may be completed at the administrator’s discretion. If the threat has not been resolved, the Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet forms shall be completed.

E. In every instance in which a threat against a student is not immediately resolved, the school administrator shall notify the parent/guardian of the student who made the threat. The school administrator shall also notify any identifiable victims or targets of the threat. If the target is a student or students, the parent/guardians shall also be notified. If the threat is not specific about the identity of the victim(s), the school administrator shall make a determination based on the circumstances of the threat whether it is appropriate to communicate to a more general notification to potential victims, such as in the form of a letter to parent/guardians. In most cases, such a letter would be appropriate to address questions and concerns that might be disruptive to learning and to solicit information that would be relevant to resolving the threat.

F. Threat assessment and disciplinary procedures are separate processes. Regardless of whether a threat is determined to be transient, serious substantive, or very serious substantive, appropriate disciplinary procedures shall be followed.

G. If the threat is determined to be serious substantive or very serious substantive, the Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet forms and other relevant documents regarding the threat shall be maintained in the cumulative file of the student’s scholastic record. If the threat is determined to be transient and the forms were completed, they may be maintained in the student’s scholastic record at the administrator’s discretion.

Adapted from Fairfax County Public Schools

For more information, contact the University of Virginia Youth Violence Project <http://youthviolence.edschool.Virginia.edu> or email <youthvio@virginia.edu>
**THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL**
Adapted from the Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence (Cornell & Sheras, 2006)

### IDENTIFY AND EVALUATE THREAT

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 messaging, email, or other electronic means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended victim(s) and regardless of whether the intended victim is aware of the threat. This protocol does NOT address threats to damage property, threats made by non-students, fights with no threat, or verbiage such as slurs, insults, or verbal abuse that does not constitute a threat. Threats may be implied or stated in an indirect manner if a recipient would reasonably regard the behavior as a threat. WHEN IN DOUBT, treat the expression as a threat and conduct a threat assessment.

Student threats shall be reported to the school administrator (principal, assistant principal, or principal designee) if they cannot be easily and readily resolved by other staff. Criteria for reporting threats should include age of the child, and the context of the threat or remark.

The administrator makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. The student, recipients of threat, and other witnesses shall be interviewed to obtain a specific account of threat in context using the Threat Assessment Documentation form. If the threat has not been resolved, and the administrator determines it is potentially serious, then the Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet should be completed.

### Student Interview

- Do you know why I wanted to talk with you?
- What happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?
- What did you mean when you said or did that?
- How do you think he/she feels about what you said or did?
- What was the reason you said or did that?
- What are you going to do now that you have made this threat?

### Witness Interview

- What exactly happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did [student] say or do?
- What do you think he/she meant when saying that?
- How do you feel about what he/she said or did?
- Why did he/she say or do that?

### DETERMINE WHETHER THREAT IS CLEARLY TRANSIENT OR SUBSTANTIVE

#### Transient Threat

- Meets one or more of the following:
  - Non-genuine expression or intended as joke or figure or speech
  - Non-sustainable intent to harm or temporary anger that is resolved
  - Resolved on scene or office (time-limited)
  - Conflict is resolved and ends with apology, retraction, or clarification

**WHEN IN DOUBT, consider threat as substantive and assess further**

#### Substantive Threat

- Factors to consider in judging a threat to be substantive:
  - Specific, plausible details such as a specific victim, time, place, and method
  - Threat has been repeated over time or related to multiple persons
  - Threat is reported as a plan or planning has taken place
  - Recruitment of accomplices or invitation for an audience
  - Physical evidence of intent to carry out threat (e.g., lists, drawings, written plan)
  - Student’s age and capability of carrying out the threat
  - Student’s history of aggressive behavior
  - Credibility of student and witness accounts

### DETERMINE IF SUBSTANTIVE THREAT IS SERIOUS OR VERY SERIOUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Very Serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat to assault</td>
<td>Threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury or use weapons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RESPOND TO TRANSIENT THREAT

- Contact student’s parents if necessary
- Notify intended victim’s parents if necessary to prevent further problems
- See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology or making amends
- Consult with safety and security specialist/SRO if appropriate
- Refer for conflict mediation or counseling, to resolve problem if appropriate
- Follow discipline procedures
- Develop Behavior Intervention Plan/behavior contract as appropriate
- Maintain threat assessment documentation in student’s cumulative file, if completed, as appropriate

### RESPOND TO SERIOUS THREAT

- Mobilize threat assessment team members as needed
- Notify student’s parents
- Protect and notify intended victim and parents of victim
- Caution the student about the consequences of carrying out the threat
- Provide direct supervision of student until parents assume control
- Consult with SRO or safety/security specialist
- Refer for conflict resolution or counseling
- Follow discipline procedures
- Develop Behavior Intervention Plan/behavior contract
- Maintain threat assessment documentation in student’s cumulative file

### RESPOND TO VERY SERIOUS THREAT

- Mobilize threat assessment team and follow procedures for Serious threat, including protective action and notification of intended victim and parents of victim
- Provide direct supervision of student until parents assume control
- Notify assistant superintendent or designee
- Consult with SRO or safety/security specialist for investigation of threat
- Initiate immediate mental health assessment if emergency situation; otherwise notify parents of need for mental health assessment
- Follow discipline procedures
- Develop Behavior Intervention Plan/behavior contract
- Maintain threat assessment documentation in student’s cumulative file

For more information, contact the University of Virginia Youth Violence Project <http://youthviolence.edschool.Virginia.edu> or email <youthvio@virginia.edu>
# Threat Assessment Documentation

**Instructions:** This form should be completed by the school administrator when conducting a threat assessment. This form should be maintained as part of the student’s cumulative file if the threat is determined to be substantive. If the threat is determined to be transient, the form may be maintained in the student’s cumulative file at the discretion of the administrator. Record specific account(s) of the threat made from the student making the threat and from the recipient(s) of the threat and witness(s) as applicable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator completing form:</th>
<th>Position:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Date this form completed:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Information on student making threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of student</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Home phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency contact</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there a history of violent behavior in school?</th>
<th>Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown ☐</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a history of violent behavior away from school?</td>
<td>Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a history of discipline referrals?</td>
<td>Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other information:

## Information about the threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date threat occurred:</th>
<th>Date administrator learned of threat:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Where the threat was made: | |
| Who reported the threat:   | |

| What was reported (use quotation marks to identify direct quotes) | |

## Information on target(s) of threat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has the intended target/victim(s) been identified?</th>
<th>Yes ☐ No ☐</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Name(s) & grade of victim(s): | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target(s) of the threat (check all that apply):</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student ☐ Teacher ☐ Parent ☐ Administrator ☐ Other ☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of victim/recipient(s) of threat:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one ☐ two ☐ three ☐ four ☐ five or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat Assessment Student Interview Form</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directions:</strong> Use these questions as a guide to interview the student making the threat. Other questions can be asked as appropriate. This form should not be completed by the student. Use quotation marks to indicate student’s exact words when possible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator completing form:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Date this form completed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviewed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> What happened today when you were [place of incident]? (Record student’s exact words for key statements if possible.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> What did you mean when you said or did that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> How do you think [person who was threatened] feels about what you said or did? (Probe to see if the student believes it frightened or intimidated the person.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> What was the reason you said or did that? (Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history to this threat.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> What are you going to do now? (Ask questions to determine if the student intends to carry out the threat.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.</strong> Additional witnesses or other relevant information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, contact the University of Virginia Youth Violence Project <http://youthviolence.edschool.Virginia.edu> or email <youthvio@virginia.edu>
Threat Assessment Witness Interview Form

**Directions:** Use these questions as a guide to interview witnesses who have direct or indirect knowledge of the threat. Complete separate forms for each witness. Other questions can be asked as appropriate. This form should not be completed by the witness. Use quotation marks to indicate witness’s exact words when possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator completing form:</th>
<th>Position:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Date this form completed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness interviewed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What exactly did [student who made the threat] say or do? (Record witness’s exact words for key statements if possible.)

2. What do you think he or she meant when saying to doing that?

3. How do you feel about what he or she said or did? (Gauge whether the witness feels frightened or intimidated.) Are you concerned that he or she might actually do it?

4. Why did he or she say or do that? (Find out whether the witness knows of any prior conflict or history behind the threat.)

5. Additional witnesses or other relevant information.
Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence Order Form

Use the power of teams to prevent violence

Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence

Dewey Cornell, Ph.D. and Peter Sheras, Ph.D.
Grades K-12

This timely manual should be considered one of every school’s most important references. It can help prevent the kind of violent situations that, unfortunately, have raised so much fear and concern in our schools.

Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence offers practical information about forming school-based teams to conduct assessments on students who threaten violence. Team leaders (principals or assistant principals) will learn skills needed to make preliminary evaluations that determine if a threat can be quickly resolved or if more extensive assessment and intervention is required. In the latter case, a full-threat assessment team—typically consisting of the principal or assistant principal, school resource officer, school psychologist, and counselor—will take steps outlined in the manual to prevent a violent act from occurring.

This resource goes beyond “on-the-spot” prevention, taking a proactive approach to help team members understand why a student made a threat and how to identify the underlying cause that created his/her turmoil.

Grounded in research that supports team-based threat assessment, these guidelines offer a solid game plan for promoting safer, trouble-free schools.

Professional Development Available (Contact a Sopris West customer service representative at (800) 547-6747 or e-mail us at customerservice@sopriswest.com.)
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Illustrated with numerous case studies—many drawn from the author’s work as a forensic psychologist—this book identifies 19 myths and misconceptions about youth violence, from ordinary bullying to rampage shootings. It covers controversial topics such as gun control and the effects of entertainment violence on children. The author demonstrates how fear of school violence has resulted in misguided, counterproductive educational policies and practices ranging from boot camps to zero tolerance. He reviews evidence from hundreds of controlled studies showing that school-based school violence prevention programs and mental health services, which are largely effective, are often overlooked in favor of politically popular yet ineffective programs such as school uniforms, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, and Scared Straight. He concludes by reviewing some of his own research on student threat assessment as a more flexible and less punitive alternative to zero tolerance, and presents a wide ranging series of recommendations for improving and expanding the use of school-based violence prevention programs and mental health services for troubled students.

Key features include the following:

**Contrarian Approach**—This book identifies and refutes 19 basic misconceptions about trends in youth violence and school safety, and shows how the fear of school violence has been exaggerated through inaccurate statistics, erroneous conclusions about youth violence, and over-emphasis on atypical, sensational cases.

**Readability**—The book translates scientific, evidence-based research into language that educators, parents, law enforcement officers, and policymakers can readily understand and shows what can be done to improve things.

**Expertise**—Dewey Cornell is a forensic psychologist and Professor of Education at the University of Virginia, where he holds an endowed chair in Education. He is Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project and is a faculty associate of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy. The author of more than 100 publications in psychology and education, he frequently testifies in criminal proceedings and at legislative hearings involving violence prevention efforts.

This book is appropriate for courses or seminars dealing wholly or partly with school violence and school safety. It is also an indispensable volume for school administrators and safety officers; local, state, and national policymakers; involved parents; and academic libraries serving these groups.

**Contents:**

- Preface
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- What Caused the School Shootings?
- How Many Guns in Our Schools?
- What Can We Do About Bullying?
- Are We Teaching Our Kids to Kill?
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