**Threat Assessment**

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Threat assessment is the process of evaluating the risk of violence posed by someone who has expressed the intent to inflict harm on another. Threat assessment evaluates the context and circumstances of the threat in order to uncover any evidence that the threat may be carried out. A priority of threat assessment is the development of interventions and follow-up activities that are developed to manage and reduce the risk of violence.

**What is a threat?**

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone. Threats can be verbal, gestured or written. They may also be direct or indirect. Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise.

**Types of threats:**

**Direct** - "I'm going to stab you with a hunting knife after school.”

**Indirect** - "I have the means to do some major destruction here.”

**Third Party** - “He is going to get what is coming to him. Wait and see.”

**Conditional** - "You better change my grade or I will kill you.”

**Veiled** - "My brothers in Columbine knew how to set things right."

**Who conducts a threat assessment?**

The Threat Assessment Team (TAT) is a multi-disciplinary team including:

* School administrator
* Mental health professional (school psychologist, school counselor, social worker)
* School resource officer
* Other professionals (school nurse, teacher)

**Components of threat assessment:**

1. IDENTIFICATION (done by TAT)
* Identify threats made by student(s).
* Interview student(s).
* Complete: *Threat Assessment Incident Report* (located in sample forms).
1. EVALUATION
* Evaluate the seriousness of the threat and danger that it poses to others. Discriminate between threats in acknowledgment that not all are the same. Making a threat is not the same as posing a threat. Is the student on the path toward an attack?
* Complete: *Threat Assessment Initial Review* and if necessary, *Threat Assessment Comprehensive Review* (located in sample forms).
1. INTERVENTION
* Use counseling and other inventions to reduce risk of violence.
* Complete: *Coordination and Monitoring of Interventions* (located in sample forms).
1. FOLLOW-UP
* TAT will review outcomes of intervention strategies and assess the need for additional or ongoing interventions.

**How to proceed with a threat assessment inquiry (Kanan, 2002)**

* Use a neutral tone that is professional and non-confrontational.
* Ensure physical safety and security.
* Assemble the team and determine the facts.
* Gather information from a variety of sources (student, staff, targeted individual, parent interviews).
* Evaluate information gathered and determine level of risk.
* Develop an action and supervision plan.
* Document information.
* Consult with district level administrators as needed.

**Purpose of student interview**

* Let the student know that behavior has been noticed and has raised concerns.
* Let the student tell story.
* Allow staff to assess and redirect behavior and to plan supportive interventions.

**Key questions to guide inquiry (Secret Service/DOE Guide)**

* What are the student's motives and goals?
* Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
* Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?
* Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?
* Does the student have the capacity to carry out the act?
* Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation or despair?
* Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
* Does the student see violence as an acceptable or desirable way to solve problems?
* Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his/her actions?
* Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
* What circumstances might cause the likelihood of violence?

**Determine the seriousness of the threat**

Following the completion of the Threat Assessment Team’s Initial Assessment and Incident Report, determine Category of Risk.

**Action plans and interventions** (Goal to reduce risk of violence)

* Describe concerning behavior.
* Develop goal and plan to address behavior, teaching, and supporting new behavior.
* Document and describe success.
* Set up a timeline to review plan and monitor interventions.

**Actions following a transient threat**

* Safety precautions may not be necessary.
* See that the threat is resolved through apologies, explanations, making amends.
* Provide counseling and education.
* Take disciplinary actions if necessary.

**Actions following a serious or substantive threat**

* The threat requires protective action. If danger is imminent notify police immediately.
* Police intervention or consultation may be required to address legal violations.
* The safety of the campus must be maintained if the student is suspended.
* Take precautions to protect potential victims.
* Warn intended victim and victim's parents.
* Notify parents of student who has made threat.
* Conduct mental health evaluation.
* Alternate placement may be considered.

**Duty to Warn**

Following a serious or substantive threat, the potential victim(s) and their parents must be warned. Physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals have a duty to warn. When a patient presents a danger of violence to another, a therapist must use reasonable care to protect the intended victim against such danger (Tarasoff v. Regents of University of California (1976) 17 Cal.3d 425).

* School districts have a duty to warn if threats are specific and substantive.
* School psychologists/counselors and others have a duty to breach patient confidentiality and warn if threat is specific and substantive.
* School districts may release confidential pupil records (general and special education records) to protect the safety of others.

**Acknowledgments**

Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools Sonoma - Resource Guide

Ventura County Sheriff/Thousand Oaks Police Department