

THREAT ASSESSMENT

FOR CAMPUS SUPERVISORS

The materials contained in this presentation are for instructional purposes only and are not intended as legal advice. If you are in need of a legal opinion on the subject matter covered in this presentation, you should contact your local school counsel.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

- THERE IS NO SINGLE CAUSE.
- THERE IS NO SINGLE PROFILE.
- THERE IS NO SINGLE REMEDY.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ajoppexO20>

WHAT IS A THREAT?



- AN EXPRESSION OF INTENTION TO INFLICT EVIL, INJURY, OR DAMAGE
- MAY BE SPOKEN, WRITTEN, OR GESTURED
- MAY BE DIRECT OR INDIRECT AND NOT NECESSARILY COMMUNICATED TO INTENDED VICTIM
- WEAPON POSSESSION IS PRESUMED TO BE A THREAT UNLESS CLEARLY INDICATED OTHERWISE (“WE WERE CAMPING THIS WEEKEND, AND I FORGOT MY POCKETKNIFE WAS STILL IN MY BACKPACK.”)

NOT ALL THREATS ARE THE SAME

Continuum of Threats



- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of Speech

THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL



STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE THREAT

Motive for the violence.

Method of committing violence.

Means of carrying out the violent act.

STEP 2: EVALUATE THE THREAT

- DETERMINE WHETHER THE THREAT IS TRANSIENT OR SUBSTANTIVE.
- THE CRITICAL ISSUE IS NOT WHAT THE STUDENT THREATENED TO DO, BUT WHETHER OR NOT THE STUDENT INTENDS TO CARRY OUT THE THREAT.
- WHEN IN DOUBT, TREAT THE THREAT AS SUBSTANTIVE.



TRANSIENT THREATS

- OFTEN RHETORICAL REMARKS, EXPRESSIONS OF INTENT TO HARM
- AT WORST EXPRESS TEMPORARY FRUSTRATION OR ANGER
- CAN BE RESOLVED ON SCENE OR IN OFFICE
- THREAT NO LONGER EXISTS AFTER RESOLUTION—USUALLY ENDS WITH APOLOGY OR CLARIFICATION



SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

- EXPRESS THE INTENT TO PHYSICALLY HARM SOMEONE BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION.
- AT LEAST SOME RISK THE STUDENT WILL CARRY OUT THE THREAT.
- REQUIRE THAT YOU TAKE PROTECTIVE ACTION, INCLUDING WARNING THE INTENDED VICTIMS AND THEIR PARENTS.
- MAY BE LEGAL VIOLATIONS AND REQUIRE POLICE INTERVENTION.
- WHEN IN DOUBT, TREAT THREATS AS SUBSTANTIVE.



PRESUMPTIVE INDICATORS OF SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

- **SPECIFIC, PLAUSIBLE DETAILS.** “I’M GOING TO BLAST MR. JOHNSON WITH MY PISTOL.”
- **THREAT HAS BEEN REPEATED OVER TIME.** “HE’S BEEN TELLING EVERYONE HE’S GOING TO GET YOU.”
- **THREAT REPORTED AS A PLAN.** “WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT TUESDAY IN THE LIBRARY!”
- **ACCOMPLICES OR THE RECRUITMENT OF ACCOMPLICES.**
- **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF INTENT.** WRITTEN PLANS, LISTS OF VICTIMS, BOMB MATERIALS, ACCESS TO FIREARMS, ETC.

SUBSTANTIVE THREATS: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- AGE OF STUDENT
- CAPABILITY OF STUDENT TO CARRY OUT 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!**

STEP 3. RESPONSES TO TRANSIENT THREATS

- NO NEED TO TAKE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.
- THREAT IS RESOLVED WITH EXPLANATION, APOLOGY, MAKING AMENDS.
- PROVIDE COUNSELING AND EDUCATION WHERE APPROPRIATE.
- ADMINISTER DISCIPLINE IF APPROPRIATE.



These actions should be documented in writing by the teacher or staff member and should be referred to the site administrator or designee if necessary.

TRANSIENT CASE STEPS

Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact content of threat and statements by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions.

Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.

- Consider criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
- Consider student's age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

- Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action.
- Student may need to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

TRANSIENT CASE EXAMPLE

- 2nd grade Jake threatens to kill his classmates after being excluded. He apologizes and denies intent. He is also tearful and distressed.
- Jake was recently removed from home for neglect. He is lonely and depressed.
- Jake receives a referral for counseling.

RESPONSES TO SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

NOTE: THESE ACTIONS SHOULD ONLY BE TAKEN BY AN ADMINISTRATOR OR DESIGNEE.

- TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO PROTECT POTENTIAL VICTIMS.
- SPECIFICALLY WARN VICTIM AND PARENTS.
- MAY CONSULT WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT.
- INTERVIEW THE STUDENT THAT MADE THE THREAT AND NOTIFY HIS/HER PARENTS.
- DISCIPLINE STUDENT FOR MAKING A THREAT.
- DETERMINE APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION FOR STUDENT, SUCH AS COUNSELING OR DISPUTE MEDIATION.
- FOLLOW UP TO VERIFY THREAT HAS BEEN RESOLVED AND INTERVENTIONS ARE IN PROGRESS.¹⁶

