

Overview of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG)

Dewey G. Cornell
University of Virginia
June 18, 2018

This paper provides an overview of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG), a school-based threat assessment model developed by Professor Dewey Cornell and colleagues at the University of Virginia in 2001 (Cornell & Sheras, 2006).¹ The paper presents an updated decision tree and forms for conducting a threat assessment. These forms are freely available for threat assessment use.

In response to a series of school shootings in 1990s, U.S. government authorities in law enforcement and education recommended the use of behavioral threat assessment in schools (Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000). Behavioral threat assessment (often referred to as threat assessment) is a systematic approach to violence prevention intended to distinguish serious threats, defined as behaviors or communications in which a person poses a threat of violence, from cases in which the threat is not serious and then to take appropriate prevention steps (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

Both the FBI and the Secret Service conducted studies of school shootings and found that these students were often victims of bullying who had become angry and depressed, and were influenced by a variety of social, familial, and psychological factors (O’Toole, 2000; Vossekuil, 2002). Unfortunately, these studies concluded that, because these characteristics can be found in so many students, it is not possible to develop a profile or checklist that could be used to pinpoint the small number of truly violent students among them. As a result, both the FBI and Secret Service cautioned schools against a profiling approach.

Nevertheless, the FBI and Secret Service did point out that almost all of the students who attacked their schools had communicated their intentions to attack through threats (and warnings) to their peers. Had these threats been reported to authorities and investigated, the shootings might have been prevented. In fact, the FBI identified a number of potential school shootings that were prevented because students reported a threat to authorities that was investigated and determined to be serious. Based on these observations, the FBI and Secret Service both recommended that schools adopt a threat assessment approach to prevent targeted acts of violence (Fein, et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000).

What is threat assessment? Threat assessment was developed by the Secret Service to deal with persons who threaten to attack public officials and has since evolved into a standard approach to analyze a variety of dangerous situations, such as threats of workplace violence (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). A threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten what is termed “targeted violence.” Threat assessment is a process of evaluating the threat—and the circumstances

¹ The Commonwealth of Virginia requires all public schools to have a threat assessment team, and permits them to use any model of threat assessment that complies with their general guidelines. The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines is one such model.

surrounding the threat—to uncover any facts or evidence that indicate the threat is likely to be carried out. Student threat assessment can be distinguished from profiling in part because the investigation is triggered by some form of *threatening behavior* by the student rather than some combination of demographic and personal characteristics.

Although threat assessment had become widely used by law enforcement to protect public figures and prevent workplace violence (Meloy, Hart, & Hoffmann, 2014), it could not be applied to schools without modification and further development. Youth frequently make threatening statements that are not serious and engage in aggressive behavior that ranges from horseplay to serious assault. It is important not to over-react to youthful misbehavior that does not pose a serious threat of violence. Moreover, unlike other settings where threat assessment is used, schools have an obligation and commitment to educate all young people, regardless of their adjustment problems and difficulties. Consequently, the methods and goals of school threat assessment for students are not the same as those for other populations. In school settings, threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way. *The primary goal of threat assessment is safety for everyone, but another important goal is to help the student to be successful in school.*

VSTAG Model

In response to the 1999 FBI conference on school shootings, a group at the University of Virginia led by Dr. Dewey Cornell developed a threat assessment model for schools. This model integrated recommendations from FBI and Secret Service studies of school shootings (Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000) with practical advice and field-tested experiences obtained from educators working in Virginia public schools (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). *School-based threat assessment must be a flexible and efficient process that can quickly resolve threats that are not serious and concentrate efforts on the small number of serious threats.* Notably, the VSTAG model provides teams with guidelines to distinguish whether a threat is transient (not serious) or substantive (poses a continuing risk to others). Accurately distinguishing between transient and substantive threats helps the school team both to avoid over-reacting to threats that are not serious and to focus its attention on serious threats that merit protective action (Burnette, Datta, & Cornell, 2017).

A transient threat is a broad category including all threats that do not reflect a genuine intent to harm others (Burnette, Datta, & Cornell, 2017; Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Most student threats are transient threats that reflect expressions of humor, anger, frustration, or fear (Cornell et al., 2004; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2012). Transient threats include a variety of qualitatively different threats that are not serious. Some examples are a student shouting “I’m gonna kill you” as a joke or playfully using his or her fingers to shoot another classmate. Another student might say “I’m gonna kill you” as a competitive statement during a game. Still other transient threats are expressions of anger that do not reflect a serious intent to harm someone, such as a student stating rhetorically “I’d like to kill that jerk” in anger but not actually possessing an intent or plan to kill anyone (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Transient threats can be provocative and disruptive, but from a threat assessment perspective, they do not reflect a real intent to harm others.

In contrast to transient threats, substantive threats are behaviors or statements that represent a serious risk of harm to others (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). According to the VSTAG model, substantive threats are characterized by qualities that reflect serious intent, such as planning and preparation, recruitment of accomplices, and acquisition of a weapon. Examples of likely substantive threats include a student threatening “I’ll get you next time” after a fight and refusing mediation for the dispute, or a student who threatens to stab a classmate and is found to have a knife in his or her backpack.

The distinction between transient and substantive threats is critical to determining appropriate responses and management strategies. The VSTAG model guides school teams in resolving and responding to student threats according to a decision tree. The first version of the decision tree had seven steps. The new version (see below) is reconfigured to highlight five main steps, but describes the same process and involves the same decisions and actions.

Decision Tree Process

At Step 1, the team evaluates the threat by interviewing witnesses, noting the exact content of the threat, and gathering information on the circumstances in which the threat was made. In most cases, the threatening student is interviewed and given an opportunity to explain what he or she meant by the threatening statement or behavior.

At Step 2, all available information is used by the school teams to consider the credibility and seriousness of the threat. A threat is considered transient if it can be determined that the student has no intent to carry out the threat. If the student is cooperative and provides a convincing explanation or apology, the threat is considered transient and the assessment is concluded here. Transient threats do not require protective action or security efforts. On the other hand, if the team is unable to resolve the threat or they are unsure about the threat’s status, then the decision tree directs them to respond to the threat as a substantive threat.

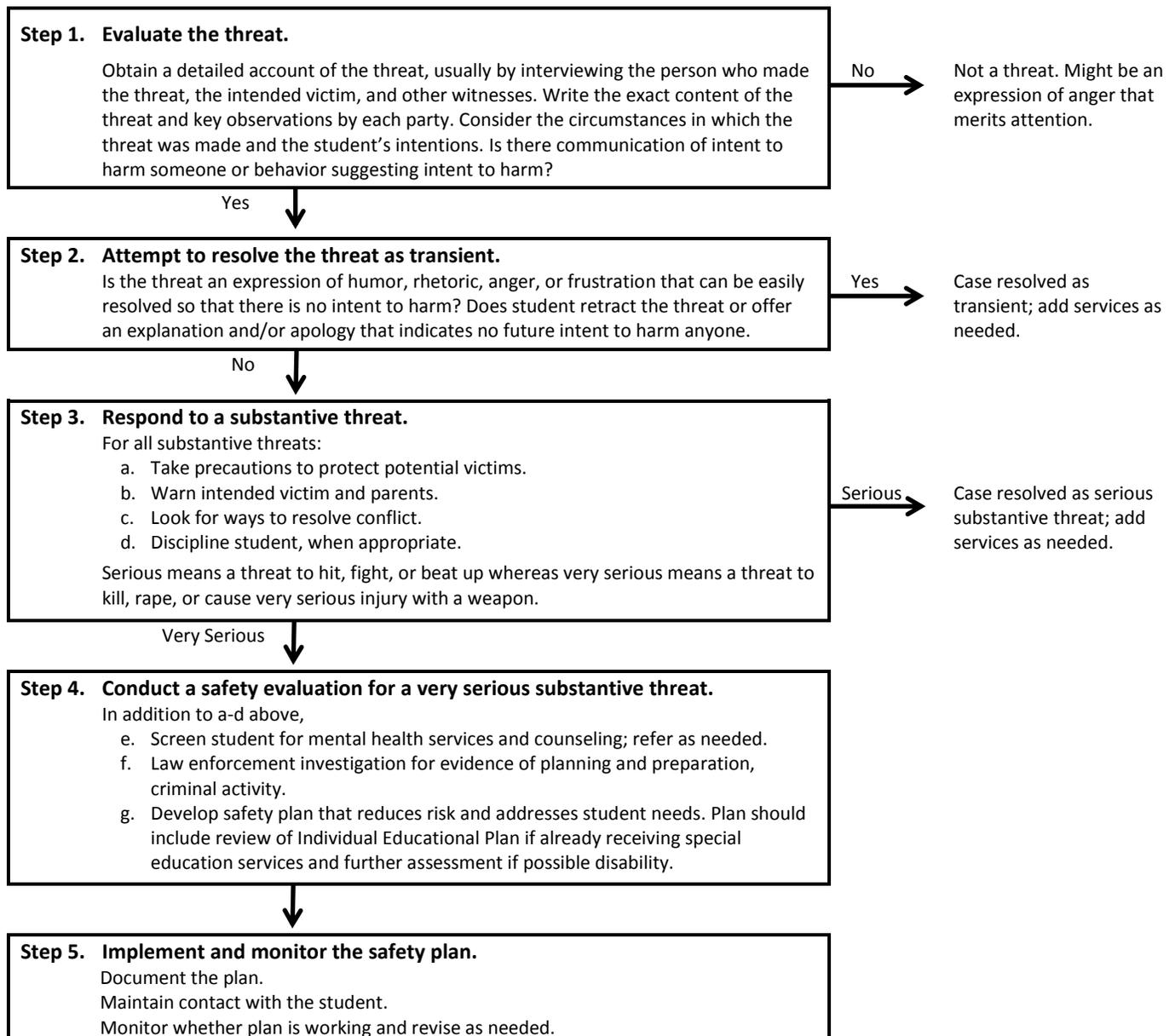
At Step 3, teams respond to a substantive threat. All substantive threat responses require protective action, which varies depending on the circumstances of the threat and how the threat might be carried out. At a minimum, protective action typically involves notifying the intended victim and his or her parents, as well as contacting the parents of the student who made the threat. Protective action could also involve increased monitoring or supervision of the threatening student. Depending on the nature and credibility of the threat, substantive threats are further classified as either “serious substantive” or “very serious substantive” threats. Threats involving a simple assault or a fight are classified as “serious substantive” and resolved at this point. In contrast, a “very serious substantive” threat typically involves a threat to kill or a threat to use a lethal weapon or inflict severe injury on someone.

Step 4 is undertaken for very serious substantive threats. In addition to the protective actions taken at Step 3, the school team will take three additional actions. First, the student will be screened for mental health services or counseling. This typically involves interviewing by a mental health professional with the goals of determining whether the student needs mental health services and understanding what conflict or problem underlies the threat. Second, there is a law enforcement investigation of the case. This investigation will look for evidence of planning and

preparation, to determine whether a crime has been committed, and assess what additional protective actions might be needed. The third action is to integrate findings from the mental health assessment and law enforcement investigation into a safety plan. The student might be suspended from school for several days until this plan can be formulated. The safety plan determines the conditions under which the student can return to school or have a change in placement.

At Step 5, the team implements and monitors the safety plan formulated at Step 4. The team maintains contact with the student and makes any necessary changes to the safety plan.

School Threat Assessment Decision Tree



Research Support

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines has been examined in a series of studies involving hundreds of schools and is the only threat assessment program recognized as an evidence-based practice in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP; 2013; <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=263>).

Field test and training studies. The first two VSTAG studies were field-tests that demonstrated that school-based teams could carry out threat assessments in a practical, efficient manner without violent outcomes (Cornell et al., 2004; Strong & Cornell, 2008). Notably, across approximately 400 cases, nearly all of the students were permitted to return to school and few of the students received long-term suspensions or transfers to another school. Students receiving special education services made more threats than students in general education, but they did not receive disproportionately higher rates of school suspension (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005).

Another group of studies examined the effect of VSTAG training on staff attitudes and knowledge (Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008; Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012; Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009; Cornell et al., 2004; Strong & Cornell, 2008). After training, school personnel showed decreased fears of school violence and reduced support for a zero tolerance approach. They showed knowledge of threat assessment principles and the ability to classify cases reliably. These changes were observed across groups of school administrators, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and school resource officers.

Another study examined the performance of VSTAG teams in a sample of 844 cases from 339 schools (Burnette, Datta, & Cornell, 2017). Inter-reliability for the transient versus substantive distinction was 70% ($Kappa = .53$). Logistic regression analyses examined transient and substantive threat differences in threat characteristics and outcomes. Threats were more likely to be classified as substantive when they included warning behaviors (e.g., history of violence, weapon use, leakage, etc.), were made by older students, mentioned use of a bomb or a knife, and involved threats to harm self as well as others. Although only 2.5% of threats were attempted, substantive threats were 36 times more likely to be attempted than transient threats. Substantive threats were more likely to result in out-of-school suspension, change in school placement, and/or legal action. Overall, these results supported the transient/substantive distinction.

Controlled studies. Five controlled studies have compared schools using VSTAG to control group schools. The first controlled study was a retrospective comparison of 95 high schools reporting use of VSTAG, 131 schools reporting use of locally developed procedures, and 54 schools reporting no use of a threat assessment approach (Cornell et al., 2009). Students at schools using VSTAG reported less bullying at their school, greater willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence (such as a student with a gun) than students in either of the other two groups. Students in VSTAG schools reported more positive perceptions of school staff than students in control schools. School records indicated that there were one-third fewer long-term suspensions, after controlling for school size, minority composition and socioeconomic status of the student body, neighborhood violent crime, and the extent of security measures in the schools (Cornell et al., 2009).

The second controlled study demonstrated that 23 high schools using the Virginia Guidelines experienced a 50% reduction in long-term suspensions over a two-year period, whereas 26 control group schools showed no statistically significant change (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). For bullying infractions, the control group had a slight increase, while VSTAG schools had a decline of 79%.

The third study was a randomized controlled study of 40 schools where half of the schools were randomly assigned to receive threat assessment training and 20 delayed training for one year and served as a control group (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012). During one school year, there were 201 students identified as making threats of violence (approximately half in each group). The critical issue was how school authorities would respond to these threats and the extent to which they would rely on school suspension or transfer as a response. Compared with control students, students in VSTAG schools were approximately four times more likely to receive counseling services and two-and-a-half times more likely to receive a parent conference. Notably, students in the intervention group were about one-third as likely to receive a long-term suspension and one-eighth as likely to be transferred to a different school.

Although the results of randomized controlled study were strongly supportive of the VSTAG model, there was a wide range of implementation fidelity (Cornell et al., 2012). Schools that more closely complied with the VSTAG model achieved more positive results than schools that followed it less closely.

The fourth study examined suspension rates in secondary schools that had adopted VSTAG across the state of Virginia (JustChildren and Cornell, 2013). Among Virginia's 663 secondary schools (middle, high, or combined schools), the 398 schools that used the Virginia Guidelines recorded 15% fewer short-term suspensions and 25% fewer long-term suspensions per year than the other 265 schools. This study was particularly concerned with the racial disparity between black and white students, since black students across all schools were twice as likely as white students to be suspended from school. A noteworthy finding was that short-term and long-term suspension rates were lower for both white and black students in schools using the Virginia Guidelines, and the lower rate for black students substantially reduced the racial disparity in long-term suspensions.

The fifth study compared 166 middle schools using the VSTAG model to 47 middle schools using either an alternative model or 119 middle schools using no threat assessment approach (Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015). The number of years a school used the VSTAG model was associated with lower long-term suspension rates, lower levels of general victimization, higher student reports of fairer discipline, and higher teacher perceptions of school safety.

Distinguishing Features

Many schools have developed their own threat assessment model, typically based on general principles derived from the Secret Service and Department of Education reports (Fein et al., 2002). There are several books describing student threat assessment that also outline general principles of threat assessment and some assessment procedures (McCann, 2002; Mohandie, 2014; Van Dreal, 2011). However, *we were unable to locate any alternative models of threat*

assessment that are supported by controlled studies. There is little research on other models of threat assessment. One exception is the German NETWASS program, which was based in part on the VSTAG model (Leuschner et al., 2017).

There are at least five features of VSTAG that distinguish it from other identified models of threat assessment:

- 1) VSTAG has a detailed, 145-page manual with explicit instructions and a decision-tree.
- 2) VSTAG introduces the concepts of transient and substantive threats as a critical distinction in conducting every threat assessment.
- 3) VSTAG emphasizes a flexible, non-punitive approach that discourages the use of school suspension in most cases and gives educators an alternative to zero tolerance practices.
- 4) A comprehensive mental health assessment is described in the manual and reserved for the most serious cases.
- 5) Training for multidisciplinary teams is standardized in an interactive workshop that has been evaluated in several studies.

Threat assessment should be considered one component of a comprehensive approach to maintaining a safe school (Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2004). Threat assessment identifies students who may be in need of additional services, as well as more general problems in the school environment—such as bullying—that merit focused attention. Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003) reviewed 221 studies of school-based interventions for aggressive or disruptive behavior by students and found that well-implemented demonstration programs are highly effective.

The foundation for a safe school rests on the creation of a caring community where students feel safe and secure (Catalano et al., 2004). Safety and security derive from two conditions: (1) an orderly, predictable environment where school staff provide consistent, reliable supervision and discipline; and (2) a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by their teachers and other school staff. A balance of structure and support is essential, and requires an organized, schoolwide approach (Mayer, 1995; Sprague et al., 2002; Sugai et al., 2000). The good news is that there *are* effective programs and approaches, and threat assessment can help school authorities to use them more efficiently by identifying student conflicts and problems before they lead to violence.

Case Examples²

1. A high school student posted on Facebook that he was considering killing himself and individuals on a list. The threat assessment process revealed that the student was depressed, facing juvenile charges, and was fantasizing about a way out of his troubles. Mental health services were provided and the family was involved in a resolution.
2. A high school student threatened to blow up the school. The threat was investigated and could not be resolved as transient, raising it to the level of a very serious substantive threat. Law enforcement conducted an investigation which determined that the student had constructed a bomb that was found at his home. The student was arrested.
3. A student was reported by friends to be contemplating a shooting at school. Interviews indicated that the threat was imminent and law enforcement was alerted. The student was identified at the time he entered the school and found to have a loaded firearm in his possession. He was arrested and charged with a felony.
4. A student showed some classmates a knife at school. The information was shared with an adult and the threat assessment team began an investigation. The student was called to the office and a search of his book bag revealed a large knife and a loaded revolver. A threat assessment revealed a perception of being bullied and various family issues. Mental health services and a bullying intervention were provided.
5. A high school student wrote a play that was about shooting students at school due to bullying. The parents found the written play and brought it to the police, who notified school authorities. A threat assessment revealed that the student was depressed and felt that he was being bullied at school. While he did not have access to weapons, appropriate mental health services and referrals were made.
6. Parents took their daughter to an emergency room due to suicidal threats contained in letters found in her room. The threat assessment revealed a plan to commit a mass homicide at school with her boyfriend, and then they would then kill themselves. The girl was afraid that she was pregnant and both students thought that the school environment was hostile. They had attempted to locate firearms, but were unsuccessful. Both students received extensive mental health services.
7. A student made threats to carry out an ethnic cleansing at his school. A threat assessment was conducted that included a search of his home. An unsecured loaded semi-auto pistol was found and confiscated. The child was detained for a mental evaluation. The investigation revealed that he was communicating with an online friend in another state who was considering a similar act. The police in that state were contacted and the individual was arrested.
8. A high school student was disciplined by school administrators for writing a defamatory remark on his ex-girlfriend's locker. Following the discipline meeting, the student posted on Facebook that he was going to kill the principal and assistant principal. This information was brought by students to the attention of the principal who immediately convened a threat assessment. The team judged the threat to be very serious substantive, resulting in the requirement of a mental health evaluation. The evaluation revealed urgent mental health concerns and significant evidence that he planned to carry out acts of homicide. As a result, mental health intervention was court-ordered and a safety plan involving law enforcement was implemented.

² Some information modified to disguise identities.

References

- Allen, K., Cornell, D., & Lorek, E. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 19*, 319-332.
- Associated Press (2006a). *Candidate proposes using textbooks as shields*. Retrieved Nov. 12, 2006, from <http://www.cnn.com/2006/EDUCATION/10/20/school.shootings.textbooks.ap/index.html>
- Associated Press (2006b). *Wisconsin lawmaker urges arming teachers*. Retrieved Nov. 12, 2006, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-10-05-arming-teachers_x.htm
- Brener, N., Lowry, R., Barrios, L., Simon, T., & Eaton, D. (2004). Violence-Related Behaviors Among High School Students --- United States, 1991—2003. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 53*, 651-55.
- Catalano, R.F., Berglund, M.L., Ryan, J.A.M., Lonczak, H.S., & Hawkins, J.D. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science, 591*, 98-124.
- Cornell, D. (2006). *School violence: Fears versus facts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cornell, D., Allen, K., & Fan, X. (2012). A randomized controlled study of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in grades K-12. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 100-115.
- Cornell, D. & Sheras, P. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*, 119-129. doi: 10.1037/a0016182
- Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Kaplan, S., Levy-Elkon, A., McConville, D. McKnight, L., & Posey, J. (2004a). Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence: Field test of a threat assessment approach. In M. J. Furlong, P. M. Bates, D. C., Smith, & P. M. Kingery, P.M. (Eds.), *Appraisal and prediction of school violence: Methods, issues and contents* (pp. 11-36). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers.
- Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Douglass, J., Elkon, A., McKnight, L., Branson, C., & Cole, J. (2004b). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 527-546.
- Fein, R.A., & Vossekuil, F. (1998). *Protective intelligence and threat assessment investigations: A guide for state and local law enforcement officials*. U.S. Secret Service. Washington, D.C.
- Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education.
- Leuschner, V., Fiedler, N., Schultze, M., Ahlig, N., Göbel, K., Sommer, F., Scholl, J., Cornell, D., & Scheithauer, H. (2017). Prevention of targeted school violence by responding to students' psychosocial crises: The NETWASS Program. *Child Development, 88*, 68-82.
- Meloy, J.R., Hart, S. D., & Hoffmann, J. (2014). Threat assessment and threat management. In J. Reid Meloy & Jens Hoffmann (Eds.), *The international handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 3-17). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, G. R. (1995). Preventing antisocial behavior in the schools. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 28*, 467-478.
- Mohandie, K. (2014). Threat assessment in schools. In J. Reid Meloy & Jens Hoffmann (Eds.), *The international handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 126-141). New York: Oxford

- University Press.
- Nekvasil, E., & Cornell, D. (2012). Student reports of peer threats of violence: Prevalence and outcomes. *Journal of School Violence, 11*, 357-375. doi:10.1080/15388220.2012.706764
- Nekvasil, E., & Cornell, D. (2015). Student threat assessment associated with positive school climate in middle schools. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management 2*, 98-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tam0000038>
- O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- Osher, D., Dwyer, K., & Jackson, S. (2004). *Safe, supportive and successful schools: Step by step*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Saad, L. (1999, April 23). *Public views Littleton tragedy as sign of deeper problems in country*. Retrieved April 2, 2005, from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/content/login.aspx?ci=3898>
- Sprague, J., Walker, H., Golly, A., White, K., Myers, D., & Shannon, T. (2002). Translating research into effective practice: The effects of a universal staff and student intervention on indicators of discipline and school safety. *Education & Treatment of Children, 24*, 495-511.
- Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis City Schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders, 34*, 42-54.
- Sugai, G., Horner, R.H., Dunlap, G., Hieneman, M., Lewis, T.J., Nelson, C.M., et al. (2000). Applying positive behavior support and functional behavioral assessment in schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 2*, 131-143.
- Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.
- Wilson, S. J., Lipsey, M. W., & Derzon, J. H. (2003). The effects of school-based intervention programs on aggressive behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*, 136-149.

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL[®]

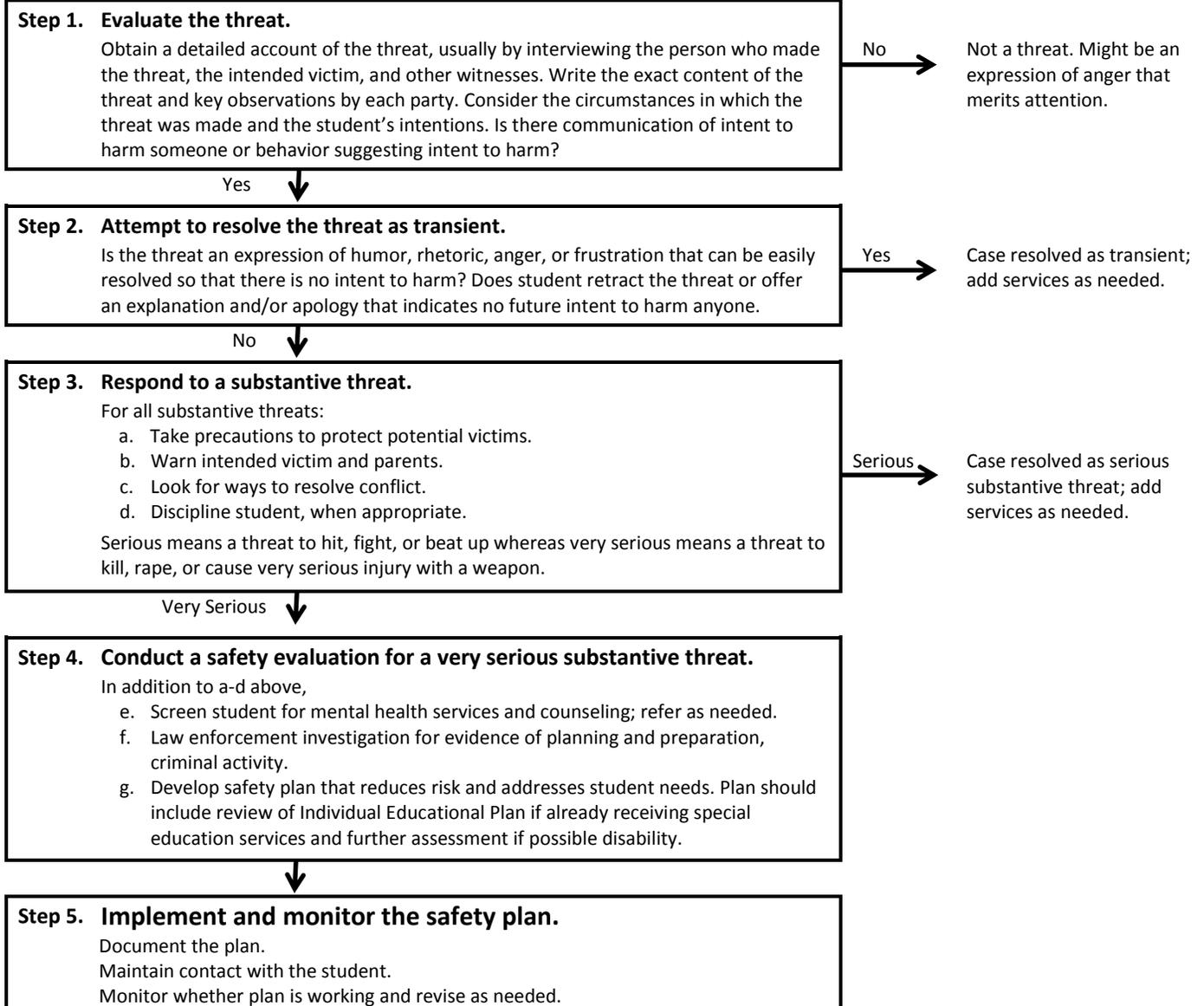
Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

OVERVIEW

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

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

School Threat Assessment Decision Tree^{*}



^{*}This 5-step decision tree is a revision of the original 7-step decision tree that retains the same information and procedures in a more condensed format.

THREAT REPORT	
<p>A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or communicated in some other form, such as via text message or email. Threats may be explicit or implied, directed at the intended target or communicated to a third party. Behavior that suggests a threat such as weapon carrying, fighting, or menacing actions should be investigated to determine whether a threat is present.</p> <p>The process is designed for assessment of threats to harm others and is not intended for individuals who have only threatened to harm themselves. Only a small percentage of cases require both threat assessment and suicide assessment, and in those cases, the team should supplement this form with their choice of a standard suicide assessment protocol.</p>	
Name of person reporting threat:	Date/time threat reported:
Affiliation of person reporting threat: <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Name of person receiving the report:	

INCIDENT or BEHAVIOR OF CONCERN

Name of person making threat:	Date/time threat made:
Affiliation of person making threat: <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Current <input type="checkbox"/> Former
Identification: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female Age: Grade, if student: School program, if student:	
Emergency Contact:	Relationship:
Home Address:	Phone:
Location threat occurred: <input type="checkbox"/> School Building or Grounds <input type="checkbox"/> School Bus/Other Travel <input type="checkbox"/> School-Sponsored Activity <input type="checkbox"/> Digital communication such as text or post <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
Summary of the incident or threat. What was reported? Include who said or did what to whom. Who else was present?	

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS (All sources are not needed in most cases.)

Sources of Information	Was information reviewed?	Relevant Findings (use additional pages as needed)
Prior threats	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Prior discipline incidents	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Academic records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Special education records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Other records	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Records from other schools	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Records from outside agencies (e.g., social services or mental health)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Law enforcement records (criminal history, contacts, firearms purchases, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	
Employment records (grievances, disciplinary actions, Title IX, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Not available	

KEY OBSERVATIONS

These items can help assess whether a threat is transient or substantive, but must be considered in the broader context of the situation and other known facts. Regard these items as a checklist to make sure you have considered these aspects of the threat, but they are summed or used as a score.

Threat is likely to be less serious:

1. Subject admits to threat (statement or behavior).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
2. Subject has explanation for threat as benign (such as joke or figure of speech).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
3. Subject admits feeling angry toward target at time of threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
4. Subject retracts threat or denies intent to harm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
5. Subject apologetic or willing to make amends for threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
6. Subject willing to resolve threat through conflict resolution or some other means.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	

Threat is likely to be more serious:

7. Subject continues to feel angry toward target.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
8. Subject expressed threat on more than one occasion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
9. Subject has specific plan for carrying out the threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
10. Subject engaged in preparation for carrying out the threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
11. Subject has prior conflict with target or other motive.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
12. Subject is suicidal. (Supplement with suicide assessment.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
13. Threat involved use of a weapon other than a firearm, such as a knife or club.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
14. Threat involves use of a firearm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
15. Subject has possession of, or ready access to, a firearm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
16. Subject has or sought accomplices or audience for carrying out threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
17. Threat involves gang conflict.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
18. Threat involves peers or others who have encouraged subject in making threat.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	

Other relevant observations

THREAT CLASSIFICATION

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

Reason for change:

OBSERVATIONS SUGGESTING NEED FOR INTERVENTION

This is an optional form used as needed for intervention planning. Here are some factors to consider in identifying possible interventions to assist the subject and reduce risk. These items are not summed or scored. Use the term “partially” as appropriate to the category to mean the condition is moderate or not clearly present.

1. History of physical violence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
2. History of criminal acts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
3. Preoccupation with violence, violent individuals, or groups that advocate violence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
4. Preoccupation with mass shootings or infamous violent incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
5. History of intense anger or resentment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
6. Has grievance or feels treated unfairly.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
7. Feels abused, harassed, or bullied.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
8. History of self-injury or suicide ideation or attempts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
9. Has been seriously depressed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
10. Experienced serious stressful events or conditions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
11. Substance abuse history.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
12. History of serious mental illness (symptoms such as delusions or hallucinations).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
13. Might or does qualify for special education services due to serious emotional/behavioral disturbance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
14. Prescribed psychotropic medication.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
15. Substantial decline in level of academic or psychosocial adjustment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
16. Lacks positive relationships with one or more school staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
17. Lacks supportive family.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
18. Lacks positive relationships with peers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	
19. Other factors that suggest need for intervention.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Not available	

THREAT RESPONSE

Use additional pages as needed. This is a list of common actions taken in response to a threat. Each case may require a unique set of actions. Add date and signature of person taking action if appropriate. Note if action was recommended but for some reason not completed (e.g., parent refusal).

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Increased contact/monitoring of subject	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Reprimand or warning	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Parent conference	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Student apology	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Contacted target of threat, including parent if target is a minor	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Counseling (note number of meetings)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Conflict mediation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Schedule change	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Transportation change	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Mental health assessment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Mental health services in school	
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Mental health services outside school	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Assess need for special education services	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Review of Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students already receiving services	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15. 504 plan or modification of 504 plan.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Behavior Support Plan created or modified	
<input type="checkbox"/>	17. In-school time out or suspension	
<input type="checkbox"/>	18. Out-of-school suspension (number days)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	19. Referral for expulsion	
<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Other disciplinary action	
<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Change in school placement (e.g., transfer, homebound instruction)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Services for other persons affected by threat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	23. Law enforcement consulted	
<input type="checkbox"/>	24. Legal actions (e.g., arrest, detentions, charges)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	25. Other actions	

CASE PLAN

This section can be used to describe the plan for any case and should be completed as Step 5 in cases of a very serious substantive threat.

Case Resolution or Safety Plan

Date

Describe how case was resolved, including any plan for further actions. List persons responsible for each component of plan.

Follow-up or Revision of Plan

Date

Describe current status of plan and any revisions. List persons responsible for each component of revised plan.