

Warning Signs of Potentially Violent Behavior

(Adapted, Monhandie, 1999)

Many students exhibit warning signs; yet pose no immediate danger to themselves or others. It is important to recognize patterns of behavior or combinations of warning signs that indicate the need for further assessment. Many of these are present in non-violent individuals and there is evidence that some violence prone individuals demonstrate no evidence of any of these signs. However, observations and feedback will be helpful in the investigation and resolution of potential violent incidents upon the review of a threat assessment team. School personnel should report their observance or suspicion of violent thoughts or behavior to the school administration, psychologist, or counselor and request further assessment.

Verbal Clues:

- Direct and indirect threats
- Verbalizing a violent plan
- Recurrent suicide threats or statements
- Expresses a wish to kill, a wish to be killed, and a wish to die
- Threatens or brags about bringing a weapon to school
- Threatening / harassing phone calls or e-mails
- Hopeless statements
- Bragging of violent behavior or fantasies
- Excessive profanity (contextually inappropriate)
- Challenging or intimidating statements
- Name calling or abuse language

Behavioral or Physical Clues

- Physical altercation / assault upon another person – frequent fighting
- Inappropriate weapons possession or use
- Drawings and other creative outlets with persistent or intense violent themes
- Violent attire (camouflage, violent message shirts)
- Physically intimidates peers / younger children
- Following / surveilling targeted individuals
- Short-fused, loss of emotional control
- Destruction of property
- Bullying or victim of bullying
- Deteriorating physical appearance and self-care
- Inappropriate possession of violent literature and information pertaining to known or suspected hate groups
- Inappropriate displays of emotion, particularly anger, depression or rage
- Isolating and withdrawn
- Signs or history of substance use / abuse / dependence
- Signs of depression / severe mood swings
- Rebellion against school authority
- Identifiably violent tattoos

Bizarre Thoughts:

- Persecutory delusions with self as victim
- Paranoid
- Delusions in general
- Command hallucinations
- Grandiose delusions that involve power, control, destruction
- Significantly deteriorated thought processes

Obsessions:

- Self as victim of an individual
- Grudges and resentments
- Object of desire
- Perceived injustices, humiliations, disrespect
- Thoughts of death or other incidents of violence
- Narrow focus – “sees no way out” – tunnel vision
- Publicized acts of violence
- Historically violent figures
- Violent music and other media
- Weapons and destruction
- Stalking