Overview

1. Rationale for threat assessment
2. Use of the threat assessment guidelines
3. Pathways to violence
4. Research
5. Liability and confidentiality

Learning Objectives

1. Know how to distinguish a transient threat from a substantive threat.
2. Understand how a mental health evaluation for threat assessment purposes differs from other kinds of evaluations.
3. Know the main research findings supporting a threat assessment approach.

What is Threat Assessment?

Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.

Prevention means “to keep something from happening”
Crisis response is not prevention.

A crisis occurs when prevention has failed.

Prevention must start before the gunman is at your door.

Prevention does not require prediction.

We cannot predict who will have an accident, but safety regulations make safer roads, cars, and drivers.

Universal, primary, or tier 1 prevention

Shootings seem unpredictable, but, Prevention does not require prediction!

House Education and Labor Committee Hearing on Campus Safety May 15, 2007

Prevention can reduce risk factors.

We cannot predict who will get cancer, but we can identify risk and protective factors that reduce cancer rates dramatically.

Selected, secondary, or tier 2 prevention

Prevention can prevent deterioration.

We can intervene to resolve crisis situations before they deteriorate into violence.

Intensive, tertiary, or tier 3 prevention
Threat assessment is part of a comprehensive approach

- Intensive monitoring and supervision
- Programs for bullying
- Community-based treatment
- Alternative to school placement
- Special education evaluation and services

At-Risk Students
Students with some problem behavior problems

- Social skills groups
- Short-term counseling
- Monitoring and other school programs
- Ongoing and intensive support
- Special education evaluation and services

Schoolwide Prevention
All students

Fear is a barrier to prevention.

School shootings are so traumatic that they skew perceptions of school safety and convince the public and policymakers that there are dramatic needs for security measures.

Annual Gun Toll
32,000 deaths
84,000 injuries
116,000 total
318 Shootings per day

Shooting data from: CDC National Vital Statistics
http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html
Shooting injuries from: http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/nfirates.html

But 232,000 outside of schools
Homicides At School vs Outside of School
Ages 5-18

Sources: CDC National Center for Health Statistics and School Associated Violent Death Surveillance Study (All annual totals are approximate, using the school year for school homicides and the calendar year for non-school data).

2005-2010 Homicides in 37 States

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School violence has declined.

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Indicators of school crime and safety: 2013. Table 2.1. National Crime Victimization Study data reported by National Center for Education Statistics (Robers et al., 2014)

What Can Be Done About School Shootings?
A Review of the Evidence

“Any given school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6,000 years.”

125,000 schools + 21 deaths/year


Why the Fear of School Violence Matters

1. School Suspensions
2. School Fortification
3. Active Shooter Drills
Zero Tolerance Suspensions After the Newtown Shootings

6 year old pointed finger and said "pow!"
http://www.sott.net/article/355561-6-year-old-suspended-for-pretend-gunshot

Zero Tolerance Suspensions

9 year old with toy gun 12 year old doodler Poem about Sandy Hook, "I understand the killings..."

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

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

Texas Study of School Discipline

Tracked school and court records
1 million 7th grade students for six years
60% suspended or expelled
**Suspension Practices**

Suspension is a practice that has more negative than positive effects on students:

- Fall behind in their classes
- Feel alienated and rejected
- Continue to misbehave and be suspended
- Drop out of school
- Juvenile court involvement

The school-to-prison pipeline

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**Racial Discipline Gap**

- High school suspension rates for certain minority groups
- Potential discrimination
- USDOE Office for Civil Rights

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**3.3 Million Suspensions Per Year Fuel the School to Prison Pipeline**

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**Why the Fear of School Violence Matters**

Newtown Rampage Spurs $5 Billion School Security Spending

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Workshop participants have permission to copy this for others in your school system.
Building Security Measures

Bullet-Proof Building Entrances

Building Security Measures

Metal detectors and x-ray screening

Building Security Measures

Security and Police Officers

Building Security Measures

Extra security in Hillsborough schools would cost $4 million
School security measures could cost millions locally
Additional Florida School Security Could Cost $100 Million
School security wish list would cost Marion County $160M
Armed guards in every Minn. school would cost $138 million
NRA proposal would cost state schools about $138 million

(DelAngelo, Brent, & Janmi, 2011)

School Shooter Drills Are Widely Practiced

Extra security in Hillsborough schools would cost $4 million
School security measures are expensive and deprive schools of resources that could be allocated to preventive measures such as anti-bullying programs and counseling services.

Armed guards in every Minn. school would cost $138 million
NRA proposal would cost state schools about $138 million

Every Per Pupil dollar spent for Security is a Per Pupil dollar NOT spent for Instruction.

Workshop participants have permission to copy this for others in your school system.
Students are involved in shooter drills.

Students escorted from school during a shooter drill.

Simulated Injuries

Students taught to prepare for intruders.

Many states mandate 1 or more lockdown drills per year.

Training Students to Attack

Little evidence that school security measures are effective.
Overall, studies conclude that there is little evidence that security measures reduce school crime.

Police officers in schools can have both positive and negative effects. When police enforce school discipline, student misbehavior is criminalized.

FBI Recommendations on School Violence

“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)

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.

Goals of Threat Assessment

1. Prevent violence.
2. Address problems such as bullying before they escalate.
3. Reduce use of school suspension.
4. Improve student trust in staff.
Bullying in middle and high school:
- School newspaper
- Rest room monitoring
- Hallway teasing
- Classroom mischief
- Uneven enforcement
- Marching band initiation
- Gym class humiliation

Bullying led to:
- Change in peer group
  - Freaks vs preps
  - Shoot up the school
- Mental deterioration
  - Depression
  - Threatening voices
  - Man under the house
  - You gotta do this

School shooting from "The Basketball Diaries"
Warning: Violent Content

Three students killed, 5 wounded in shooting

Carneal pleads guilty in shootings

West Paducah, Ky.
DEC. 1, 1997

Three girls were killed when MICHAEL CARNEAL, 14, opened fire on a prayer meeting that had assembled in school just before the start of classes. He had warned a classmate that "something big" would happen. When a friend pushed him to a wall to stop the rampage, Carneal said, "Kill me, please. I can't believe I did that." He faces trial as an adult.

A .22-cal. Ruger pistol was used.
Contributing Factors

Bullying
Mental Illness
Peer Influences
Access to guns

Prevention Opportunities

Bullying
Mental Illness
Peer Influences
Access to guns

No one reported his threats

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

Columbine Threats

3 Reports of School Shooting Threats
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.

6 Principles of the Threat Assessment Process

(dataset from Secret Service/DOE Guide)

1. Targeted violence is the result of an understandable process, not a random or spontaneous act.
2. Consider person, situation, setting, & target.
3. Maintain an investigative, skeptical mindset.
4. Focus on facts and behaviors, not traits.
5. Use information from all possible sources.
6. *Making* a threat is not the same as *posing* a threat. Ask "Is this student on a path toward an attack?"

Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence

A collaborative project of:
University of Virginia Curry School of Education
Albemarle County Public Schools
Charlottesville City Public Schools
Funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund

Field-Test Schools

22 Elementary schools
6 Middle schools
4 High schools
3 Alternative schools
35 Total
Team roles

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

School divisions may further specify team roles and include other staff to meet local needs.

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.

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.

Grade Levels for 188 Student Threats of Violence

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Number of Threats</th>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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What did the students threaten to do?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Hit/Beat Up</td>
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<td>Kill</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoot</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cut/Stab</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vague</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other/Bomb</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

N = 188 cases

Key Point

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.

### Key Point

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

#### Continuum of Threats

**Just screaming or having a tantrum is not a threat. The question is whether the student expresses intent to harm someone.**

**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 6. Conduct Safety Evaluation.**

**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 are 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...

Transient versus substantive threats

Substantive Threats

Transient Threats

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.

**Transient Threats**

1. Threat Reported to Principal
2. Evaluate Threat
3. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.
4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.
5. Respond to serious substantive threat.
6. Conduct Safety Evaluation
7. Follow up on action plan.

**Step 3. Responses to a transient threat.**

- 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.
**Student Threat Assessment: An Evidence-Based Approach**

**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 the 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?**

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<th>Number of Transient Threats</th>
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**Transient versus Substantive Threats**

- Transient Threats 70%
- Substantive Threats 30%

**Serious Substantive Threats**

**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?**

![Graph showing number of substantive threats by grade level.]

**Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.**

- Take precautions to protect potential victims. May consult with law enforcement.
- Notify intended victim and victim’s parents.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Discipline student for threat.
- Determine appropriate intervention for student, such as counseling or dispute mediation.
- Follow up to verify that threat has been resolved and interventions in progress.

**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 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.

**Very serious cases are relatively rare**

**Very Serious Substantive Threats**

**Very Serious** → **Substantive Threats**

**Transient Threats**

**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**

- Threat Reported to Principal
  - Threat is Serious
  - Threat is Very Serious
  - Threat is Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
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  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly Transient or Substantive
  - Threat is Clearly...
Step 6.  
Conduct a Safety Evaluation for a Very Serious Substantive Threat.

Safety Evaluation conducted by a team.
- Principal leads the team.
- School psychologist or other mental health professional conducts Mental Health Assessment.
- School resource officer consults on legal issues.
- School counselor leads intervention planning.

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.

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.

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

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**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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**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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**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 subject 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 his 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 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.

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 are beyond current knowledge in the field of risk assessment. The report may identify risk factors and protective factors, and express concern 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 nature of these recommendations that should convey the nature and degree of concern about the potential for violence. In all cases, the goal is to reduce the risk of violence rather than predict violence. Recommendations may include a wide range of strategies, and should address both any immediate safety needs to protect potential victims and broader efforts to resolve conflicts or pressures 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.
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

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

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

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

3 Pathways to Violent Behavior

- Psychotic Path
- Antisocial Path
- Conflict Path

3 Pathways to Violence

There are multiple pathways to violence and thus no single profile or set of warning signs.

- 3% Psychotic Pathway (Severe mental illness)
  - Paranoid delusions
  - Grandiose delusions
  - Auditory hallucinations

- 15% Antisocial Pathway (Criminality)
  - Predatory, goal-oriented
  - Psychopathic
  - Group or gang-affiliated

- 20% Conflict Pathway (Revenge)
  - Abused/Bullied
  - Betrayed/cheated
  - Sense of injustice

When can prevention occur?

- Prevention
  - Physical Preparation
  - Planning and Consultation
  - Rumination over Violence
  - Grievance or Disappointment

- Psychotic Pathway (Severe mental illness)
  - Paranoid delusions
  - Grandiose delusions
  - Auditory hallucinations

- Antisocial Pathway (Criminality)
  - Predatory, goal-oriented
  - Psychopathic
  - Group or gang-affiliated

- Conflict Pathway (Revenge)
  - Abused/Bullied
  - Betrayed/cheated
  - Sense of injustice
Look for patterns, not a single profile.

Antisocial youth -- instrumental crime
Conflicted youth -- reactive anger
Psychotic youth -- delusional motive

Antisocial Youth
- Instrumental crimes
- Under-controlled aggression
- Antisocial peers
- Delinquent history
- Early childhood problems
- School discipline history

Psychotic Youth
- Delusional motive
- Auditory hallucinations
- Substance abuse
- Resentment over mistreatment
- Alienation from peers
- Odd behaviors

Conflicted youth
- Reactive violence of victims
- Over-controlled hostility
- Few previous overt behavior problems
- Over-sensitive to shame
- Intense need for approval, status
- Suicidality

High school senior with history of school and community behavior problems, drug use, family discord
- Suspended from school for profanity, defiance, tobacco
- Took car from classmate and shot him

Police Arrest Former Student in High School Shooting

December 01, 1992

Police arrested a former student Thursday in the shooting death of an associate principal at a suburban Milwaukee high school.

The suspect, Leonard McDowell, 21, had been arrested twice in the past 13 months on school property, police said in Wauwatosa, Wis.
- Early behavior problems, retained 2x in K, parents divorced, sibling schizophrenic
- Bomb threats age 14, placed in special ed.
- Laughed & talked to self, appeared to be "in fantasy world."
- Intense anxiety and avoidant behaviors, tics, foot dragging, contamination fears, panic attacks, began drinking.
- Obsessed with Bill Daley of Bob Newhart Show and Barry Manilow. Aggressive at home.
- Age 18 teacher assault, sent to alternative school as "mentally ill and dangerous."
- Trespassed at school, confronted by assistant principal, struggled with police.
- "I got a fissure of the brain, my head snaps." Means voices. Repeatedly talks about shooting assistant principal to fix his fissure.
- Age 21. Zig Ziglar's "I'll meet you at the top."
Bullying motivated many of the school shootings

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 schools not responsible for student-to-student harassment. May 1999 Supreme Court reversed this decision.

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

- 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 “faggot” “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

“OCR raises the bar for schools.”

OCR Dear Colleague letter, 2010

The statutes that OCR enforces include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 19641 (Title VI), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 19722 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 19733 (Section 504); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 19904 (Title II).

Section 504 and Title II prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.5 School districts may violate these civil rights statutes and the Department’s implementing regulations when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school employees.”
USDOE OSER Policy
Recommendations for Bullying of Students with Disabilities

- Comprehensive multi-tiered behavioral framework
- Implement clear policies on bullying
- Collect data on bullying
- Notify parents when bullying occurs
- Address ongoing concerns
- Sustain prevention efforts


Research on Threat Assessment

1. Initial field-test in 35 schools
2. Memphis field test
3. Special education outcomes
4. Staff response to training
5. High school climate retrospective study
6. High school suspension prospective study
7. Randomized control trial in 40 schools
8. Statewide suspension rate study

Research on Threat Assessment


What did the students threaten to do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrest</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspend</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workshop participants have permission to copy this for others in your school system.
**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.

**Follow-up on student behavior after the threat**

- Carried Out Threat: 0
- Other Violence: 31
- Discipline Violation: 100

According to school principals interviewed after approximately one year.

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**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*

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**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*
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

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

This quasi-experimental study examined the adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in 23 high schools. After training, school administrators and other staff members demonstrated substantial increases in knowledge of threat assessment principles and decreased commitment to zero tolerance approaches. Schools using the guidelines showed a 55% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying infractions from the pretraining year to the posttraining year, in contrast to a control group of 26 schools not using the guidelines.

NASSP Bulletin, 2011

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

High School Discipline Study
- Compared 23 high schools implementing threat assessment with 26 control high schools (no threat assessment).
- Used school records of suspensions and discipline infractions for baseline year prior to training and follow-up year after training.

NASSP Bulletin, 2011

High School Discipline Study

Long-Term Suspension Rates

- Trained Schools (n = 23)
- Comparison Schools (n = 26)

Baseline Year
Outcome Year
Randomized Controlled Trial

- 40 schools (K-12)
- Randomly assigned
- 1 year follow-up
- 201 students

School Psychology Review, 2012

Randomized Controlled Trial

Students in threat assessment schools...
- Received more counseling
- More parent involvement
- Fewer long-term suspensions
- Fewer alternative placements

Logistic regression odds ratios: 3.98, 2.57, .35, and .13

2013 NREPP Listing

Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines


Governor’s School and Campus Safety Task Force

40 members, Led by Secretaries of Public Safety, Education, and Health and Human Resources

http://dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/SchoolCampusSafetyTaskForce/

Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs

Student Threat Assessment as a Safe and Supportive Prevention Strategy

4-year project

Student Threats to Harm Others

Selected sample of 1,470 threat assessment cases reported by 810 Virginia public schools during the 2013-14 school year
Percentages for 1,470 threat cases from 810 schools. One case can involve more than one type of threat.
Student Threat Assessment: An Evidence-Based Approach
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

School Placement Outcome (%)

- No Change: 80%
- Transferred to alternative school: 10%
- Placed on homebound instruction: 5%
- Transferred to regular school: 1.3%
- Student changed residence: 1.4%
- Other: 6%

Racial/Ethnic Background of Student Threat Cases

- White: 49.1%
- Black: 53.4%
- Hispanic: 53.8%
- Asian: 53.4%
- Other: 53.8%

Virginia enrollment is 53% White, 23% Black, 13% Hispanic, 11% Other groups.

Racial/Ethnic Differences in Disciplinary Response

- White: 47%
- Black: 61%
- Hispanic: 68%

No statistically significant differences for White vs Black or White vs Hispanic students.

Research Directions

- Statewide implementation data
- Inventory of practices and models
- Fidelity standards
- Assessment of outcomes
- Technical assistance/training
- RCT on training effectiveness

Liability Protection

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

Training Workshops

- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Indiana
- Kansas
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- Wisconsin

Workshop participants have permission to copy this for others in your school system.
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.

Confidentiality Versus Prevention of Violence

“Check, check—6's either one or the other.”

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.”


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….”

Student Threat Assessment: An Evidence-Based Approach
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.

**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.

**Re-entry Planning**
Help students return to school
- Consider restorative justice approach that lets student make amends for actions
- Obtain release of information to share consequences and conditions with victims
- Caution against retaliation
- Monitor student’s return

**Documentation of Threats**
1. Maintain quality of threat evaluation process
2. Document incidents and responses
3. Liability protection
4. Evaluate threat rates and trends

**Threat assessment is part of a comprehensive approach**

**Workshop participants have permission to copy this for others in your school system.**
How is violence prevention like Rubik’s Cube?

1. Not one problem - multiple problems
2. Not one solution - multiple solutions

Available from amazon.com or email dcornell@virginia.edu

http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu
Threat Assessment Training
Case Exercise Worksheet

(Use one of these worksheets for each case)

**Step 1. Evaluate Threat.**

What witnesses would you call to assess the severity of the threat?

What was the content of the threat and what were the circumstances in which it was made?

What was the student’s explanation of the meaning of the threat?

What were the witness(es) and/or threat recipient’s perception of the meaning of the threat?

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

Is the threat transient?  
#Yes  #No

If the threat is transient, please list the reasons why below.
1.  
2.  
3.  

(If the threat is transient, continue on to Step 3. If the threat is substantive, respond to the question below.)

Is the threat substantive?  
#Yes  #No

If the threat is substantive, please list the reasons why below.
1.  
2.  
3.  

(Continue on to Step 4.)

**Step 3. Respond to Transient Threat.**

If the threat is transient, what response steps would be appropriate in this situation?
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

(If the threat is transient, Step 3 is the last step in this exercise.  
If the threat is substantive, please continue to Step 4.)
**Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.**

If the threat is substantive, would it be considered *serious* or *very serious*?
# Serious substantive threat  # Very serious substantive threat (Please list reasons below.)
  1.
  2.
  3.

(If the threat is a serious threat, proceed to Step 5.
If the threat is very serious, skip to Step 6.)

**Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.**

What appropriate steps would you take to respond to this serious substantive threat?
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.
  5.

(If the threat is a serious threat, Step 5 is the last step in this exercise.)

**Step 6. Conduct Safety Evaluation.**

What appropriate steps would you take to conduct a Safety Evaluation in the case of a very serious threat?
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.
  5.

**Step 7. Follow up with action plan.**

What would be appropriate follow-up procedures?
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.
Threat Assessment Case Exercise 1
Sixth Grade Rivalry

Scenario

Sixth grade boys, Chris and Billy, had been rivals since first grade. Recently their conflicts had become more frequent and more intense. Towards the end of class, Chris overheard Billy talking to a group of girls and referring to him as a “sissy boy.” Chris had had enough. He waited for Billy outside class and then went straight up to him and said, “You’ve had it man. I’m gonna kick your _____. Meet me out back after school.” Their teacher, Ms. Johnson, overheard the confrontation in the hall and approached the boys. The boys said it was “nothing” but Ms. Johnson was concerned about Chris’s threatening statement and reported the incident to the principal.

The principal, Mr. Stevens, called the boys into his office immediately and met with them one at a time.

Interview with Chris:

Chris entered the room obviously agitated. As the principal asked him about the incident, Chris glared at the floor and answered the principal’s questions abruptly and insincerely. No, he was not arguing with Billy and yes, everything was fine between the two of them. He said he didn’t remember exactly what he said to Chris and that “Ms. Johnson was overreacting.” As Mr. Stevens asked more questions, Chris responded that he was just “sick of Billy’s cocky attitude” and “wished Billy would lay off [him],” but stated again that the incident was “no big deal.” Mr. Stevens asked Chris to wait outside his office while he spoke with Billy.

Interview with Billy:

Billy told quite a different story than Chris. Billy stated that Chris “got in [his] face and threatened to beat [him] up after school.” He said that he didn’t know what Chris’s problem was and that he had been acting “weird… kind of punchy” lately. Billy stated that Chris just “needed to get over himself and leave [him] alone.”

Interview with the teacher:

Ms. Johnson said she heard Chris tell Billy to meet him after school and could testify to the ongoing conflict between the boys. She said that they deliberately sat on opposite sides of the classroom and were often seen trading insults across the room and recruiting others to join in the harassment. Ms. Johnson thought a fight between the boys was inevitable.

Discipline histories:

Both Chris and Billy have a record of multiple detentions for disorderly conduct, tardies, and truancy.
Threat Assessment Case Exercise 2
Harassment between Friends

Scenario

The bell has rung at a local middle school and students are moving throughout the halls changing classes. A student comments to a passing student of Arab descent, “Man, I hate you guys, go back where you came from because we don’t want you here in America. I am going to bomb you back to where you came from.” The Arab student says nothing, but hurries to class where he reports the event to the teacher who informs the principal.

The principal, Ms. Thompson, called the following individuals into her office and interviewed them about the incident.

Interview with Sam (threatened student):
“I was walking down the hall to class when Theo said that I am not wanted in America and that he was going to bomb me back to where I came from. Theo used to be my friend. I felt like saying, ‘I am from America, and proud,’ but I just ran away and told the teacher. I don’t know what to do. I am not afraid of Theo, but I just don’t feel welcome at this school anymore. I am so tired of all of this hate. I am a US citizen and don’t deserve to be treated like this.”

Interview with Theo (student who made the threat):
“Man, I am going to get in trouble for this. I am sorry, I didn’t mean it. I am not going to hurt anybody. I walked by Sam in the hall and just started thinking about everything going on in Afghanistan and got mad and told him to go back to where he came from. I didn’t mean it; he is my friend. I have just been so confused about this whole situation that I want all of the Arabs to just leave America alone.

Theo’s Discipline History: Theo has had detention two times this school year for being tardy. He has also received a discipline referral for excessive talking.

Interview with their teacher:
“Sam came to me on the verge of tears. He said that a friend, Theo, ‘just told him that he wasn’t wanted in America and he was going to bomb him back to where he came from.’ I was shocked. Theo and Sam have always been good friends. Sam has been so worried lately and he is not focusing well in class at all. I am really surprised at Theo. He gets in trouble for talking and sometimes he has a bad temper, but I have never heard Theo say something so hateful.”

Interview with Witness 1:
“Everybody was changing classes and some of us were talking about the terrorist attacks. Theo got mad and all of a sudden and told Sam that ‘he was going to bomb him back to where he came from.’ Then Theo just ran down the hall. Theo and Sam have always been friends. I don’t think Theo meant it; he just got really angry and went off at the mouth. Theo has done it before, but he didn’t mean it.”
Threat Assessment Case Exercise 3
Johnny Threatens his Classmates

Before class, a ninth grade boy reports to his teacher that a friend and fellow classmate of his, Johnny, told him that Friday was the day “some kids were going to die”. This boy told the teacher that Johnny has always been talking about a group of popular kids whom he’d like to “get rid of,” and recounted different incidents in which those kids teased or mocked Johnny on the bus and in the locker room at school. The friend told the teacher that Johnny has always been angry with this group of kids, but lately he’s been really fed up. The friend showed the teacher a list of the students Johnny had made in his notebook that had a heavy line drawn through it, and next Friday’s date written across the top. The teacher showed the principal the list and relayed the concerns of Johnny’s friend, and the principal began evaluating the threat. The principal called the following people into his office to assess the situation:

Interview with Johnny’s Teacher:
“Johnny has never been a discipline problem in my classroom. I’ve noticed that he often sits alone and appears to be on the outside of the popular students in class. I also noticed that two students in my class were on Johnny’s list of students with a line through it. Last semester I saw these two students teasing Johnny before class. I broke it up and spoke to the two boys afterwards and I haven’t noticed anything since.”

Interview with Johnny:
“Why did I get called down here, I didn’t do anything wrong. Why are you looking at my notebook? You’re not allowed to search my things, that’s against the law. Yeah I made that list but it don’t mean nothing. I don’t know why I drew a line through those names. I just don’t like those kids, that’s all. No, they don’t tease me. I just don’t like them. Why do you have to call my parents? I didn’t do anything.”

Observations of Johnny: Johnny appeared anxious from the start. He was very worried when the notebook was opened. When the issue of teasing was brought up he became quiet and denied any violent intentions.

Johnny’s Discipline History: Johnny has two fights on his record from the previous year. Upon further investigation it was noted that each fight was with another boy whose name appeared on the list in Johnny’s notebook. There was a meeting held after last semester regarding Johnny’s declining grades attended by Johnny’s math teacher, guidance counselor, assistant principal, and both of his parents. They appeared concerned about Johnny’s grades and reports of him being teased by other students. The school staff were unaware that bullying was going on and agreed to increase monitoring of these students.

Interview with Witness 1:
“I told my teacher about the things Johnny has been saying because I think he’s been acting funny lately. At first I thought he was just kidding, but he’s talked about it a bunch of times. Yeah, he’s been getting picked on for awhile. Mainly on the bus and in the locker room. Johnny tried to fight back a couple of times, except now I think he tries to ignore them, but it doesn’t really work. He’s afraid to tell on them because he thinks they might gang up on him sometime when no teachers are around. I just don’t want something really bad to happen at our school.”

Interview with Johnny’s Mother:
“I cannot believe my son would do something like this. Believe me he will be grounded when he gets home. I do not think it is necessary for him to talk to a psychologist, and he definitely does not need to be suspended. After all, it’s really the school’s fault. At that meeting last semester he told you that he was being bullied and you didn’t do anything about it because obviously, he’s still being bullied. I don’t blame him for being angry and saying those things. He was just talking out of frustration. We all know that he would never hurt anyone.”

Interview with Victim’s Father:
“I am surprised that my son was involved in any bullying and he should be disciplined for that. But the real concern is with Johnny. That boy made some serious threats against my kid and you better not tolerate that behavior in this school. I would expect that he will be expelled so my son doesn’t have to spend the rest of his school career looking over his shoulder.”
**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.

**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.

**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.
Bullying Assessment Flow Chart

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
Not bullying
Consider another infraction.

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
Could be a fight or some other infraction.

Was there dominance?
Was the aggressor stronger or dominant over the other? Was one side outnumbered?

No
Not bullying
Consider another 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 of 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 verbal abuse 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.

RESPOND TO TRANSIENT THREAT

- 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?

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

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.

Administrator completing form:  
Position:  
School:  
Date this form completed:

#### Information on student making threat

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

Is there a history of violent behavior in school?  
Yes ☐  No ☐  Unknown ☐  

Is there a history of violent behavior away from school?  
Yes ☐  No ☐  Unknown ☐  

Is there a history of discipline referrals?  
Yes ☐  No ☐  Unknown ☐  

Other information:

#### Information about the threat

Date threat occurred:  ____/____/_____  
Date administrator learned of threat:  ____/____/_____  

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

Has the intended target/victim(s) been identified?  
Yes ☐  No ☐  

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

Target(s) of the threat (check all that apply):

- ☐ Student  
- ☐ Teacher  
- ☐ Parent  
- ☐ Administrator  
- ☐ Other

Number of victim/recipient(s) of threat:  
- ☐ one  
- ☐ two  
- ☐ three  
- ☐ four  
- ☐ five or more

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

**Directions:** 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.

<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>Student interviewed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What happened today when you were [place of incident]? (Record student’s exact words for key statements if possible.)

2. What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?

3. What did you mean when you said or did that?

4. 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.)

5. What was the reason you said or did that? (Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history to this threat.

6. What are you going to do now? (Ask questions to determine if the student intends to carry out the threat.)

7. Additional witnesses or other relevant information.

For more information, contact the University of Virginia Youth Violence Project <http://youthviolence.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.