Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence

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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.

Overview

1. Rationale for threat assessment and use of threat assessment guidelines
2. Psychological and legal issues
3. Group exercises

School violence is not increasing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Crimes per 1,000 students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indicators of school crime and safety, 2009. Table 2.1. National Crime Victimization Study data reported by National Center for Education Statistics

School homicides are not increasing.

Homicides by students on school grounds during school day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Homicides</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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</table>

Cases identified from records of the National School Safety Center.
Teach students to distinguish snitching from seeking help

**Snitching:** informing on someone for personal gain

**Seeking help:** attempting to stop someone from being hurt

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**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)

Download at www.fbi.gov

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**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)

Download at www.fbi.gov

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**Secret Service/DOE Recommendations:**

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.

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**Threat Assessment**

- 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.

Download at: www.secretservice.gov
Team roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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</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 (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)</td>
<td>Team member to conduct mental health assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers, aides, other staff</td>
<td>Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Team roles may vary based on local needs.

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?

Number of threats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>N=188 cases</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>
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</table>

Grade Levels for 188 Student Threats of Violence

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.

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?

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 versus substantive threats

- Substantive Threats
- Transient Threats

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.)

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.

Transient versus substantive threats

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

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.


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.
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.

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.

Teacher/Staff Interviews

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

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
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**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

**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.

**Key Point**

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

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

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

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

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.
Session 2

1. Pathways to violence
2. Liability and confidentiality
4. Research

3 Pathways to Violent Behavior

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

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

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

Liability Protection

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


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....”


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

- 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.

Documentation of Threats

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

Research on Threat Assessment

1. Initial field-test study
2. Memphis field test
3. High school climate study
4. High school suspension study
5. Randomized controlled trial

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.

How did schools respond to 188 threats?

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

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*

Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

Findings for Virginia Model Schools

- Less bullying and other victimization
- Greater 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*
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High School Discipline Study

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

Implementing a Threat Assessment Approach

Threat assessment should not be burdensome, but a more efficient way to resolve student threats:
- Quickly resolving transient cases
- Focusing more effort on substantive cases.

1. Educate your staff.
2. Select and train your team.
3. Update student code of conduct.
4. Inform students and parents.

Threat assessment is part of a comprehensive approach

Intensive Interventions
- Students with very serious behavior problems
  - Intensive monitoring and supervision
  - Group counseling
  - Community-based services
  - Alternative school placement
  - Special education evaluation and services

At-Risk Students
- Students with some problem behaviors
  - Short-term counseling
  - Social skills groups
  - Tutoring and other academic support
  - Special education evaluation and services

Schoolwide Prevention
- All students
  - Clear and consistent discipline
  - Restorative justice programs
  - School-wide security programs
  - Programs for bullying and teasing
  - Character development curriculum
  - Local resources for peer support
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.)


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.”
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.”
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.

**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.

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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
**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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transient Threat</th>
<th>Substantive Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meets one or more of the following:</td>
<td>Factors to consider in judging a threat to be substantive:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-genuine expression or intended as joke or figure or speech</td>
<td>• Specific, plausible details such as a specific victim, time, place, and method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-sustainable intent to harm or temporary anger that is resolved</td>
<td>• Threat has been repeated over time or related to multiple persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resolved on scene or office (time-limited)</td>
<td>• Threat is reported as a plan or planning has taken place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict is resolved and ends with apology, retraction, or clarification</td>
<td>• Recruitment of accomplices or invitation for an audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Very Serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 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 amendments
- 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>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Home phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where the threat was made:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who reported the threat:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was reported (use quotation marks to identify direct quotes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Information on target(s) of threat

- **Has the intended target/victim(s) been identified?**
  - Yes □
  - No □

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name(s) &amp; grade of victim(s):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of victim/recipients of threat:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ one  □ two  □ three  □ four  □ five or more</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 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>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student interviewed:**

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.
Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence Order Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Code</th>
<th>Product Title</th>
<th>Qty.</th>
<th>Unit Price</th>
<th>Total Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OF112301</td>
<td>Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td>$43.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shipping/Handling*  
Sales Tax**  
Total Amount Due

Order Amount  Shipping/Handling  
$1.00–$99.99  12% ($4 minimum)  
$100.00–$99,999.99  10%  
$100,000.00–$499,999.99  8%  
≥ $500,000.00  6%

CUSTOMER INFORMATION:
Name ____________________________________________
Job Title ____________________________________________
School/Organization ____________________________________
District ____________________________________________
County ____________________________________________

May we e-mail you about these and related resources?  Yes ☐  No ☐  
(We do not sell, rent, or give your personal information to anyone.)
E-mail Address ________________________________________

BILL TO:

If using a credit card, “BILL TO” address must match the address where the credit card statement is received.

Name ____________________________________________
Street Address ______________________________________
City/State/Zip ________________________________________
Country ____________________________________________
Phone (_____) __________________ Fax (_____) __________________

SIX EASY WAYS TO ORDER:
Fax Toll Free (888) 819-7767  
Phone Toll Free (800) 547-6747  
Internet www.sopriswest.com  
E-mail customerservice@cambiumlearning.com  
Mail Sopris West Educational Services  
Attn: Customer Service  
4185 Salazar Way  
Frederick, CO 80504

☐ Check/Money Order (Payable to Sopris West)  
☐ Signed Purchase Order # ____________________________________________  
(MUST be faxed or attached to order)

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard  
Account Number ________________________________________
Expiration Date (Month/Year) ___________________  

Printed Name As It Appears on Card ____________________________
Cardholder Signature ________________________________________

May we e-mail you about these and related resources?  Yes ☐  No ☐

We do not sell, rent, or give your personal information to anyone.

BILL TO: (If different from “BILL TO”)
Name ____________________________________________
Street Address ______________________________________
City/State/Zip ________________________________________
Country ____________________________________________
Phone (_____) __________________ Fax (_____) __________________
E-mail Address (for shipping confirmation only) ________________________________________

Prices are effective January 1, 2009.  
All prices subject to change without notice.  
Call (800) 547-6747 to verify prices and to request an updated catalog.

Terms are NET 30 days, no cash discount, F.O.B. shipping point, and payable in U.S. dollars or equivalent.

Terms and Conditions

*Enter amount as indicated in chart at left.

**In accordance with state and local tax laws, applicable sales tax will be calculated and added to your order at time of shipment. Materials purchased with a Certificate of Tax Exemption must be paid by the Certificate Holder to be tax free. Please attach copy of certificate to order, or sales tax will apply.

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